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"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 indicate 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 roll back 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. ●

STOOD UP: The UML's Madhab Nepal waves at journalists from house arrest on Thursday afternoon. The government refused to allow him to meet visiting US Principal Deputy Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Donald Camp.



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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 withdraw from the pact simply because doing so would mean even greater rampage of its beleaguered cadre. The NC and the rest of the alliance are now captives of their own folly.

GUEST COLUMN
 Bhari K Shrestha



The seven party alliance does owe 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 referendum on itself.

The seven parties, now reduced to being the Maoists' surrogates in Kathmandu, will now be required to pay back by obediently carrying out their wishes. It is their greed for power that brought the politicians to the Maoist embrace to scare the king into submission. Instead, they find themselves in a quagmire. Now their representatives are back in New Delhi presumably to receive fresh instructions from their new bosses.

Meanwhile, India and the west now seem to have broken ranks. While the Indian ambassador was calling on these politicians for speedy implementation of the 12-point agreement, the US envoy was warning the parties to rethink the pact. The parties have now been spurred into reverting to their original identities from this opportunistic ensemble. Hence the resurrected reference to the six-point pact of the seven-party alliance.

While the various 'communist' outfits of unclear credentials regarding their democratic values and proximity to the Maoists were annoyed by Moriarty's message, the NC being more beholden to the west was only 'unhappy'. Girija Prasad Koirala was probably simply too aware of the possible dangers in such backtracking. GPK's recent overtures to Deuba for NC reunification at this particular juncture seems to be inspired more by the need to have more strength to wriggle out of a deadly Maoist snare.

However, the US must bear the following facts in mind before making more moves to 'restore democracy' in Nepal. Firstly, the

12 years of democratic practice have shown that the politicians—many of them with laudable records of sacrifice up to 1990—must resort to corruption to remain in politics, because they have to buy votes from a largely poor and illiterate electorate.

This is what wrecked governance and denied to the people what a democracy was otherwise supposed to deliver. Secondly, most of the present breed of leaders have become so corrupt they do not mind casting their profession of democracy to the winds when money and power are at stake. While they have all known and felt India's predatory designs including the birth and nurturing of the Nepali Maoists in their land, they have had no qualms about going a-begging to New Delhi.

Therefore, despite their tantrums in the name of 'agitation against regression' the last four years, people refuse to converge on Ratna Park in their support. Therefore, handing power back to these very same politicians without any hope that things will be any different would force us to relive the nightmare of the last decade all over again.

The foreign catalysts in Nepali politics must take note of the success of grassroots empowerment during the 1990s. Devolution of authority to the primary stakeholders in contrast to local elected bodies must be the cornerstone of any new political arrangement. Added to it, the politicians must also feel a balancing influence of the king when their recklessness knows no bounds. ●

NEVER TOO LATE

The slight softening in tone of those in favour of an interventionist monarchy could, if one is an optimist, signal a course-change by the captain of the ship of state. There is a whiff in the spring air which gives us a hint of hope in these bleak and insecure times.

But having been disappointed so often in the past four years, we are under no illusions that these gestures will amount to much. There is a certain self-destructive obstinacy to the direction this country has been taken on by one-man rule. All this soft-talk could be a result of realisation that whatever was being tried isn't working, or it could be just another ruse and a familiar attempt to sow confusion. A perfunctory reshuffle of the cabinet would only be seen as a tactic to prolong the status quo, and the king's attempt to buy time to hold elections in his own terms.

In the long saga of blunders the regime has made, the biggest was to dismiss the Maoist unilateral ceasefire and allow the rebels to get away with public relations brownie points. By signing the 12-point agreement, the parties shared the kudos for having pinned the Maoists down in committing to rejoin mainstream politics.

However, by now making the self-defeating announcement of a 'final and decisive' offensive, the Maoists have squandered their gains. The campaign of blockades, strikes and a return to the senseless destruction of public property (like this symbolic ruin of an orphanage after the rebel attack on Tansen last month, below) threatens the MoU and casts strong doubts about whether the comrades can be trusted. Points that are being raised at a followup party-rebel meeting in Noida this week.

It may be true that the Maoist leadership needs to talk tough about a make-or-break offensive to keep its own rank and file in line but by escalating the violence the Maoists risk sidelining the political parties and wasting their own advantage.

They should call off the needless and counterproductive blockade of district capitals in the coming weeks, bring back the ceasefire and pledge to renounce violence. Such a move would mean they don't need the barrel of the gun to force Nepalis to support them anymore. But more importantly, it would give the war mongers among us no more excuse to crack down on democracy and prolong this meaningless conflict.



JAGDISH BHATTARAI

A future foretold

If 85 percent of college kids are for a republic, then that is the way we are headed

Unbeknownst even to themselves, the students of Tribhuban and Mahendra Sanskrit universities created history last week. Compared to the 20 percent turnout in last month's civic polls nearly 85 percent of eligible student voters lined up for students council elections at nearly 200 constituent and affiliated colleges all over the country.

Nearly all those elected had campaigned on a republican platform.

STATE OF THE STATE
 C K Lal



Student unions affiliated to

royalist parties failed even to register their presence. The writing on the wall is clear: the future of Nepal is republican. This will have far-reaching consequences on, for instance, our rapidly-expanding military. How is the army going to vet new recruits to weed out republicans if 85 percent of college kids don't believe in the monarchy anymore?

There are other indications that the monarchy has dealt itself a mortal blow in the past year. The landmark Supreme Court decision dismissing the RCCC was a reaffirmation of the sovereignty of the people, that the constitution is still in force and that the government headed by a chairman-king has no constitutional basis. In a civilised society with a residue of political morality, such an unequivocal judgement would have forced a government to step down in disgrace. But we are still under the spell of strongman rule.

Then the 10th conference of Nepal Bar Association last week declared its commitment to constitutional supremacy and rule of law, called for the dissolution of the present government and demanded elections for a constituent assembly. That 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 ceremonial king can still exist in a republic but it has no place for an active monarchy.

Loyal royals entrusted 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.

US Assistant Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs for South Asia, Donald Camp arrived in Kathmandu via New Delhi on Wednesday and Sher Bahadur Deuba is going on a junket to Colombia. Don't know if the two are connected but neither visit is likely to change ground reality.

What must be giving the royal rearguard sleepless nights must be vanishing international aid. With the state coffers effectively at the disposal of the palace,

army and police the regime needs cash and fast. In public, the Harvard-alumnus state minister for finance puts on a brave face but privately treasury officials are in near-panic. It's a mess: double-digit inflation, revenue shortfalls and a disbursement crisis. When an outraged public can't take it anymore, no prizes for guessing where the anger will be directed.

