Nearer and nearer

Y ou don’t have to go far to see the face of war these days. Just drive to Thahkot, down to Malekhu and along the picturesque highway that in peacetime used to take Kathmandu’s weekenders to resorts in Kurintar and Manakamana.

At Fisling, where white water rafters still launch their boats (right), there are charred hulks of tankers destroyed by Maoists to enforce their blockade. Further up the road on Wednesday, army commandos in full battle gear were massed around armoured personnel carriers.
By renewing their pact with the Maoists last week, the parties have once more shown that they can bring the rebels out of the jungles if they had more support. By standing their ground on the dispute over the pool of aggrieved villagers, the government has turned to violence to keep cars off the roads and undermine the army's practice of providing security. It depends on the threat of violence they get their safe landing and take the wind out of the[king's] sails.

CRITICS OF THE PARLY ARE PARTLY RIGHT: VIOLENCE AND NON-VIOLENCE DON'T MIX.

The Maoist blockade that crippled the country for months is not worth its while unless it destroys the regime's integrity. It is this country's tragedy that people are not coming out openly in the streets in support of their pro-democracy agitation just to re-evaluate the decisions that prove the people's worst fears that they haven't changed their spots.

Why is it that the king's enemies insist on punishing the people to get back at them? How is it going to help build public support when you deprive the poorest segments of society from their livelihoods for prolonged periods?

It is this country's tragedy that people fighting to liberate the people have always been punished the very people they're supposed to be fighting to liberate. The people's desire for peace and normalcy is positive and, more than anything else, the people's capacity to be patient. But it's not too late to prevent new bloodshed if there is some genuine concern of the Rimpoche that there is a price for the legitimacy the rebels gain from violence.

VIOLECE IS A DEADEND.
Within 24 hours of the withdrawal of nationwide blockades by the Maoists, the parties killed hundreds throughout the kingdom. Peace remains as elusive as ever.

On a busy afternoon at Asian this week a second cousin is spotting haggling over the price of fresh strawberries from Novakot. There is little doubt that the monopoly of food exists in the marketplace. As soon as a seller gets a buyer's touch they sell them with novelty but keep them reassured with the promise of reliability.

The challenge is to design an appropriate mix of freshness and familiarity. This is difficult enough in business but in politics the task is much more daunting. The incumbency factor can make a party remain in power or lose it depending on its campaign strategy. Democratic party/communist insurgent loses its relevance with the masses but can't acquire legitimacy without renouncing violent behaviour. Baburam Bhattarai, skilled strategist that he is, must be in that dilemma to rebrand his party to keep its young adherents on board without frightening away the democratic-coalition of political parties, civil society and the international community.

The Maoist leadership needs time to make the change. The second MoU with the seven party alliance last week gave them another opportunity to design a safe exit strategy from the vicious circle of armed insurgency, ruthless repression, alienation and rebellion. Sadly, some powerful and familiar interests are determined to see to it that they fail.

The very term ‘constitutional forces’ is an oxymoron. Sovereignty of the people is the sole constitutional force in any democratic country. It is exercised by institutions and instruments created by the constitution in accordance with constitutional provisions and judicial traditions.

Since 1990 Nepal is the only constitutional force of this country is, of course, after the 1990 constitution. In the courts it is their creations charged with the responsibility of acting according to the letter and spirit of the supreme law of the land.

That stopped working the day parliament was dissolved under unusual circumstances four years ago. Whether the constitution is dead for good, consigned, in ICU or hostage to Article 127 is debatable. But everyone agrees it is ineffective. When the foundation has collapsed, there is no point building on it.

Most Nepalis have no idea what a constituent assembly is supposed to deliver. Will it usher in a dictatorship of the proletariat or just legitimise monarchical democracy? Will it introduce inclusive democracy or perpetuate the status quo? These questions need to be debated in an atmosphere of give-and-take with an open mind. There can be no better forum to deliberate these issues than a parliament reinstated for the express purpose of preparing the ground for constituent assembly.

It will offer the right mix of innovation and ease to improve the visibility and value of reinvented Nepali Maoism in the marketplace of ideas. The alternative to messy parliamentary democracy is complete anarchy.

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SCHOOLS ON THE FRONTLINE

RAJAN PARAJULI
in JUMLA

The government requires schools to make children sing the national anthem every morning. But the Maoists have banned it, and ruled that only revolutionary songs be sung. To avoid getting into trouble, teachers in schools in remote Jumla risked their lives to avoid violations. The Maoists have forced all students to tear out portraits of members of the royal family from their text-books. Every book in every classroom has pages missing. Likewise across Nepal, teachers and students here in one of Nepal’s most remote districts are on the frontlines of the conflict, squeezed between the state and the rebels. The government has moved out post offices, agricultural extension and forestry offices from the hinterland. Only the teachers remain. There might be ceasefirees and 12-point agreements with the parties but nothing has changed here. Teachers are still forced to march in protest programs, sometimes a roundtrip for a week across rugged terrain. They are still paying the mandatory 'donation.' Now there is talk that all teachers have to come to class dressed in combat fatigue, teach themselves the curriculum and follow the rebel calendar with holidays for Mao’s birthday. The teachers know this will make their schools targets of security forces but there is nothing they can do about it.

Two years ago, Maoists came to Jumla’s Tribhuvan Secondary School and abducted the principal and two teachers. The principal was later killed in the forest and the two teachers let go with the warning not to speak against the movement. Once released the principal was interrogated by the army, and then the police took the two into custody and beat them up. "We are struggling to stay alive between these two sides," says a teacher, "our students are terrified."

After the Maoists killed the principal, Ghanashyam Bhatta was forced by the District Education Office to replace him. "I resisted twice," Bhatta says. "But they told me I couldn’t. I am a Maoist sympathizer." Jumla CDO Krishna Shrestha takes a hard line on teachers who listen to the Maoists. "Their job is to teach, not do politics," he tells us, "besides the military patrols are under standing instructions to treat civilians well."

This lack of understanding of their plight angers teachers caught in the crossfire. "What do they think," asks one teacher, "if we are mere Maoist supporters why would they have to抽象 us?"

Schools in contested areas on the outskirts of Jumla hear the booby trap along the trail. "We are struggling to stay alive between these two sides," says a teacher, "our students are terrified."

In the meantime, the government has made good on its promise to hand over the power to hire and fire teachers to the school management committee by amending the Education Act and Regulations. It is clear that the government is serious about the idea of a public-private partnership in which it provides the financing and the community provides the management oversight of the school. A recent survey of over 10,000 households served by 33 schools that have gone over to community management shows that the impact of this change has been phenomenal (see table).

