



KIRAN PANDAY

POLL

Editorial p2
The people have spoken

A nationwide Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll 2006 conducted two weeks ago shows the Nepali people reject extremism and have some definite ideas on how to restore peace. (Above) Hiranya Baral interviews a street vendor in Bhaktapur. A surprising 53.8 percent of respondents said they were satisfied with what they were doing. Highlights:

- The Maoists and the monarchy are equally to blame for the present situation
- Direct rule by the king is not right
- Since the king has taken over, it's up to him to fix things
- The monarchy should not be abolished, but the king shouldn't have absolute powers
- The king, the parties and the rebels should get together and find a solution through an interim government
- The Maoist insurgency futile, and there is no military solution
- A general election is not possible unless peace is first restored

Full story p 8-9

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 292

Q. Which of the following alliances do you find most probable in the current scenario?

Total votes: 7,439

King-Party	27.7%
Party-Maoist	34.7%
King-Maoist	3.4%
King-Party-Maoist	23.8%
Don't know	4.8%

Weekly Internet Poll # 293. To vote go to: www.nepalimes.com

Q. Should the seven parties push through with their Kathmandu rally next week?

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An April uprising

Dictatorial regimes become irrational and start doing silly things

THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN

In well-oiled democracies public opinion polls are a vital part of governance, allowing elected leaders a chance to feel the public pulse and fine-tune policy. In Nepal, where the king has now been ruling directly or through hand-picked nominees since 2002 opinion polls serve the function of a referendum, or the real election we've not had for seven years.

What use, you may well ask, are public opinion polls when rulers have nothing but contempt for public opinion? But even dictators need feedback. History is littered with the ashes of despots and tyrants who only listened to psychopants and yes-men. They thought they could ignore public opinion and bamboozle their way with force of arms. Juntas with the mightiest armies, emperors backed by superpowers, ironfisted totalitarian comrades with nuclear weapons all fell to people power. They just didn't see the writing on the wall. Moral of the story: you can ignore all the people all the time, but not for long.

It is our sincere and well-meaning advice that our own regal regime carefully peruse the results of the nationwide survey that we print in these pages. Look at the message your people are sending you, read between the lines. "We don't like you," they are saying, "but we may still need a symbolic crown." But if this drags on, next year's opinion poll may not even leave open that option.

It will be tempting for the king, parties and the Maoists to selectively cull the results and take only what they like. But they should make no mistake about it: the Nepali people have given up on all three of you. To regain their trust you have to do as they say. They are telling you to get together, form an interim government and restore peace. They've had enough of the war and instability you have waged in their name. Less than one percent of the people want an absolute monarchy. More and more young people believe Nepal can do without a monarchy, but the majority still wants to give constitutional monarchy a chance.

The message to the Maoists is clear: if you give up arms we may even consider voting you to power. What are you waiting for, comrades? Don't you know that the longer you wait the more ammunition you give to the royal regime to crackdown on democracy? A ceasefire announcement would not just defuse next week's showdown but remove the pretext for militarisation.

The Nepali people have spoken and they have shown us once again how integrated clear-headed they are. They reject extremism and violence outright, and support democracy and the middle path. They know that is the only way they can get on with their lives.



KIRAN PANDAY

In a bid to propitiate the stars, ensure better feng shui and prevent US attacks, the Burmese junta shifted its capital from Rangoon to Pyinmana last year. It is 320 km away in the middle of nowhere.

To lure bureaucrats away from their lucrative moonlighting assignments and profitable

STATE OF THE STATE C K Lal



gasoline ration coupons in the old capital, Gen Than Shwe is offering them a hefty salary hike. SLORC, as the junta previously called itself in classic Orwellian doublespeak, has announced up to 1000 percent pay raise for senior bureaucrats. The surname of 'Royal City' has been added to Pyinmana to make it sound less like the boondocks, but Rangoon-based dinks have refused to relocate. After all, there is no salary hike for them. Dictatorial regimes everywhere after a while start becoming irrational and start doing silly things.

Given the similarities in the isolationist trajectories of their junta and ours, it is quite possible that jabs here may also decide one fine day that the capital should be shifted to Gorkha. As the cradle of the dynasty that ruled a never-colonised land it would also be removed from the foreigner-infested Valley. For all intents and purposes, by relocating to Pokhara for the past month the chairman of the council of ministers has already shifted the capital. It's the security chiefs, cabinet ministers and administrators who commute.

Running the kingdom from a temporary retreat must be costing the exchequer quite a bundle but no one is counting. When the king was stationed at Itahari barracks of the RNA, ministers were regularly ferried by air. Military and chartered choppers now frequent the Pokhara-Kathmandu air route. US emissary Donald Camp flew in last month and flew out immediately to Pokhara, although the king came to Kathmandu to receive the Chinese State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan. The to-and-fros will probably continue for a while longer as even cabinet ministers are 'granted audiences' at Lakeside. The Kathmandu grapevine has it that even when he is in town, the king prefers to reside on Nagarjun rather than the repainted Narayanhiti.