UML and NC leaders and the Maoists are confabulating again in New Delhi. When the 12-point understanding between them crystallises into a consensus document on a republican agenda, even hardcore monarchists will start jumping the royal ship. Everybody, especially the traditional elite, love to be on the winning side.

Lastly, the international community and India are seriously worried about this dangerous drift. Even China is getting edgy and sending State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan on a rescheduled trip this month. ●

LETTERS

DELUSIONAL

The king conveniently forgets that he is getting guns and money from abroad when he complains about funds given to the parties ('Where will the money go?', #288).

Kapil Bhattarai, email

I couldn't agree more with Pravin Rana (Guest Column, 'What intervention?', #288). I guess we are all tired of the drama on streets of Kathmandu and elsewhere, tired of reading the same news again and again, tired of politics, tired of listening that Girijababu doesn't want to talk to king. Right now the Nepali people want genuine honesty from all concerned: the palace, political leaders, Maoists and international organisations before Nepal turns into a living hell.

Niraj Ojha, email

Ambassador Moriarty is peddling the same brand of delusional thinking that led the US to attack and destabilise Iraq, torture prisoners and lie to the world. His regime is unconcerned about the deaths of thousands of Asians as long as it fits in with their agenda. They are trying to divide up the parties and give the king a stronger hand while pretending 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 media has been curbed and the right of expression has been curtailed in the country. I was mistaken that Mr Lal was a mature and responsible columnist. It appears that he only is a mirror image of one of those paid political cadres in shroud of a professional writing only to appease their masters.

Suputra Nepal, email

As a Nepali studying in India and looking at the prosperous economic conditions here and slowly gaining a powerful position in the world economy only makes me worried that my country is headed for a steep downfall. After reading your editorial ('As if there is no tomorrow', #288) it occurred to me 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 it up with the motto, make money while in power (at the cost of the country).

Name withheld, email

ICONIC THAMEL

I read the very negative article on Thamel by Pankaj Rayamaji ('Lean and mean in Thamel', #289) 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 will be flies but the magnetism of such tourist

hotspots 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 a 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 sport 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.

Trish Agini, Thamel

RANG DE BASANTI

Kanak Mani 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 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 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 of differentiating between a fiction and reality. But most importantly of all, the movie in any sense doesn't say it is 'okay to contemplate the murder of 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 saviours but they too become a wasted victims and he does a fantastic job of amplifying that 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 create if nothing else, 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 *Time* itself. I had written the following letter to the *Time* editor

but it wasn't published:

In his essay A Tale of Two Kingdoms, Pico Iyer misleadingly 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 'streets are silent after dark'—at least not in the vibrant capital Kathmandu where the beat still goes on till the wee hours. Catering to the exclusive niche upmarket, Bhutan 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 multicultural 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—a freedom not enjoyed by its neighbours. While Bhutan may deservedly 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 retort to Pico Iyer, because I had written a similar letter to *Time* which the editors in their wisdom didn't deign to publish. Maybe you will, just to show Mr Lama is not alone:

'After reading Pico Iyer's piece on Bhutan in your latest issue it pained me to see the author become the latest victim of the King of Bhutan's public relations stunt of promoting 'gross national happiness' and 'abdication' his power. Iyer admits to having fallen into the trap of the Bhutanese regime'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 it to South Asia's police state. Besides, it is hard to swallow gross national happiness when it comes from a regime that has made at least 110,000 of its southern citizens unhappy by driving them out of the country. This the world's biggest refugee crisis in per 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 daschund ('Cos it's there', #288) was not a hoax but an elaborate publicity campaign to advertise mountain sports products by Mammut. They advised mountain sports and climbing fanatics all over the world of the dangers of using equipment which is so good that it can cause loss of common sense. Just like Mary Woodbridge, who bought herself a Mammut jacket and suddenly found herself wanting to conquer Mount Everest.

J Couture, email

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

S Gorkhali, email



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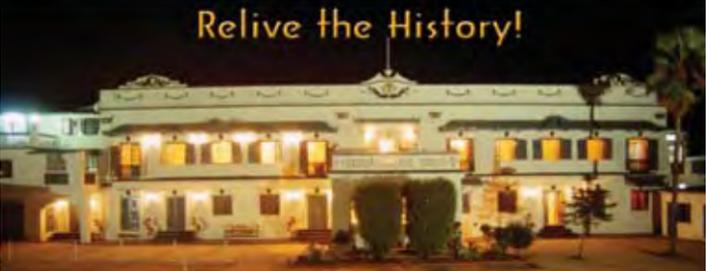
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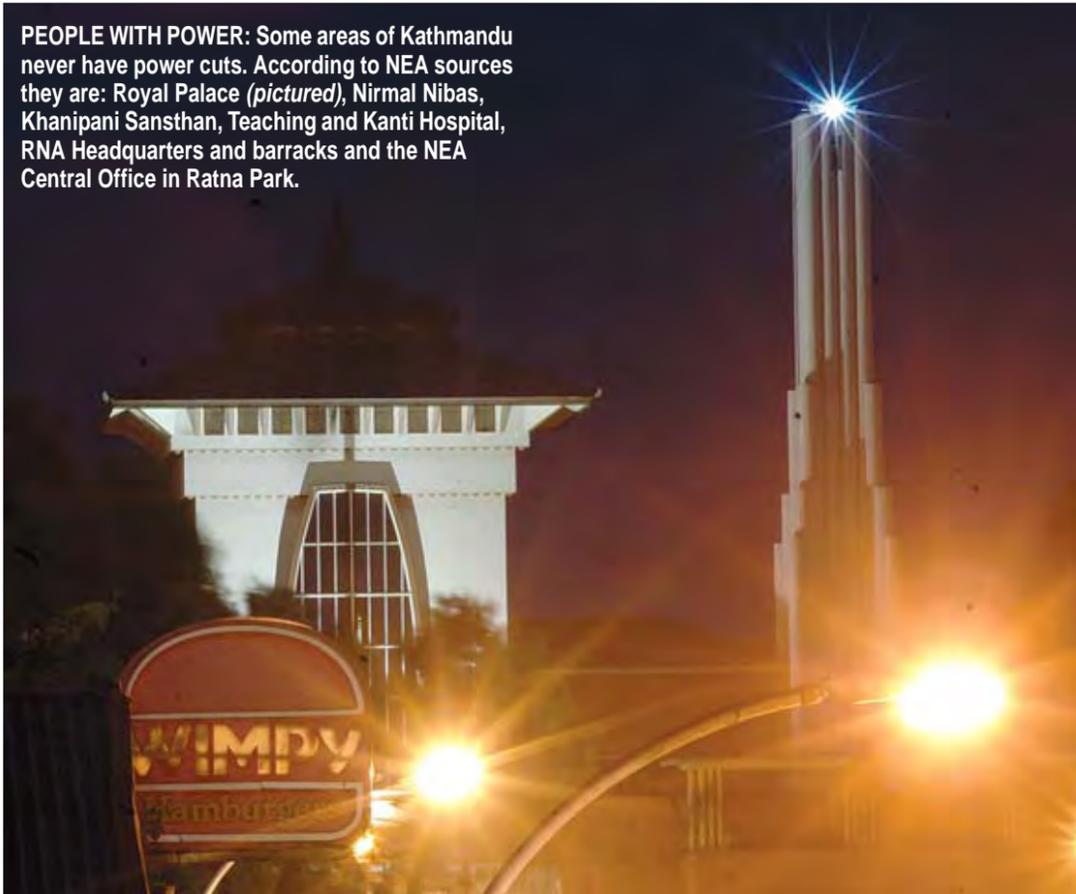
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Loadshedding till 2015