What results show is that modest performance incentives and community efforts make a powerful combination to improve provision of education dramatically and very fast. Although this survey covers a small sample, the leaders of the national network of community managed schools tell us that these results do not surprise them at all. They are consistent with what they have been seeing themselves, though their observations are not quantified. This is great news for the education system in Nepal. I suspect the achievements are far better than anyone had expected. But it is also encouraging for the development effort in Nepal more broadly. When the political crisis and the insurgency have made development work more challenging, there is increasing evidence and realisation that letting the communities lead the way is the smart approach to sustainable development. This survey’s results strongly support this idea.

Of course, community management of schools is just one example of such an approach. There is a scope for the government to expand its support for a number of other community-based programs like the Poverty Aleviation Fund, rural drinking water (through the ‘Fund Board’ and other programs) alternative energy development (through the Alternative Energy Promotion Center), rural electrification (through the community electrification program), and microcredit schemes (through the Rural Microfinance Development Center).

A rather unprecedented game of disinformation about the true intention of the government continues and the Ministry of Education and Sports has failed thus far to counteract such a smear campaign with any real evidence. Many communities have become uncertain about the community management concept, and some observers seem to feel that this reform process is no longer working.

But many of the communities that have taken over school management are seeing impressive results. They march on and other communities that have been confused by conflicting information would do well to follow their lead.

Ken Ohashi is the World Bank Country Director for Nepal.

Let communities run schools
This is the smart approach to sustain quality education

The transfer of government schools to community management in 2002, and in the first year 95 schools were handed over to community management. In the second year, the program gained momentum and the total reached 1,000 and now well over 2,000 schools are under community management. That is more than 10 percent of about 21,000 government funded schools in the country. But this year, the process has slowed rather sharply. Is this another case of Nepal failing to bring a good reform to its logical conclusion?

Since last year, in many areas local Maoists seem to have warned communities not to accept the management responsibility over their own schools and where the transfer had already happened, return the responsibility to the government. Their basic argument seems to be that this transfer of schools to community management is a sly trick of the government to withdraw funding. This certainly does not seem like a government that is trying to withdraw from the funding obligation for primary education. In the meantime, the government has made good on the promise to hand over the power to hire and fire teachers to the school management committee by amending the Education Act and Regulations. It is clear that the government is serious about the idea of a public-private partnership in which it provides the financing and the community provides the management oversight of the school.

Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Academic year 03/04</th>
<th>Academic year 04/05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school primary age children</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school primary age girls only</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out-of-school primary age girls only</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary dropout and repetition rate</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary dropout and repetition rate</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the Maoists, the country’s school system has become a target because it is the only government entity still left in the villages. And that puts teachers and students directly in the crossfire.

Adapted from a radio feature broadcast on Antenna Foundation.

RYAN PARAJULI
Buried

Story ideas for biz reporters

Over recent months, this columnist has noticed the business pages of most of our newspapers and magazines are carrying more adverts than business news. Further, some of them are relying on the international wires rather than providing news of Nepal. To help what the media’s interest for home-grown headlines, your weekly Brief suggests a few ideas our biz reporters could explore:

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

● The essential task of branching Nepal (see #171) is finally complete. While talking to Arun Aranad and Rahul Sen, who worked relentlessly to create the ‘Naturally Nepal—Once is Not Enough’ campaign, it became clear that during the course there were two exploited emotions far more than most consultants would be comfortable with. However, the media handled the creation as a press release and no more. Perhaps the news got pushed aside by the usual violence, political rhetoric and ‘un-rhetoric’ but why did no journalist interview these people? And why didn’t the plethora of marketing, advertising and trade shows get the branding just the first step in creating a buzz about Nepal? This exercise must not be allowed to go the same way as the Kathmandu-Lhasa bus service.

● Last week’s visit of a senior Chinese leader, apart from creating a perceived sense of legitimacy for the government, did result in some interesting economic developments. Duty free entry for more than 1,500 Nepali goods! This should all make us jump for joy. But like many such announcements this one was short on details. What is on that list? Where in China can they be sent to? And how? The answers are many but the answers few. As someone at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences told the Beed, China is far more willing to invest in trying to reach Nathu La in Sikkim with roads, railways, transmission lines and gas pipelines than waste energy to stimulate Nepal to consider how it might take advantage of its transit position.

● The review of the Bikram Era exhibition, a conference with the theme ‘Leveraging ICT to Create an Engine of Growth for Nepal’ is scheduled for 24-25 March.

Nepali society needs more pluralistic thinking, main liberal debates on issues. Since politics is a debate we are sick of, why not start covering economic and business issues. Then we could depend less on international wires to fill our newspaper pages.

www.arthabeed.com

Not doing too badly in IT outsourcing

Despite political instability, a power crisis and slow internet Nepal’s dot coms come of age

GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA

The government’s Information Technology Policy released in 2000 committed that Nepal would be put on the global IT map in the next five years. It is 2006, and it is debatable whether we have reached that target. But we’re not doing too badly. Demography has brought competition in telephony and among internet service providers. There are now competing operations systems in Nepal with the release of Nalpaxim and software vendors are still hoping the IPR regulations are implemented.

In 2000, the Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) also announced a target of software export earnings to reach Rs 6 billion in five years. We are nowhere close to that figure but we’ve been making progress. GeoSpatial Systems was one of the first information outsourcing companies established in 1996 with direct foreign investments from Japan. Nepali employees sitting in Kathmandu combine aerial pictures with geographic data to make 3-D topo maps. The work requires high concentration and precision output.

Herve Charrier and Sushree joined the company in 2001 to return to their home country. GeoSpatial is a good part of his student and working life in Japan. GeoSpatial now has 60 full-time staff (pictures) but it can employ up to 250 people in shifts. Because of the specialised nature of work, all employees are continuously trained, with senior engineers spending from six months to two years in Japan to learn Japanese mapping technology. Rajesh Shakti, another entrepreneur runs a Hitech Valley IT which employs 200 staff. It specialises in internet based applications from clients in North America and Europe. After starting out small with only five people the company is now one of five large scale software operations in Nepal. “Our customers are abroad at the speed at which they are programmed in Nepal can meet deadlines and revert back within 24 hours,” Shakti told us, “We had communication problems but now with simple instant messenger software we have solved those problems. Serving Mails is now the largest outsourcing company in the country and has just moved into a larger and state-of-the-art 35,000 sq office in Patan that can house 1,500 people. D2Hawyke is a cost-centre local operation of an established firm abroad that employs 50 people. Yomari Inc is a web design company with offices in the US but all its operations in Nepal. There have also been unsuccessful dot com startups as well. The first high profile company to open a development center in Nepal was Pilgrims Asia, which moved operations to Bangalore after realising that it was hiring more people from India. The number of companies involved in medical transcriptions have also gone down.

It companies have evolved their own processes and treatment of infections and periodontal disease and cosmetic and prosthetic equipment. The clinic’s services include examinations, fillings, extractions, chairs, an intra oral camera, newly designed X-ray machine and whitening treatment of infections and periodontal disease and cosmetic and prosthetic dentistry.

MORTGAGE LOANS: Rastriya Bariya Bank is now offering mortgage loans for personal and business needs. One of the country’s biggest banks till now has focused on lending in the industrial, commercial and micro credit sectors but today also offers loans for housing, education and vehicles. Clients can take mortgage loans of up to 30 million for business purposes and Rs 5 million for personal needs. The loans are repayable in five years at a net interest rate of 9-10 percent.

CRACKERS COUPON: Mama Chicken Crackers has launched its ‘run for runs’ coupon scratch game. Based on cricket, customers can win prizes by tallying runs. Rewards range from a packet of Mama chicken crackers (six runs) to an MP3 Player (36 runs).

DENTAL CARE: Advanced Dental Care has opened opposite the north gate of the Narayanhit Royal Palace. It features larger treatment rooms, new dental chairs, an intra oral camera, newly designed X-ray machine and whitening equipment. The clinic’s services include examinations, fillings, extractions, treatment of infections and periodontal disease and cosmetic and prosthetic dentistry.
Pact reaffirmed

Text of the second MOU between the Seven Party Alliance and CPN (Maoist) issued separately

Everyone is well aware of the 12-point understanding reached between the seven party alliance and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) on 22 November 2005 for loktantra, peace, prosperity, progressive thinking and national independence. The understanding created a nationwide wave that completely swamped the 8 February municipal polls orchestrated by the autocratic regime. That failure leaves no doubt that the understanding has been endorsed by the people. The widespread international support for the understanding also proves that it will be the true foundation for the resolution of the conflict.

Today, we express our strong commitment to implement the understanding. The seven parties are fully convinced that the force of the opposition movement will restore parliament, which in turn will create an interim government and conduct constituent assembly elections after dialogue and agreement with the Maoists. Such elections will end the conflict, establish loktantra and restore the people’s sovereign and state power. The Maoists believe fully that an interim government formed by a national conference of democratic forces and constituent assembly elections can achieve this political goal. We have agreed that we will continue talks in order to reach a common agreement on the process. We also agreed that the people’s movement is the only means feasible for achieving our goal. We appeal to all democratic forces, civil society, professional groups, marginalised and oppressed peoples, the press and public to actively take part in the ongoing loktantra and restore absolute democracy and restore people’s sovereignty through constituent assembly elections.

We appeal also to the international community to provide all support in our attempt to end the 10-year armed conflict and establish peace and loktantra by ending Nepal’s autocratic monarchy. Along with this understanding, the seven party alliance has called for a non-cooperation movement and massive mobilisations on 6-8 April in Kathmandu. The SPA has also called for a non-cooperation movement and massive protests only at scheduled times and places. A human wave should engulf the capital and the people should block all highways. After the entire country is under the control of the people, the autocratic regime should be opposed and isolated through non-cooperation. It is this people's struggle that will dislodge the root causes of Nepal's historical crisis and break the autocratic hurdle now in our path.

Feuding Maoists

Expelled Maoist central committee member, Babhina Shrestha, in Nepal

Samacharpatra, 19 March

Just when we were engaged in fighting the royal palace, we face yet another autocratic front within our party. Chairman Prachanda wanted to promote nepotism—his family members were his top priority. Comrade Baburam could not withstand even a single criticism against him. When the parties were agitating in the streets more than a year ago, Prachandra and Baburam had arranged a meeting with the king in Thawang. This was not something the central committee had planned and a majority of its members were unaware of the plan. They even agreed that if Thawana was inappropriate, talks would be held in the Bhurban Hunting Reserve. These plans were known to us only after they were leaked at party meetings much later. The parties have chosen to hold talks with the representative of the old regime at a time when we should have been heading to the people’s movement. This is something we believe the people will have to oustdate. But it proves that Prachanda and Baburam had illicit relations with the palace, which inspired the king to stage his coup. We believe that the movement’s goal should be a republican setup but Prachanda and Baburam have compromised for lesser goals. They were unwilling to form a republican front. We also said that the 12-point agreement with the parties should carry the word ‘republic’. But the two leaders simply abandoned the word when they signed the pact whereas the NC and UML expressed their concerns in the document. Our repudiation from the party is a result of growing feudalism and capitalism within the leadership. They have also forgotten the need for criticism. We told the people this and they sacked us. We have not left the party to有效期. We are fighting for the growing feudalism and capitalism within the leadership. They have also forgotten the need for criticism. We told the people this and they sacked us. We have not left the party to有效期. We are fighting for the people at the New Cultural Revolution Group within it and we believe that the majority is with us.

Indian goons

Desantar, March 19

Dhangai—Impoverished Nepalis crossing the border to India in search of livelihood got looted by the Indian authorities at the border. This is nothing new, but such incidents have been increasing. Even the number of Nepalis from farwest

Constitutionally sound

Interview with Advocate Sarawatiba Tuladhar, first president of the Nepal Bar Association, in Kathmandu, 21 March

Was the Bar Association’s national conference a failure? I do not agree with the stand that the Bar has taken regarding current political crises. I decided to attend for a constituent assembly as the means to change the present system, meaning the constitution. But the 1996 constitution was brought about through a lot of haphazard. It is as if the constituent assembly is only fulfilling the law. If the Bar had not interfered, instead nothing has been done in the spirit of the constitution and that is the cause of instability. It is the governments that have been unable to solve the country’s problems, and bring about development. The constitution has been blamed for these failures.

What should the Bar have done? The Bar should have attended to correct the flaws of the political bodies and governments. They should have proposed in a democratic manner. If they had worked in a fully democratic manner for the people and country we could have achieved much more.

Why did the Bar decide to opt for a constituent assembly? The majority decided to go for a constituent assembly. Perhaps it is because the Bar’s leader also decided to go for one. Even though the majority has decided, I say that it is not necessary to discard this constitution and write a new one. If the leaders had wanted to they could have done so much. Given the situation, they chose to use power against the spirit of the constitution and only fulfilled their selfish personal and party motives. That brought the country to the current situation.
travel from the hills to India and their numbers have been growing due to the conflict. Unfortunately, on their return home many are robbed by the Indian cops who extort huge sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. “All I had saved was Rs 5,000 after working for six months in Mumbai and I have nothing left,” says Dina Senyal from Archam. Nepalis get extorted at stations and looted in trains, according to returnees. But they have no one to complain to. An Uttar Pradesh police official admitted that such incidents were true but he added that action against the culprits are difficult due to the conflict.