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

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



KIRAN PANDAY

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

It's finally come to this: of 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 launched right away.

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 loss 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. 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

Nothing in the pipeline

The NEA may like to blame this year's winter drought for the power shortage but even if there 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 309MW 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 Nepali 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 Statkraft would be interested in investing in Tama Kosi.

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 Gyanendra 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 florescent lamps because a 11W light is as bright as a 60-W incandescent bulb. If all 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 Ratna 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, useable water in Kulekhani will run out within a month and the present 35 hours of loadshedding 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

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अर्थ-राजनीतिक साप्ताहिक हरेक सोमबार

All-natural Nepal

Nepali officials will unveil the new tourism brand 'Naturally Nepal, Once is Not Enough' at a trade show in Berlin on Saturday. The delegation will be led by Minister of State for Tourism Yankila Sherpa and include 17 travel trade firms. The Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) says it is ready to invest Rs 100 million in promoting the brand with a goal of attracting 300,000 more tourists to the country. The campaign focuses on three major segments: weekend breaks (aimed at Indian and other regional tourists) adventure holidays and 'lifetime experience' (targeted at US, European and other long-haul markets).



Garments gain

Exports of ready-made garments to the US jumped in the month of February over the same period in 2005 but dropped one-third in the past two years, according to the Garment Association of Nepal (GAN). Exports totalled \$ 6.6 million in February this year compared to \$ 9.9 million in February 2004. Sales have plummeted after duty-free access to many western markets ended with the phase-out of the Multi-fibre Agreement on 1 January because of WTO rules. About 80 percent of Nepal's garment makers have closed shop since then. In 2005, exports to the US fell 41 percent, compared to a drop of 30 percent in 2004. Nepal, neighbours like Bangladesh and other least-developed countries have been lobbying for special access to western markets since the agreement was phased out but have been unsuccessful to date. February's export hike was thanks to an increase in orders by clothing manufacturer GAP, according to GAN's Basant Pokhrel.

#1 Manager

Standard Chartered Bank CEO Sujit Mundul has been named Manager of the Year-2005 by the Management Association of Nepal (MAN). Mundul, who has led the bank for three years, was given the prize at a ceremony last Friday at Soaltee Crowne Plaza.

NEW PRODUCTS

REDESIGNED HYUNDAI: Hyundai's award-winning Getz has had a major makeover and will go on sale in Nepal from March 2006. Designers have made a series of styling changes, including wraparound headlamps, black bumper inserts and new wheel trims and alloy wheels to give the car a cleaner, sportier appearance. A new 1.4 litre petrol engine replaces the previous 1.3 unit. Available colours are metallic sky blue, space silver, midnight grey mica, hip-hop red and ebony black.

Getting back on track

Nepal must hitch its wagons to the Indian and Chinese locomotives

LONDON-The Asia 2015 conference has just reiterated what we have been saying in this space all along: that this is Asia's century. (see 'Action Asia', # 244 and 'Looking East', #252).

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



With more than half the world's population, a huge chunk of the global economy, rising intra-regional trade and a fast expanding consuming class, it deserves the world's focus. However, Asia also counts more poverty and greater disparities between genders, ethnic groups and rural-urban dwellers so that its major challenge in future decades will be how to ensure inclusive growth.

This century Asia will see India, China and other high-flyers transform themselves from recipients to givers of aid. India refusing aid after the Asian tsunami was a matter of pride—no one likes to be a taker forever. Further, with globalisation investments will largely substitute for aid.

Nepal will remain one of the few Asian recipients over the next 25 years, so we need to get our act together and determine how we can use it for our benefit.

This Beed believes new partnership paradigms are required. For instance, with new ordinances that permit non-profit companies, foundations could be established that include corporations and NGOs so that giving can be sustained over a long period. These corporate foundations could take a leaf from the books of efficiently run businesses and manage aid in a similar manner. This would also help the long term process of substituting foreign aid with the home-grown variety.

If hundreds of Rotarians in Nepal can contribute to becoming Paul Harris fellows, they can certainly set aside

with many of our Ivy League graduates aspiring no further than the cubicles of the World Bank or other multilateral agencies. Perhaps this role suits our limited ambitions too. Since our private sector is generally loath to professionalise, by utilising these proven human resources, the aid management business could boom here.

Aid can resume swiftly to Nepal if we can end this political stalemate. Conflict resolution is not a pre-condition to assistance as continued conflict surely will spark further aid experiments but a post-conflict rehabilitation plan would attract the most aid. Our future is laid out in this sequence:

1. Peace
2. End to political deadlock
3. Conflict resolution
4. Rehabilitation
5. Nepal rejoining mainstream Asia

With globalisation, political boundaries do not matter. We may still be Asian due to geography but we

could easily be lumped in with the world's most dysfunctional nations because of our own stupidity. It is important that we get a slice of the growth that this continent and especially our giant neighbours are embarking upon. ●



"Nepal doesn't have the luxury of time"

Sultan Hafeez Rahman, Country Director of the Asian Development Bank's Nepal Resident Mission, spoke to *Nepali Times* about lending in the past year and the Bank's engagement in future.

***Nepali Times:* What is the level of ADB's assistance to Nepal at present and has it changed in the last year?**

Sultan Hafeez Rahman: ADB's country strategy and program approved in 2004 proposed an annual assistance program of upto \$100 million per year for 2005-2007. However, as you know, there was no new lending to Nepal in 2005. The actual level of assistance in 2006 will depend on whether it can be provided effectively and safely in the prevailing security and political environment. It is also critical for the government to keep the reform programs on track and do much more to engage with Nepal's development partners and convince them that it is serious about reforms and development. ADB will continue to consult with other development partners of Nepal on future assistance programs.