Parties’ ploy
Hira Biswakarma, 20 March

The leaders of the seven parties are still concealing the move with the support of the Maoists and the consent of Delhi. That’s why they reaffirmed the 12-point agreement. But the party chiefs were unwilling to sign the same statement as the Maoist leaders because they are scared of being branded as Maoists. “All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. ‘All I had sums of money after accu...
The 4th World Water Forum in Mexico City last week was sponsored by Coca-Cola. But the fizzy drink wasn’t what interested children here. Shanta Chauhan, 14, of Dang and Suresh Baral, 13, of Kaski (pictured, above) made the trip to the Children’s World Water Forum to talk about the role of young people in improving sanitation in Nepal. The two were chosen from among 400 Nepali schools with water and sanitation clubs. “When we started our youth club in my village with the help of UNICEF people didn’t trust us so they showed us away,” remembers Shanta.

In 2004 only 35 percent of houses in Shanta’s village had proper bathrooms but now over 65 percent do. “We don’t just talk about latrines and bathrooms,” the young girl explained confidently, “we perform street dramas, distribute flyers and have concerts on sanitation.” It’s now become a status symbol for people in her Dang village to have a bathroom, to keep surroundings clean and to live in a hygienic environment.

Suresh was involved in setting up his own school club in 2004 that offered loans of Rs 5,000 to families interested in building a bathroom. “Today, all the village’s households are equipped,” says Suresh proudly. Participants in Mexico City were impressed with how much the children have achieved in so little time—something that adults would find impossible to do. Over 100 children aged 11-15, from 28 countries participated at the children’s forum, presenting 55 local action plans five of which will be chosen to be presented at a dialogue session at the main water forum.

“The most important thing I learnt about water is that it is vital for sanitation and it is not wise to separate the two,” Suresh told children from other parts of the world through an impressive powerpoint.

Living in dormitories, the children had a chance to meet other kids. Shanta and Suresh have made friends from Tajikistan, Laos, Mexico and Japan. They also learned from one another. Says Shanta: “There are many problems in our villages but that doesn’t mean we wait for someone else to solve our problems. I am going back to Nepal with the message that children can make a difference.”

Young and water wise

Melting like ice cream cones

Yet, global warming and retracting glaciers don’t make it to the World Water Forum

MALLIKA ARYAL
in MEXICO CITY

There are 10,000 policymakers, water experts, scientists, businessmen, researchers and writers from 130 countries here in Mexico City for the 4th World Water Forum. The Third Assessment Report of the UN’s expert group, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects that the Earth’s average surface temperature will rise between 1.4°C-5.8°C by 2100 if no major effort is made to cut emissions of the greenhouse gases.

In the Nepal Himalaya, average annual temperatures have been increasing 0.06°C a year since the 1970s. At this rate, there could be a rise of as much as nine degrees by the end of the century, spelling a catastrophe for the mountains and the people who live below them. There are 2.315 glacial lakes within the country and 20 are already so swollen with melting snow that they are in imminent danger of bursting. A Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) report released last year reported that 67 percent of Himalayan glaciers are retracting rapidly. The Fund was concerned about what this would mean to biodiversity and wildlife. But there is a much more serious issue: rapidly melting snows would increase the flow of Himalayan rivers in the dry season for the next 35 years, according to one simulation model, but after that the rivers would dry up. However, climate change is a global phenomenon caused by increased fossil fuel use in the industrialised countries. The Nepali Himalaya may suffer the consequences, but the solutions lie elsewhere. “Every year, countries like the USA and Australia delay in making significant contributions towards climate change, we move closer to calamity,” says Jamie Pittlock, director of the WWF’s Global Freshwater Program.

Others believe that instead of playing the blame game it is better to get together and ready for the worst. “We need to understand that climate is not going to stabilise soon, thus we need to work towards preparing so that if there is a catastrophic event, there is minimum destruction,” says Nishat. He proposes pressuring governments to work to develop early warning systems.

Himalayan experts agree that glacier retreat must be tackled at a regional level and are calling on cooperation of the affected countries. Bissham Gajja, policy adviser at WWF’s Global Freshwater Program says: “Governments should work on adaptation strategy, take a preventive approach and work with the people.

UN’s Nishat agrees, “The impact will be felt most need to seriously revise their national laws and incorporate climate change laws into their future disaster plans.”
There is all this global warming how come it snowed so much this spring?
That is what trekkers and Sherpas in Khumbu were asking last week as an unprecedented and unusual blizzard dumped heavy snow at the tail end of a bone-dry winter. Meteorologists explain it is not so much climate change but climate variability associated with the greenhouse effect.

No one we spoke to in Khumbu last week could remember a winter like this without snow, or a spring with so much. “This is something we never saw and heard about,” said 80-year-old Jangbu Sherpa, at Namche Bajar. “It’s quite ominous.”

The freak storm hit the region on 10 March, blowing and snowing for two full days. Nearly a meter of snow fell on Tengboche and up the Imja Valley. Many trekkers were unprepared and were stranded. “The guidebooks I referred to did not have any information about snowfall in this season,” said Sarah Topping, from London.

Some farmers were happy because it meant an end to a long drought. “The fields were drying up,” said Sunku Maya Tamang, a seasonal farmer in Lukla. “Now that it has snowed, we can sow barley once it melts.” But others were full of questions. “First, we did not get snow throughout the winter and now we are getting to see snow fall during the spring, this is quite puzzling for all of us, god knows what disaster we will face next,” said Jangbu.

Phurba Gyelgin, at Monjo, is also worried. “It did not snow when it should have and now when there should have been plenty of sunshine we get hit by the freak snowstorm, something is not right.”

Many such observations have been forwarded to conservation organisations working in the region, such as the World Wildlife Fund. “We noticed that it had snowed unusually and unexpectedly for three days last spring as well,” said WWF Climate Change Officer Chamling Rai.

The Italian research group that goes by the acronym EV-K2-CNR recently installed a weather station below Chomolungma at 5,079 m to monitor climate variability. Officials at the Department of Hydrology and Metrology in Kathmandu caution against jumping to hasty conclusions. “Just because it did not snow for one season or it snowed in spring doesn’t indicate climate change,” said Senior Divisional Meteorologist Sarju Baidya.

The department’s explanation is that this winter’s westerly disturbances were deflected by atmospheric pressure. “The westerylies all veered off into Tibet, which is why there was no precipitation this winter,” explains Baidya.

While that may explain the barren winter, it offers no insight into what the Sherpas of Khumbu can expect next.●

Locals near Everest fret about Mother Nature’s next surprise

Crazy weather

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA in TENGBOCHE

SNOWED UNDER: Namche Bajar last week under a metre of snow (top) and Chomolungma and Lhotse soar above an unusually white spring at Tengboche Monastery.
An American billionaire invests in rural health care in Nepal in memory of his son

Nick Simons had just finished college in New York and was travelling around the world when he came to Nepal in 2002. He liked it so much here, he stayed and worked in a community health project and was determined to dedicate his life to health care in the Third World. On his way back to America, he drowned while swimming in Bali.

Nick’s parents Jim and Marilyn Simons were devastated and decided to help Nepalis live healthier lives in Nick’s memory. They flew to Kathmandu in their private jet and saw the overcrowded maternity ward. They decided to fund a new $1.5 million maternity hospital that is currently under construction in Lagankhel.

Jim Simons was a mathematics professor at MIT and Harvard where he worked on probabilities and found ways to predict trends in the stock market. He set up Renaissance Technologies which helped corporate clients with management of their investment portfolios and grew into a multi-billion dollar business.

Jim and Marilyn wanted to do something more for Nepal that would make a real long-term difference in rural health. With a task force of Nepali health experts led by former ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa they set up the Nick Simons Institute (NSI) which was launched this week in Kathmandu.

“Rural health care is not a new problem and there are lots of people addressing the issue,” Jim says, “what makes NSI unique is that it will do this job better than it has ever been done with an emphasis on quality training.”

This is a relatively less glamorous way to do charity. Most philanthropists like to help with high-profile diseases that bring big headlines, address rural health in developing countries is an anonymous and low-profile. But the Nepali advisers at NSI were convinced that to make a real difference in Nepal, health care workers in remote and the poorest areas parts of Nepal needed to be trained in basic skills like childbirth, anaesthesia, bio-medicine, nursing, x-ray and even dentistry.

NSI has drawn up a strategy to select and train health personnel who are most likely to remain in the villages, and not migrate to the cities once they learn skills. It is looking at innovative ways of keeping doctors in rural hospitals by paying for their children to go to school in the cities and giving them telephone and internet access. Trainees will develop skills in existing government and mission hospitals like Tansen, Rukum, Dadeldhura and Okhaldhunga.

“Nepal has doctors, but they are in the wrong places, and it isn’t enough to train health workers we have to make sure they stay where they are needed,” says Mark Zimmerman Executive Director of NSI. There is great disparity in health care in Nepal: Kathmandu has 117 doctors for every 100,000 population but the figure is 3.3 for other towns and 0.7 for remote areas.

Jim and Marilyn Simons say they have a great sense of fulfilment that after three years an institute named after their son is finally getting off the ground.

“You know, we’d probably never have come to Nepal if Nick hasn’t been here,” says Marilyn, “he was so happy in Nepal, he said he wanted to live and work here. Nick left us a gift by opening a whole new world to us.”

The gift of life

The SASIA STORY

Sasia is the name Madanjeet Singh has coined for South Asia’s common currency in the hope that, like the Euro, it will become the anchor of economic stability and regional cooperation in the subcontinent.

This well-illustrated book contains rare pictures and is the story of Madanjeet Singh’s career as a painter, photographer and diplomat. It lays out his vision for prosperity through regional cooperation.

Available at all leading bookstores in Kathmandu.

Rs 600
Kukur-sukur ra car-sar

The outbreak of double-barrelled words in Nepali is getting out of hand

T he first time I became aware of the jingle word, an ever-increasing phenomenon in the Nepali language, was in a taxi. The driver was from Dhapakhel and he told me what his village was like. It is a most beautiful place, he said, because at night from his house he can see all the lights of ‘airport-sarport’. I naively asked the driver for the meaning of ‘sarport’. He merely shrugged his shoulders.

The Nepali language has a lift and a musical tone because of the number of enjoyable jingle words matching the mood of the expression. Families are known by their jingles, such as dai-bhai, mama-kaka, chhora-chhori, and little girls are known as chholi-beli. Early summer morning, when the air is crisp and clear and birds announce the new day, we say it is rim-jhim. Over hot oil your clothes become rani-changi, which can be seen waraji, all around. In the market, when wedding processions with baja-aja can be seen dayan-bayan, we buy mal-saman. After that we have dal-bhat together with friends, sang-sang.

But of late, Nepali colloquialism seems to have got out of hand. New jingles pop up like rebels in the hills and the speed at which new rhymes are invented requires a daily update of my Nepali dictionary. A friend says he loves to listen to gete-sargete during his khaza-saza. A well-educated neighbour expresses his concern about the blip-slip-and-increasing number of passal-sasal in Kathmandu’s gulli-sulli.

When I buy a new carpet for the house the shopkeeper says I shouldn’t worry. His carpet-sarpet are the cheapest and best and his tasne-sasne manche are without a doubt the most experienced in the district. A neighbour down the road is looking for a job and claims she makes excellent coffee-soffee for office staff during their meetings-sitting. A friend praises her, saying how she has even been to italy-sitaly to work for bideshi-sideshi. She claims she is the best barista in the district. A neighbour down the road is looking for a job and says..."I am sure the assault of jingle words does not stop at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and that villagers include Mao-babas and Khababas add their own new juicy expressions to the Nepali language. It is not surprising that those who mix their mother tongue with English would pioneer updated variations of the words. Anyone with a computer-computer hides the cable-sable or tar-sar behind a fancy office table after which they google-soogle till the cows come home or do the latest gadget-sgadget and skype-saye or email-emall with nata-gota and sati-thali around the globe. I am sure the assault of jingle words does not stop at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and that villagers include Mao-babas and Khababas add their own new juicy expressions to the Nepali language. It is not surprising that those who mix their mother tongue with English would pioneer updated variations of the words. Anyone with a computer-computer hides the cable-sable or tar-sar behind a fancy office table after which they google-soogle till the cows come home or do the latest gadget-sgadget and skype-saye or email-emall with nata-gota and sati-thali around the globe. I am sure the assault of jingle words does not stop at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and that villagers include Mao-babas and Khababas add their own new juicy expressions to the Nepali language. It is not surprising that those who mix their mother tongue with English would pioneer updated variations of the words. Anyone with a computer-computer hides the cable-sable or tar-sar behind a fancy office table after which they google-soogle till the cows come home or do the latest gadget-sgadget and skype-saye or email-emall with nata-gota and sati-thali around the globe. I am sure the assault of jingle words does not stop at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and that villagers include Mao-babas and Khababas add their own new juicy expressions to the Nepali language. It is not surprising that those who mix their mother tongue with English would pioneer updated variations of the words. Anyone with a computer-computer hides the cable-sable or tar-sar behind a fancy office table after which they google-soogle till the cows come home or do the latest gadget-sgadget and skype-saye or email-emall with nata-gota and sati-thali around the globe. I am sure the assault of jingle words does not stop at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and that villagers include Mao-babas and Khababas add their own new juicy expressions to the Nepali language. It is not surprising that those who mix their mother tongue with English would pioneer updated variations of the words. Anyone with a computer-computer hides the cable-sable or tar-sar behind a fancy office table after which they google-soogle till the cows come home or do the latest gadget-sgadget and skype-saye or email-emall with nata-gota and sati-thali around the globe. I am sure the assault of jingle words does not stop at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and that villagers include Mao-babas and Khababas add their own new juicy expressions to the Nepali language. It is not surprising that those who mix their mother tongue with English would pioneer updated variations of the words. Anyone with a computer-computer hides the cable-sable or tar-sar behind a fancy office table after which they google-soogle till the cows come home or do the latest gadget-sgadget and skype-saye or email-emall with nata-gota and sati-thali around the globe. I am sure the assault of jingle words does not stop at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and that villagers include Mao-babas and Khababas add their own new juicy expressions to the Nepali language. It is not surprising that those who mix their mother tongue with English would pioneer updated variations of the words. Anyone with a computer-computer hides the cable-sable or tar-sar behind a fancy office table after which they google-soogle till the cows come home or do the latest gadget-sgadget and skype-saye or email-emall with nata-gota and sati-thali around the globe. I am sure the assault of jingle words does not stop at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and that villagers include Mao-babas and Khababas add their own new juicy expressions to the Nepali language. It is not surprising that those who mix their mother tongue with English would pione..."
Treading carefully in Sri Lanka