Careful assessment of the impacts of our assistance on the ground, which involved extensive travel by our own staff, including myself, to project sites in many parts of the country and reports from local communities and NGOs undertaken every quarter of last year, plus detailed specific assessments conducted ahead of initiating ADB-funded projects suggest that the bulk of our project activities were being implemented effectively and with safety for all stakeholders. Of course, the conflict causes major disruptions in implementation in many cases; however, these problems in most cases do not persist for long periods and do not affect all project activities simultaneously. These assessments also reminded us of how desperately poor and vulnerable rural and remote areas of Nepal were and how much development assistance meant to the poor and to the country. Let me also stress that being able to continue assistance in the present environment is not enough. Nepal needs peace and stability to be able to seriously commit itself to development and achieving the millennium development goals.

We hear that bilateral and multilateral donors are divided over providing assistance to Nepal?

As far as I am aware, Nepal's development partners—all of them—

share similar concerns. The political and security situation in Nepal has implications for development assistance and its effectiveness. Given the complexity of the situation, there is, not unexpectedly, a lot of discussion among the donors on how best to remain engaged in Nepal. We value this discussion very much and feel donors basically share the same concerns. At this hour of crisis for Nepal, donors are fully seized of their role—this is my impression.

How come the ADB didn't make any new commitment in Nepal in 2005?

We have 23 ongoing projects spread throughout the country. First we needed to assess the impacts of the escalation in the conflict on the projects assisted by ADB very carefully. Secondly, five loans approved by ADB in 2003 and 2004, which were pending implementation, needed to be initiated on the ground and we had to assess how well these could be implemented in the prevailing conditions. Third and very importantly we were mindful of the serious concerns expressed by the international community about peace, democracy and human rights in Nepal. Fourth, given the country's situation it was imperative that we adopt a cautious approach. It could not be business as usual. Although we made no new commitments in 2005, we did permit two of the five pending loans approved in 2003 and 2004 to be initiated in 2005 and provided three new technical assistance.

How do you see the country's economic performance?

Nepal's economy has been seriously affected by the conflict. Overall GDP growth has dropped sharply from 5 percent in the 1990s to just over 2 percent in the past three years. This means that Nepal is barely growing in per capita terms. The GDP of Asian countries, which have successfully transformed their economies, grew 4-5% per year in per capita terms. The adverse impact of the conflict on education is another very serious consequence. It could take decades to recover from such a loss even after peace is restored. The loss of livelihoods, shelter and personal security—all basic human entitlements—are stark effects of a conflict no one seems to want.

The downside risks of Nepal's economy are rising and hence the short-term economic outlook is not encouraging. Macroeconomic stability is still holding but it is essential for this also to yield strong growth and poverty reduction. Nepal has tremendous potential to develop into a prosperous country and, in my view, become the first middle-income country in South Asia. But it does not have the luxury of time. Every crisis—in Nepal's case a truly tragic one—also presents opportunities, which must be seized for the well being of the people and country.



KIRAN PANDAY

Has there been any progress on the Melamchi project?

We remain concerned about this in view of Melamchi's importance. We are assessing the situation and expect more clarity on this in the next review meeting of the project's donors.

There are serious concerns about corruption in Nepal. How concerned is the ADB?

ADB has a very stringent anticorruption policy and other policies to deal with such concerns. ADB affirms a zero tolerance policy when credible evidence of fraud and corruption exists among ADB-financed projects or its staff. ADB's Anticorruption Policy requires all ADB-financed activity, including all ADB staff, adhere to the highest financial and ethical standards. Whenever, there are reports/complaints of irregularities, ADB's independent Integrity Division investigates the matter. It is also part of our routine work in the resident mission to keep track of such concerns and report these to relevant authorities in the Bank. You can be assured that we also follow news on corruption and irregularities reported in your paper as well and take necessary action. Information about such concerns can also be sent directly by individuals to ADB. ADB's President has reiterated the institution's total commitment to root out corruption from ADB-funded projects and/or among its staff. I might point out that ADB's swift and well-acclaimed investigation of alleged irregularities in the Melamchi project last year should have demonstrated our seriousness in combating corruption. On the institutional side, we are providing assistance to strengthen Nepal's anticorruption institutions..

Biased activists



WRITING ON THE WALL: Maoist slogan on the wall of a school latrine in Kaski urging students to put their pens and books in their bags and march on the palace.

MITRA VAIDYA

Nepal, 12 March

नेपाल

NEPALGANJ-When human rights activists take rides in army helicopters to observe the corpses of Maoists killed in clashes, as they did in Ganeshpur of Bardia, 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.

Nepalgunj 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 Commission 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 democratic 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

राजधानी

BAGLUNG-The Maoists have locked up 24 community schools here to pressure the government to stop handing them 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 burdening communities with running schools. Now that this school is closed and poor village students are deprived of their lessons, principal Bishnu Prasad Sharma of Shiba Primary School in Adhikarichaur VDC says the schools are quietly running classes behind closed doors 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 DEO's request to run the schools under government management.

Explosive India

Dristi, 7 March

दृष्टि

When security forces seized explosives the Maoists were trying to smuggle from India some months ago, it was hardly a surprise. In Morang, the rebels were caught with commercial explosives and dynamite that could manufacture nearly 25,000 bombs. Ten days ago, security forces captured a huge stock of materials in Bhairawa: about 25,500 kg of gelatin, 7,500 m of safety fuses, 29,500 (No 27) 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 destruction, thus breaching their commitment to not endanger 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 when it could easily control the flow of arms. As always, New Delhi has a dual policy towards Nepal. For instance, most of the rebel leaders have safe haven in its territory and are protected by the government. 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 MCC and PWG have united and Maoist leader Prachanda has proposed merging into a single party.

Solitary

Kantipur, 4 March

कान्तिपुर

The government has transferred political detainees and kept some of them in solitary confinement, party sources say. Ram Chandra Poudel of the NC has been taken from the Police Training Centre to a police barrack in Tripureswor and locked up alone. The NC's Narhari Acharya has been taken to the Women's Training Centre and kept in solitary confinement while civil rights leaders Debendra Raj Pandey has been transferred to the Police Number 1 Division in Naxal. Similarly, rights activist Krishna Pahadi has been sent to the Police Number Two Division in Maharjanj. Pahadi had been taken to the Gangalal Heart Centre in Maharjanj for a checkup. Editor Shyam Shrestha and the NSU's ex-general secretary Basu Koirala are also at the police base in Maharjanj. Party sources say the government has relocated them because it wants to prevent interaction and exchange of information between the detainees and to inflict psychological torture on them. The detainees are among 12 picked up during demos in mid-January who are still in detention. UML general secretary Madhab K Nepal has been in house arrest since then. Others who are still in detention are: Gopal Man Shrestha, Bimalnedra Nidhi, Pradip Giri Prakash Sharan Mahat of the NC-D and Hridesh Tripathi of the Sadhabana who are all at the APF base at Duwakot in Bhaktapur.

12 vital points

Nepal Samacharpatra, 8 March

संज्ञाकारण

Maoist Central Committee member Agni Sapkota (Kanchan) says that confusion about the 12-point agreement between the Maoists and the seven parties is the result of feudal forces trying

to destabilise it. Reaffirming 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 at a time when the domestic and international situation favoured such a move, the country would be ruined. Speaking at a program organised by the Forum for Complete Democracy in Nepal in Jalbire, Sindhupalchok, Sapkota added 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 attack Kathmandu Valley, he added but admitted that military strength alone can't do it and a political front is needed.

Airport entry

Notice in Gorkhapatra, 8 March

गोरखापत्र

Tribhuban International Airport Civil Aviation Office Notice:

For the information of the travelling public, vehicles which need to imperatively go to Tribhuban 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.

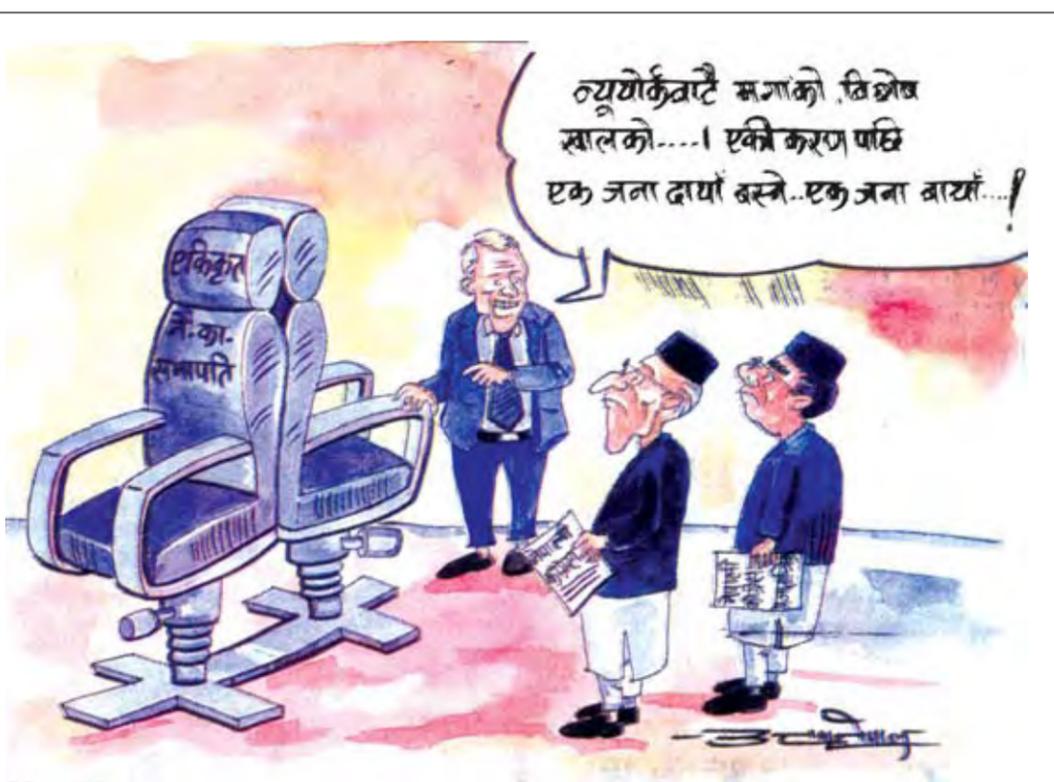
Delhi-Pokhara

Columnist Suresh in Jana Aastha, 8 March

आस्था

So 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 and the other wants to have elections to a constituent assembly. Neither is afraid of elections. It's just a question of deciding which kind of elections to have. And that is why both leaders are giving audiences left and right.

A king who was sitting in Nagarjun suddenly went to Pokhara and summoned a slew of political leaders for audiences. And Prachanda, who was sitting in his capital 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 go to Pokhara? 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.



Moriarty: "This is a designer chair specially imported from New York...after reunification of the party one of you can sit in the left and the other in the right!"
Chair: Unified Nepali Congress Chairman.

राजधानी Rajdhani, 5 March

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, 8 March

Election dates

Jana Aastha, 8 March

आस्था

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 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 but 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 as bad as portrayed and they should resume aid otherwise even what remains of 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.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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, Biswabandhu 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."

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Senior Adviser Human Rights and Good Governance

The Danida Human Rights and Good Governance Advisory Unit (DanidaHUGOU) invites applications from qualified Nepali citizens for the following position:

Position: Senior Adviser, Elections and Democratic Processes Component

Duties and Responsibilities

The main tasks of the Senior Adviser are to develop the Elections and Democratic Processes Component Description further on the basis of existing reports and other documents and to subsequently identify and assess potential partners and projects, coordinate with partners and other donors, and monitor and review project activities within the scope of the foreseen DanidaHUGOU support to initiatives within the Component.

Required Qualifications

Advanced university degree (Masters Degree or equivalent) in social or political science or a related field and at least six (6) years of relevant working experience, possibly from the academia, civil society, and/or donor agencies of which at least three (3) years should have involved aspects related to human rights and/or good governance. Experience with managing projects, including the application of Logical Framework Approach and/or other project tools, would be a significant asset.

The Senior Adviser to the Elections and Democratic Processes Component will report directly to DanidaHUGOU's Programme Coordinator.

The successful applicant must have advanced analytical skills, excellent communication skills (spoken, written and presentational), extensive report writing skills and experience, good inter-personal skills and good computer skills (word processing, spreadsheet, e-mail and internet).

Expected starting date: 1 May 2006. The Senior Adviser will be based at the DanidaHUGOU office in Kathmandu. Closing date for applications: 24 March 2006.

If you are interested and qualified, you should submit an application, including the following: (i) letter in which you describe your motivation for applying for the position; (ii) updated curriculum vitae; (iii) names and contact details of three references; and (iv) recent passport size photograph. Your application should be sent to **DanidaHUGOU, P.O. Box 6332, c/o Embassy of Denmark, Kathmandu, Nepal**. Only written applications will be considered and telephone contacts will not be entertained. Short listed candidates will be contacted for an interview. A detailed job description for the position can be obtained from the DanidaHUGOU office or by forwarding a message to the following e-mail address: hugou@hugou.org.np.

DanidaHUGOU is an equal opportunities employer and encourages as such in particular women, Dalits, and disadvantaged Janajatis to apply

DanidaHUGOU is supporting human rights, social inclusion, media, anti-corruption, justice, governance and democratisation initiatives in Nepal through the provision of technical assistance and grants.