SUSPICIONS LINGER DESPITE THE RESUMPTION OF TALKS

Colombo—Sri Lanka is one country where you take no time to pick up the thread from where you have left it off the last three months or three decades ago. It is the same old ethnic divide in different forms at different times. Currently, they are sitting across the table for sorting out a way to live together in the united country. But this is not the first time they are doing so. They have gone over the exercise again and again. India was in the picture more than once and even got enthralled and mixed in a war.

After burning its fingers, New Delhi is reluctant to get involved again. Norway is now betting for it and consults India at every step. Oslo has even strengthened its negotiating team and this has evoked some hope. But there are lots of ifs and buts. The Sinhalese believe that the talks will produce little since the LTTE is not willing to be pinned down to anything concrete. Sri Lanka’s chief negotiator says “it is too soon to say anything”. In one way, he is right. The LTTE is not willing to be pinned down to anything concrete.

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President Mahinda Rajapakse is treading carefully and says the talks are only preliminary. He is being hassled by Chandrika Kumaratunga. She began well as president but then in her eighth year rule she got lost in political intrigues which were of her own making. Sadly, the talks have not got beyond the preliminary stage. They seldom have in the past because both the Sinhalese and the Tamils have never put all their cards on the table. They always have a few up their sleeves. Both sides know it. Sinhalese editors, politicians and human rights activists say how can you trust the Tamils who, while being at the negotiating table, are extorting money, buying weapons from foreign arms suppliers and training Tamil children for their Eelam fight? The Tamils are mostly opposed to the LTTE that they have a long tale of grievances. Not many Tamils are either in government service or either the Sinhalese-run Indian public schools for the Sinhalese and the Tamils are mostly separate nowadays and there is very little social contact between the two communities.

Two things struck me: the Sinhalese anxiety to maintain peace with the LTTE and the belief that there was the third man, India, which would step in if there were anything worse happening. A few years ago, the word, ‘federation’, was a taboo. Now the Sinhalese, except the hardliners, talk about it and try to find out how things were working in India. The status of Indian state may be acceptable to the Sinhalese-pro-peace but they are sure that it would constitute a full and final settlement. The fear of Sinhalese, who constitute nearly 70 per cent of the population, is that the LTTE would use the status of state as a stepping stone to get to the Eelam. The general impression is that the LTTE, led by V Prabhakaran, is interested only in an independent Tamil state at the expense of Sri Lanka’s integrity. This is where India comes in. An average Sinhalese feels that New Delhi will thwart the LTTE’s ambitions to have an independent Tamil state because it poses a danger to India itself.

Rich Indians’ power play

NEW DELHI—India’s plan to reform its ailing power sector has been stalled by influential sections of society that benefit from subsidies provided by state-run utilities and steal electricity in collusion with officials, say experts. “Substantive improvement in power supply may not take place in the near future unless the care issue creating opposition to reform, that is, the issue of subsidy, is suitably addressed,” says V Santhakumar, a researcher at the state-run Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in the southern state of Kerala. The popular perception that electricity tariff reforms would adversely affect the poor was incorrect, he added. Says Shubhasis Gangopadhyay, director of the independent India Development Foundation, “Those who never receive electricity do not figure in discussions on power sector reforms—they don’t care one way or the other.”

Truly Malaysia?

KUALA LUMPUR—Malaysia’s first serious survey of race relations in 50 years shows that behind the façade of unity and peace, racism runs deep in this multi-ethnic melting pot. The telephone survey of about 1,200 Malaysians also found that the majority find comfort and security in their respective ethnicity and not in a common Malaysian identity, as the travel and tourism brochures suggest. “The findings are not at all surprising,” said social scientist Chandra Muzaffar. “This is partly because ethnic boundaries are real in our society and almost every sphere of public life is linked to ethnicity in one way or another.” The survey also found that negative racial stereotyping was deeply entrenched. For example, minority Chinese and Indians see the majority Malays, who make up 60 per cent of the population of 25 million people, as lazy.

Not mai pen rai

BANGKOK—A popular local expression for Thais laid-back and non-confrontational character—mai pen rai (it’s OK)—has been turned on its head these past weeks as an opposition campaign to get Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to resign picks up. With a hint of compromise surfacing from the main contenders locked in this struggle, it is becoming increasingly clear that this Southeast Asian nation could be heading towards political paralysis. “It is difficult to reach a compromise at this stage,” said Chamnong Boonrat, deputy director of the Research Centre on Peace Building at Bangkok’s Mahidol University. “There is not enough trust, each party is holding firm to their positions—all of them think the other is working in their favour.” The prospect of a snap election on 2 April, or even at a later date as some are suggesting, will do little to reduce the political heat against Thaksin, he added. “If he continues as the prime minister, you can expect more agitation and the act of governing will become more difficult.” (IPS)
An escalating war comes closer to the capital

NARESH NEWAR

The Royal Nepali Army’s elite Ranger Battalion had just come down off the mountain after a major battle on Tuesday in which 21 Maoists were killed. The Maoists in a statement said only 12 of their men were killed.