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BOMB WARNING

Nepali children need a new curriculum that includes bomb risk education

NARESH NEWAR



KANAK MANI DIXIT

One 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 as a country affected with new civilian casualties due to victim-activated explosions," says mine and bomb risk expert Hugues Laurence who is working with UNICEF 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 mines in Nepal are those planted by the security force to protect their own barracks, police posts, airports and government office premises. When haphazardly positioned without warning signs, they can cause civilian casualties.

Last September, two women in Manthali in Ramechhap were injured while trying to cut grass by inserting their hands inside a secured fence of the army camp. The 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 predominantly 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 Laurence.

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 Laurence. The rules are simple:

- Avoid areas where clashes recently took place as there will always be stray socket bombs lying everywhere
- Do not touch roadblocks 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 slaughter' # 286). 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





NARESH NEWAR

'COLLATERAL DAMAGE': The remains of the bus in Madi in Chitwan (left) 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 Laurence.

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 education 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.



UNICEF 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.

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 channelling 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 organised 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 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.

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WAYNE AMTZIS

WARY

Scraps clutched at
What was once a world,
through shaking fingers,
falls. Territory, mapped and scouted,
with a shout swells
and shrinks. Though daily passed through
doors are not there
to open and shut. These walls
can't keep the cold out
It's not just cold that stiffens the bones
There's no ease,
only watchful wary habit
Wings no longer carry you far and wide
A diminished range
like a noose
slung from overarching limbs,
holds the village tight
Shackled gaze. Curfew-ed voice
Fiddle strings cut
No more song. No more dance
A useless tourniquet
stems the flow
Stiff-winged vultures
feast below

POETIC LICENSE
Wayne Amtzis



TILL A FIERCE FLAME FREE THEM

All the towns on the map lie inert
In the villages, the houses rise on four legs,
and sometimes on eight,
rise and shuffle. Rise before dawn
and crawl a few meters here,
a few meters there. So much commotion,
so much to and fro...
With dwellings on their backs,
with legs in the air, kicking
All the towns lie inert, all the dwellings
overturned in the to and fro,
rising, kicking...

A manchild with a magnifying glass
drags the map into the light
If the dwellings had wings, he surmises,
they would not crawl. Their papery wings
would be. ... All the towns
lie inert. All the wingless inhabitants,
not wanting to be seen, trailing fright on the map,
let out a collective sigh. A few meters
to the left, a few to the right
Caught up in this diabolical swarm
children shout out what the old men and all the others
are muttering "Here! Over here!"
Their papery wings seared in the light

Demystifying The Long March

Author retraces 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 Israelites' exodus out of Egypt. I was raised on it.

The myth can be stated succinctly. The fledgling Communist Party and its three Red Armies were driven out of their bases in the South in the early 1930's by Chiang Kaishek's Nationalist government. Pursued and harried by their enemies, they crossed high mountains, turbulent rivers and impassable

COMMENT
Sun Shuyun



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 Kaishek 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. I tracked down and interviewed 40 of them—ordinary people who were left behind or managed to reach the end but with stories that are highly instructive.

Huang Zhiji was a boy, little taller than his rifle, when he joined the Red Army. He had no choice: they had 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 86,000 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 later," 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 Kaishek, let Mao pass. As a reward, he was later made a minister in the Communist government.

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 promised. It could barely support its own population, let alone the Red Armies.

Soldiers had no clothes to protect them from freezing cold. Women were ordered to turn back and go home because there was not enough food. Barely a month after

the union of the three Red Armies, the Party decided that the Long March was to continue. But the kidnapping of Chiang Kaishek by the general he had appointed to wipe out the Communists saved them. As part of the price for his release, Chiang recognised the Communists as legitimate. The Long March was over.

Not, however, for the 21,000 men and women of the Western Legion. They belonged to the Fourth Army, headed by Zhang Guotao, Mao's archrival. Their mission was to get help from Russia at the border in western China. But Mao kept sending them contradictory orders, the result was that they could neither fight nor retreat.

Trapped in barren land where survival was difficult, the overwhelming forces of Muslim warlords wiped them out. Only 400 reached the border, the rest were killed or captured.

It was the Red Army's biggest defeat. Yet it is missing from official history. Wang Quanyan, a senior officer, was taken by a Muslim commander as a concubine. That was enough to make her a traitor in the eyes of the Party, negating all her years of dedication. She and the rest of the Fourth Army survivors had to fight for half a century to be recognised as Marchers.

The Long Marchers persevered, fought, starved, despaired and endured. Hunger drove the armies to take hostages for ransom. Purges continued until practically no officers were left to command battles. If the Marchers had doubts, they conquered them with the help of Communist propaganda. They rose to their ordeal with a bravery and self-sacrifice unsurpassed in China's or anyone's history.

What motivated them? I asked a top general what he knew of communism at the time. "I had no idea then and now," he replied. "I doubt that even Mao knew what it was." ●

Sun Shuyun is author of *The Long March*, to be published in March 2006.





PICS: JAMPA KALSANG TAMANG

Mayadebi's meditating son

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

DIPAK RAUNIYAR
in BARA

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

Mayadebi, 55, is worried about her son, Ram Bomzon who is now known as the boy Buddha of Bara and is attracting devotees from all over Nepal and even India and Thailand. While a lot has been written about Ram, whose fame has spread all over the world with even Discovery Channel preparing a documentary, 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 boy, Mayadebi remembers, Ram was special. He was born on a full moon night 17 years ago and started crying so hard even before he had been fully delivered that the house shook.

"As long as I can remember he was always a vegetarian, he used to tell us it was wrong to keep livestock and poultry," Mayadebi remembers, "he was gentle and always smiling."

The Buddha's mother's name was also Mayadebi but Ram's mother doesn't know whether her son is a reincarnation. She is bewildered by all the *tamasha* surrounding her son and is worried about his health.

"He hasn't eaten now for nearly 10 months," she says, "he is really thin, how can he go on like this?" What makes her even more worried is that her son had said he was going to meditate for six years just like Siddhartha Gautam.

The village of Ratanpur in the jungle of Bara now resembles a carnival town. There is a bus park, trinket shops, restaurants, lodges for hundreds who come from far and wide to pay their respects to the 'holy' boy. Even those who come just 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 crosslegged 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. "There was a big noise and we saw a fire, we rushed to try to put it out," recalls a local shopkeeper.



WORRIED MOTHER: Mayadebi Bomzon doesn't like to talk much about her son but admits she is worried about whether he will survive the ordeal. The road leading to the meditation site (top) has now become a market.

Although Ram's brother and a member of the local committee were singed by the fire, they said nothing happened to Ram.