Further down the road, soldiers of the Sixth Battalion based in Baineni were all smiles when we caught up with them on Wednesday (pictured above). They were headquartered on the Prithbi Highway. They surprised the Maoists after getting intelligence on their plan to ‘climb the capital. This means the rebels are following the plan to ‘climb the mountain, sources told us they are now regrouping once more for the major battle on Tuesday in which 21 Maoists were killed. The Maoists in a statement said only 12 of their men were killed.

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But so far the rebels have only succeeded in carrying out ambushes when soldiers move out of barracks to clear obstacles, sabotaged government buildings, and attacked security personnel in the middle of crowded towns increasing civilian casualties. While the rebels had pinned down troops on the Prithbi Highway in the past, this is happening less and less. Army sources told us they are now familiar with the topography along the highway and have stationed posts at strategic locations and improved intelligence.

But however much the army thinks it has superiority, analysts say, in guerrilla warfare in this kind of terrain all it takes is one tree across the road and an ambush to strike a blow. And an attack even bigger and bloodier than the one on Thankot in February that left 12 policemen dead is a near certainty.

Meet my tennis team

Our diversity is our strength

Spring break for me means a trip with my tennis team to a warm location in the US. This year, we chose to come to Los Angeles for an opportunity to train outdoors for the first time in months and to have some fun. One week away from the rigors of schoolwork gives our student athletes an opportunity to re-charge their batteries for the remainder of the season. It is great to feel the sunshine and exciting to know that winter is behind us.

I was settling in my seat for our flight west when eight of my players, my assistant and my trainer walked into the plane. They were dressed in orange and blue sweat suits and in great spirits. I was very proud of how professional they looked and how vibrant they were. I decided than to write about my team and what they mean to me.

One of the great things about being a coach for a college team like the University of Illinois is to have a chance to incorporate the individual aspects of tennis into a team concept. This is definitely a challenge and lot more difficult than it looks. My philosophy is very simple: ‘the chain is only as strong as the weakest link’. Everybody on the team has to be on the same page and marching to the beat of the same drummer for us to be successful.

My role as the head coach is not just teaching the finer points of tennis. At times I am a motivator, a psychologist, a taskmaster, a team-building and a mentor. For these roles immensely and I am very fortunate to have a wonderful group of young women who are motivated both on and off the court. One great thing about the US is the opportunity it provides athletes to pursue their sports careers as well as to continue their education. And can you believe that they receive a full scholarship to do just that? It is worth more than $250,000 over five years.

Meet my top six players:

Maccall Hanks – This native of Los Angeles is a six-foot-serv volleyer who will certainly play at Wimbledon one day.

Memel Qiu – A brilliant student who hits with two hands off both sides, this Chinese immigrant is also a tenacious competitor.

Brianna Knue – She’s the heart of our team, the ultimate ‘team player’ from the windy city (Chicago).

Emily Wang – A power hitter and an extremely compassionate person, from Lawrence, Kansas.

Shivani Dave – She has Agassi-like ground strokes. A social butterfly, her parents are from India.

Alejandra Cuadra – This clay court expert from Lima, Peru aspires to work for the United Nations.

Diversity is the strength of our team. We have power hitters, counterpunchers, retrievers and server and volley specialists as well as all-court players. They have diverse academic majors such as electrical engineering, pre-med, business, accounting and social work. We have Chinese American, Indian American, Russian, Cypriot and Peruvian players, among others, on our team. It’s sure a colourful group and there is never a dull moment with them.

My assistant is JoAnne Russell, a former Wimbledon doubles champion. From Naples, Florida she is a tremendous inspiration for all of us. Not only is JoAnne a former #1 doubles player in the world, she also made the top 10 playing singles. She is our energizer and brings passion and energy to practice day in and day out.
EXHIBITIONS
- Group Exhibition by Artists Society of Nepal 17-24 March
- Park Gallery
- Shanti Tayya by Uma Shankar Shah Siddhartha Art Gallery
- 26 March – 19 April

EVENTS
- Francophone Night Festival. 24 March. 6PM. Alliance Francaise.
- Ramailo Saanjh presents new jazz rock band followed by DJ Sani. 24 March. Rs. 150
- Shani Thital Palet 31 March. 6PM nega-laya R sola . Rs. 500
- Ramailo Saanjh with Anil Shahi and Maya Mantra. Rs. 1000. 1PM-10PM. 5 and 26 April. Porside Dwarika’s Hotel.
- Life Skills Training Camp. programs@youthinitiative.org.np. Rs 1550
- New Free Student Union(FSU) : A football match organised by the Students Union. 24 March. 3-5PM. Martin Chautari
- Ghode Jatra 29 March
- Ibson vs Shakespeare a football match together organised by the Norwegian embassy. 26 March. Jawalakhel

MUSIC
- Classical Music at Lajimpat Cafe. Every Sunday. 6PM-9PM.
- MOKSH LIVE presents Jazz with JCS trio and Friends. Niek’s Place. Every Tuesday and Saturday. 4701324.
- Unplugged sessions with Strings. Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622.
- Uncork the Good Times Fusion bar at Dwarika’s presents Ciney and Par-jai Fridays 7PM onwards. Rs. 750. Dwarika’s Hotel.
- Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- Live Music at New Orleans Cafe. 4703031.
- Best of jazz ACS trio and Friends. Niek’s Place. Every Tuesday and Saturday. 4701324.
- Unplugged sessions with Strings. Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622.
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- Cadenza Collective Live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- Live Music at New Orleans Cafe. 4703031.

DINING
- Grilled lobsters at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu at 4491234 Ext. 91150.
- Nepali Cuisine at Krishnapur Restaurant. Dwarika’s Hotel. 4478488
- Lunch at Shivapuri Heights Cottage 25 March. 9841 371927
- BBQ Ban Bhoj with swimming at Godavari Village Resort.
- Saturday & Sunday. 5506875
- Breakfast at Singma Restaurant. 8.30 – 11.00AM daily. 5520004
- Stupa View vegetarian creations, clay oven pizza, tasty desserts, espresso & latte. Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- Great Dining options at Al Fresco, Bikanha, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- The Shangri-La Express Soups, make your own sandwiches and salads and choice of dessert only for Rs 399. Everyday from 11AM - 3PM. The Shambala Garden
- Breakfast at 1905 New York style bagels whole wheat pancakes and real croissants baked in house daily. Omelettes made to your gourmet style. 1905, Kantipath
- Breakfast With Birds lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fire place. Farm House Cafe. 4375379

GETAWAYS
- Home away from home Shivapuri Heights Cottage for bookings 9841 371927. sohan@escape2nepal.com
- House-Im. Nepalese Salads with Nepali Thali every Saturday at the terrace garden. Nagarkot. 668-0046, 668-0080 (ext.2111)
- Club Chino at Chino Chowk. Menu packages from Rs.1700.00 per person with dinner, breakfast, accommodation and shuttle service. 668-0080, 668-0083
- Go Double, Pay Single special air package to Thailand & ASEAN destinations with Air Nepal & Air Asia, valid until 31 March. 4247215. malaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resort & Spa, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- Star Cruises/Singapore with Air Sahara bring you cruise packages from Rs.65,500. 2012345
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

Being Cyrus’ is a story of six people and is set in a Parsi household of Sethnas. The Sethna family is headed by Fardoonjee Sethna [Honey Sethnas]. The Sethna family is headed by Fardoonjee Sethna [Honey Sethnas]. The Sethna family is headed by Fardoonjee Sethna [Honey Sethnas]. The Sethna family is headed by Fardoonjee Sethna [Honey Sethnas]. The Sethna family is headed by Fardoonjee Sethna [Honey Sethnas]. Cyrus soon becomes an integral part of Sethnas. Meanwhile an extra marital affair starts in the household. A deep rooted secret starts to unravel and the mystery around the character Cyrus starts to engulf everyone. Who is he? Where has he come from? What’s his agenda?

Call 442222 for show times at Jail Nepal www.jainepal.com

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Radio 24-2115 on 102.4

BHUKANAKA

Nepali weather

by MAUSAM BEED

Many parts of the country, including the Valley, have already received this month’s rain quota but after five months of drought water remains in short supply. Thursday morning’s satellite photo shows an active westerly front streaming towards the western Himalaya, carrying with it moisture and a good chance of more rain before the end of March. The earlier rains moderated temperature fluctuations and the mercury level has been rising consistently by one degree a week. Expect balmy afternoons and with localised convection storms into the weekend that we in the profession call “Charlie bravo”.

FIND US ON FACEBOOK/BEHIND THE ADVENTURES OF HERCULES
In tune with Nepal

In 17 years, musician Yoshihiro Akita has not dreamt once of his homeland. He’s only visited Japan once in the past decade and today, aged 54, all his wishes are rooted in Nepal.

The first time I came here 25 years ago I felt like I had been here in a previous life. So I want to die here,” he says with a smile.

After a couple of hours with this multi-talented man you start to understand why he is looking to hand over his unique yet very practical piano-tuning business to an apprentice and devote his working hours to Buddhism.

Born into a family of Buddhist monks, Akita was trained as a piano tuner. He married his Newari wife in Osaka 22 years ago and five years later the couple moved to her roots in Patan. “I was just tuning pianos for friends, and I started wondering how many pianos there were in Kathmandu. I put up a notice at a supermarket and people began calling,” Akita recalled.

Today, he carries a binder full of letters recommending his skills as a tuner, a list of pianos in the Valley and their condition, along with advice on the instrument’s care and value.

Besides pianos, Akita has also learned to care for the human body, having developed a physiotherapy technique that one satisfied patient, an ambassador here, calls “body tuning.” Today Akita’s son runs the Sotai Japanese Traditional Physiotherapy clinic in Jawalakhel.

That freeing up Akita’s time for his thanka business (Mababa Buddhist Thanka Gallery and nepalthanka.com) and to his goal of revitalising the art with what he calls the true spirit of Buddhism. “Much of Buddhist art has been going in the wrong direction,” he says, “my aim is to convey the exact feelings of the Buddha.”

But when the stress of healing others “gives me a headache” Akita reaches for his piano, where his favourites range from Chopin to Andre Gagnon to easy listening.

But Akita is not completely happy because there is no peace in Nepal. He adds: “I have a dream. Peace will come to Nepal and then I’ll go to the mountains and play piano.”

Marty Logan
Us yeomen must think positive

Thanks to the yeoman’s service imparted by our country’s current rulers in the past year, we can say with confidence that things can’t get any worse. Therefore, if my memory serves me right, things can only get better.

That is why you may have gleaned from recent coverage in The Rising Damp that we are all bubbling with optimism about the future. We have started seeing the glass as half-full and that is largely due to the fact that we have already qualified the other half. Everything looks rosy on the sunny side of the street because we are wearing rose-tinted shades. We clearly detect a silver lining that wasn’t there before in cloud cuckooland. And as we confidently sail underneath a rainbow towards a glorious sunset we know all this has been made possible because we have looked up all pessimists under the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA).

And allow me to take this opportunity to also propose a vote of thanks to the large numbers of yeomen and women who have demonstrated courage, commitment and patriotism in the year 2062 and who I’m sure will be recognised and awarded medals in the New Year’s Honour’s List.

So, with permission from the Chair (May I?) allow me to propose the following richly-deserving candidates for decorations: soldiers who courageously marched into newsrooms last year to ensure that all the news was good news; daring dogs of Pokhara Municipality who fearlessly stood as candidates in the recently successfully-concluded elections; Herod, the cantorist extraordinary and member of UNACOOTS; and since everyone from the good old days is coming out of the woodworks why not also give a medal to the shoplifting Royal Nepalese Ambassador and Kleptomaniac Plenipotentiary who exercised his diplomatic impunity and whose service to the nation has remained unrecognised for over two decades and a half?

It is when we start recognising every Nepali who has tirelessly worked for the betterment of this country that we will set an example for others to follow. And I’ll start right here by developing a positive mental attitude myself and not poking fun anymore at those on top of the food chain. So, here is a rundown of all the upbeat things that have been happening lately which may help us count our blessings:

- Burnhakarni reservoir has risen by 1.7 cm due to recent rains which means loadshedding will now be reduced from 5 hours a day to 4 hours and 57 minutes a day.
- Another contingent of RNA peacemaking troops has left for the Congo where it will try to win the hearts and minds of the Congolese people who overwhelmingly yearn for a ceasefire, the restoration of peace, democracy and respect for human rights.
- Kathmandu has held its First Chicken or Egg Festival which proved once and for all eggs came first and there is no bird flew in the country.
- Two potholes were patched in Krishna Galli this week, which is a 200 percent improvement on the situation in the previous fiscal year when no potholes were patched.
- A new Bikram Calendar has been approved by the Department of Astrology and Voodoo that will eliminate the month of Baisakh in 2063 since that is the month when most political upheavals have historically taken place in this country.
- The Nepal Telepathy Corporation has introduced a new service called Sixth Sense (Registered Trade Mark) for voice mail in which callers will have to use their intuition and instinct to figure out what callers are trying to say since they keep getting cut off.