Mayadebi remembers Ram stopped going to school, followed a Lama and went from monastery to monastery. His mother lost track of him and she would hear he was in Lumbini or Dehradun. Mayadebi says she has 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 and he was shaken but regained his composure. Before resuming his meditation, he reportedly said he wasn't a Buddha and asked the priest not to treat him like one.

Mayadebi says she hasn't slept properly after that incident. Ram appears in her dreams sometimes and strangely that provides her some relief. ●

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 at 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 daughters and this girl, who everyone at the new house called Puja.

At nine years old she was rough around the edges but raring to work, stepping up on a wooden stool to scrub dishes at the sink and burying herself under a mound of clothes that she would tote upstairs to dry on the rooftop. Despite prodding, Puja said little,

NEPALI PAN
Marty Logan



speaking mostly with a smile that lit up her round face.

But 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 squirreled 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 chattering and walking 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 'Sanskriti'.

School seemed to boost the girl's confidence, she was now more likely to answer questions with a few quiet words, 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.



NARESH NEWAR

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 enrolled in primary school but she couldn't even count herself among the 15 percent of school kids who drop out in Class One.

Then, 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 full-toothed smile. Her mother had survived the birth and had decided to keep the girl's older sister at home and to return Puja to her place in the city. She left the emergency money behind to buy baby formula and caught the first bus back.

No, this was not the story I planned to tell—and I'm happy it turned out that way. ●

India gets US nod on nukes

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

How 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.

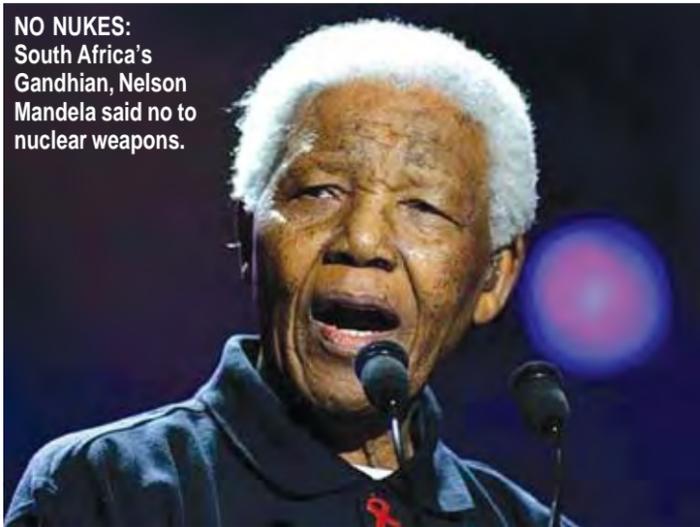
SOUTHASIA BEAT
Kanak Mani Dixit

But there are certain actions for which discredit must go solely to nation-state India, the post-1947 phenomenon. Such as the nuclear weaponisation underway, to which George W Bush has recently given his unipolar superpower blessing. The 'smiling Buddha' nuclear

explosion of 1974 at Pokhran and the BJP-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. Rabindranath Tagore would have written a ballad against the misuse of the name of

NO NUKES:
South Africa's
Gandhian, Nelson
Mandela said no to
nuclear weapons.



the *Sakyamuni* 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 'throw-weights' 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 sahibs, here is the opportunity to actually be a sahib. They wouldn't care to acknowledge to

their minions that going 'nuclear' no longer requires great technological capability. Any half-capable university physics department could manage an atomic explosion.

There are many countries in the southern hemisphere capable of developing nuclear weaponry but which have decided to forgo this lethal arsenal. India should be shamed by the forbearance and abstinence of the Australias, Malaysias, Indonesias or Egypts. In 1994 Argentina, Brazil and Chile brought into force the Treaty of Tlatelolco and agreed to forgo their existing nuclear programs. South Africa under Nelson Mandela took the most Gandhian step of the nuclear era by relinquishing its existing nuclear weaponisation program.

The decision-making classes and opinion-makers of these southern countries did not have the level of self-questioning that they needed a nuclear weapon to provide confidence before the world. Meanwhile, what of the anti-nuclear proliferation cacophony that emanated prior to 1999 from Indian diplomacy and intelligentsia? Suddenly, the reference to Gandhian ahimsa as the Indian gift to the world has disappeared from addresses by New Delhi's representatives at the UN in New York. Now, it is all realpolitik and India has more or less stopped speaking for the South at large.

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 West wants India to be. The first hints of the changing fortunes of the Indian upper classes, in terms of wanting to be part of the sophisticated worldly set, came when the manipulative corporatised Miss World and Miss Universe competitions decided to place their respective crowns on a Sushmita Sen or a Aishwarya Rai. The process of co-optation had begun.

Since then, the economic growth of India has made those within the Washington Beltway suddenly keen to co-opt those within the New Delhi Ring Road. As for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, who cares for the destruction of an entire international regime when the short term agenda of George W Bush dictates otherwise?

Bush and his vainglorious administration can be expected to do few things right and the Indian power elite have simply decided to take advantage of this situation for the sake of their own short-term goals which goes in the face of their Southasian civilisational heritage. Who are you going to use those nuclear-tipped missiles against? Do you really need them to become a world power and would you not become a better world power when your children are better fed? ●



International Women's Day

8 March, 2006



Message of UNFPA Executive Director Ms. Thoraya Ahmed Obaid

Today, on International Women's Day, I join others in paying tribute to women. Progress for women is progress for all. No enduring solutions to society's most pressing problems can be found without the full empowerment and participation of women.

Women are not only life givers. They are peace builders and must play a full role in conflict resolution and recovery. They are workers, even though their work is often undervalued and underpaid. They are the backbone of families, communities and society, even though their multiple roles are not often recognized or appreciated. Yes, women are different from men but this difference should be celebrated along with the recognition that all human beings are created equal in dignity and rights and should be afforded equal opportunity and legal protection.

Much progress has been made over the years for the advancement of women and this past year was no exception. In Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected President, the first female President in Africa. In Germany, Angela Merkel was elected as the nation's first female Chancellor. And in Chile, citizens elected their first woman President, Michelle Bachelet. These victories represent important steps forward but we still have a long way to go before we reach gender parity in the political decision making levels. Today only 16 per cent of legislators worldwide are women.

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 mutual 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

GAME POINT
Sujoy Lama



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 very dangerous 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 last year's French Open. Nadal's weaknesses are his serve and transition game. For him to have a legitimate shot at being number one, he needs to generate more pace on his serve and get more free points, especially on faster surfaces.

Federer's dominance of men's tennis has been a major concern for the ATP tour. People have lost interest in the game because the number one has no rivals. Great rivalries make the game exciting for fans and boost its popularity. In the past, McEnroe/Borg, Becker/Edberg and Sampras/Agassi took the game to great heights. I believe the answer to Federer's dominance is Nadal. He is the opposite of Roger in every sense of the word. He shows his emotions, plays physical tennis and is a great counter puncher. The fact that he has a winning record over Roger is great. They have played four times and Nadal has won three of those. Let the rivalry begin!



KIRAN PANDAY

Bullets against bullets

Himalayan Enfielders saddle up for their Kathmandu-Pokhara peace ride

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

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 hours: 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—anyone 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 include a motorcycling 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 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, Holi ride
1PM - Lunch
7PM - Dinner at Paradiso

Wednesday 15 March

9AM - Back to Kathmandu
1PM - Lunch at Trisuli Centre
4PM - Arrive Kathmandu Club Page 3



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Incidental Meeting** paintings by Celia Washington (UK) Sunita Rana (Nepal) & Montserrat Clausells (Spain). Siddhartha Art Gallery. 9-21 March.
- ❖ **Painting Exhibition** by Ed Bartlett. 10 March. 5.30 PM. Indigo Gallery

EVENTS

- ❖ **Celebrating this year's Fagu Purnima** a youth forum. 10 March. 3PM. Martin Chautari
- ❖ **Win with Liverpool**-watch Liverpool take on Arsenal live at Liquid Lounge, 12 March. 21.30
- ❖ **5th Annual Coca Cola Ride Nepal 2006** 12-15 March. Himalayan Enfielders. 4440462
- ❖ **Fagu Purnima/Holi** 14 March.
- ❖ **Doing Field Work** in the United States of America and Nepal: lecture by Dilli Ram Dahal at Yala Maya Kendra, 17 March. 5548142
- ❖ **World Water Day** 22 March.
- ❖ **9th Annual Moon Camp**. 4107599. www.youthinitiative.org.np
- ❖ **Nature and Wildlife Photography** competition for amateur photographers. www.wcn.org.np
- ❖ **The Third Himalayan Open Golf Championships** to be held from 13-18 March.

MUSIC

- ❖ **The Cloud Walkers** at Rox Bar. Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM, Upstairs.
- ❖ **Best of Jazz** JCS trio and Friends. Niek's Place, Tuesday and Saturday. 4701324.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711
- ❖ **Uncork the Good Times** Fusion bar at Dwarika's presents Ciney and Par-e-jat, Fridays. 4479448

DINING

- ❖ **Steak at Olive Bar & Bistro** featuring a unique selection of aged steaks, fresh fish and Italian specialties. 4411818
- ❖ **Beat the heat** with milkshakes at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Breakfast** at Singma Restaurant. 8.30 - 11AM daily. 5520004
- ❖ **Strawberry Time** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Stupa View** clay oven pizza, tasty desserts, espresso & latte at the Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- ❖ **Mexican and Italian** food at Fuzone Café, Lagankhel. 5542935
- ❖ **Great Dining** options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Barbeque** at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- ❖ **The Shangri-La Express** make your own sandwiches and salads and choice of dessert. 11AM - 3PM. The Shambala Garden
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** at Fusion, Dwarika's, happy hour 5-9PM.
- ❖ **Breakfast** at 1905 New York style bagels whole wheat pancakes and real croissants baked in house daily. 1905, Kantipath
- ❖ **Breakfast With Birds** lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fire place. Farm House Café. 4375279



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Hiking Sakhu** to Changunarayan. Saturday 11th March, appukarki@gmail.com
- ❖ **Club Himalaya Chiso Chiso Hawama** package from Rs.1700 per person with dinner, breakfast, accommodation and shuttle service. 668-0080
- ❖ **Go Double, Pay Single** special air package to Thailand & ASEAN destinations with Air Nepal & Air Asia, until 31 March
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, relaxation in Pokhara. 01 4361500
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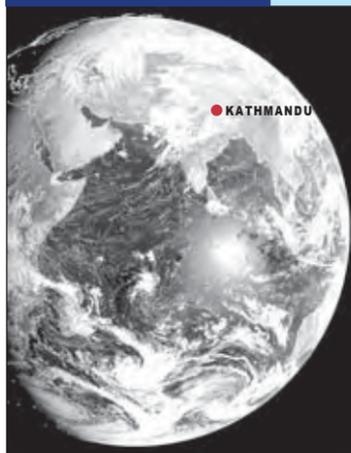
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NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED



Even if you don't usually pray, pray with all your might. And there is nothing else we forecasters can do than cross our fingers and hope that these twin low pressure systems circling each other over central India (seen in this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning) don't cancel each other out. This is the first sign of moisture we have seen approaching Nepal in the past five months and the system better hurry up and dump some rain on this parched land. Jumla did manage to wring out 3.8 mm of rain on Wednesday morning. But we need this rain to fall on the Kulekhani Reservoir and to irrigate farms across the hills and tarai. Our guess (actually hope) is that it will be a wet weekend.

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श्री ५ को सरकार
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MIN BAJRACHARYA

NEPALI BABIES: Women demonstrate in Baneswor on Wednesday on International Women's Day demanding that children be eligible for citizenship papers on recommendation of mothers and not just fathers.



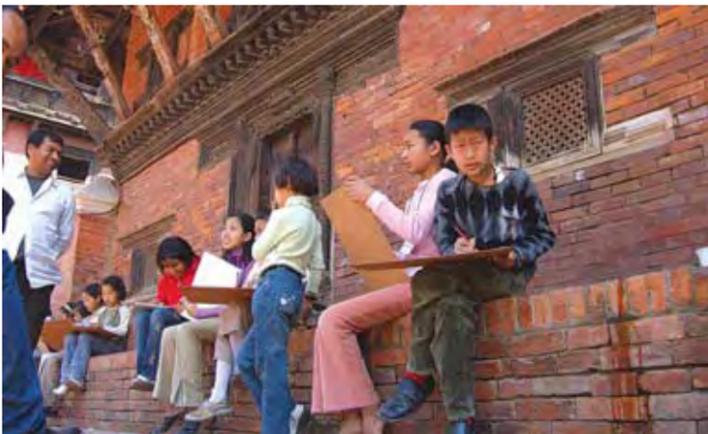
EKAL SILWAL

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



KIRAN PANDAY

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



ALOK TUMBHAHANGPHEY

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



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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



KIRAN PANDAY

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 Away* and radio programs. For his perseverance and commitment for the rights of the disabled, Sudarshan was awarded the Asoka 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

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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 criticising 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? Whoa, 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 venture that cutting off power to the 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.

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



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:

- 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.'
- 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.
- 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'.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 in force then, it will enter the Guinness Book as the tallest building in the world without a functioning lift.

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