Strongmen like to add their own qualifiers to the word 'democracy'. Gen Than Shwe says he's erecting a 'disciplined democracy'. King Gyanendra's roadmap is supposed to usher in 'meaningful democracy'. Both defy logic. And just as there is no reason to keep Aung San

Suu Kyi under detention, the continued imprisonment of Madhab Nepal, Narahari Acharya and Ram Chandra Poudel is equally arbitrary. Peace activists Krishna Pahari, journalist Shyam Shrestha, civil society motivator Devendra Raj Panday are still behind bars for supporting non-violent struggle. Juntas are terrified of peaceniks.

To build a town deep in the forest doesn't make much sense. Just as daft is to spend over Rs 60 million rupees to hand over a pair of rhinos to a European zoo. When wielders of power aren't accountable to anyone excesses are the norm. Despite seeing how generals in Islamabad and Rangoon thumb their noses, the international community hasn't yet seen that dictators don't care much for the sanctimonious sermons of self-declared do-gooders. Burma is a pariah state but the outside world hasn't even been able to free a Nobel peace laureate from the clutches of her ruthless captors.

Nepal's foreign friends must accept that no amount of diplomatic pressure will make a dent here. Our guys are as determined to safeguard 'national interests' as the Burmese junta. Juntas cloak themselves as the self-appointed guardians of the people and they can't be dislodged with good intentions and platitudes. And how do you reason with people who believe in a divine mission and in supernatural powers?

Nepal's seven party alliance must insist that diplomatic manipulators advocating unity between 'constitutional forces' must either deliver or keep quiet. Will an April uprising created by the renewed 12-point understanding allow the Maoists to gain an upper hand? If they do, we know who to blame. ●

LETTERS

CK LAL

CK Lal has correctly read the tide of republicanism ('A future foretold', #289) at Tribhuban University campuses. However, a columnist of his repute needs to do more. He should advise us about methods of translating our energy into concrete program of action.

Manas Paudel, Tribhuban University

● C K Lal should seriously contemplate a sabbatical. His columns are dull, repetitive and lack a balanced view of Nepali politics. His lack of criticism of the political parties and their role in leading us to the mess we are today baffles me and I suspect being a 'kangresi' hiding behind a 'democrat' veil is the root cause. This is obvious to anyone without political affiliations who reads your paper. Maybe a period off from journalism will revitalise him and put aside his double standards which an unbiased paper like you continue to promote. As for your other guest columnist, Bihari K Shrestha, the less said the better.

Name withheld, email

RIMPOCHE

The passing away of Chu Nyima Rimpoche was a big loss for many of us at the Nyingma lineage ('Chu Nyima is gone but we are still here', #290). He was an inspiring teacher and good disciple of the legendary Jadril Rimpoche and Do Drupchen Rimpoche in Sikkim. Before departing for Kathmandu last month he visited both these teachers in Sikkim and Silliguri. Chokyi Nyima was travelling with another Khenpo from Sikkim to initiate teaching in Gorkha Monastery. Now the 100 monks and nuns at the monastery are feeling the pain and loss. One of his cousins when he heard the news ran from the monastery to the nearest roadhead in Gorkha a journey of seven days which he did in two. Here in Sikkim we are still trying to come to terms with the loss. We were calling Kakrbhitta and friends in Kathmandu. When we heard that the prayer books of the Nyingma lineage (Longchenpa) were found that we feared the worst and then when his body rose from the submerged bus, that it was confirmed. Chokyi Nyima is the second teacher we lost in a year. Last year, we lost the Kabhre Rimpoche who had over 300 students and was himself a student of the Dudjom Rimpoche and Khenpo Rimpoche.

The task now is to continue with their work. Our root teachers like Jadril Rimpoche and Do Drupchen in Sikkim will visit the Gorkha monastery to initiate the teachings.

Gyurme Dondup, Gangtok

LAUGHTER-SAUGHTER

Congratulations to Lucia de Vries for her Nepali Pan piece 'Kukur-sukur ra car-sar' (#291). It was one of the most amusing pieces of writing I have read in *Nepali Times* in recent times. After the reading-seeding and laughter-slaughter I got the feeling Ms de Vries is a genuine Nepalophile. At a time when Nepal is suffering so much pain and lack of self-esteem, it is good to see an attitude which appreciates with good humour all that is good about Nepal.

M Mohan, email

● I thoroughly enjoyed 'Kukur-sukur ra car-sar' by Lucia de Vries. I have brought this topic up amongst many friends many times, but never thought it could be made into a great article as she has done. However, I do not think there is anything new with 'taxi-sexy'. I remember using it,

even if not exactly the same, 'taxi-saxi'. Also, most of the jingle words have an 's' unless the primary words themselves start with an 's'. Eg. kura-sura, gadi-sadi, sag-tag, sirani-firani.

Jayjeev Hada, email

● Who is Lucia de Vries? I thoroughly enjoyed her humorous piece 'Kukur-sukur ra car-sar' and could not stop laughing. She deserves a takma-sakma or mala-sala.

SS Gobinda, email

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes all feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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Tough slog in the Khumbu

Trekking takes a slide amidst news of bandas, blockades and incorrect reports of missing Polish trekkers

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA in NAMCHE BAJAR

Penicillating strike days into their calendars is the first step that Khumbu tourism operators take these days to prepare their clients' itineraries. The idea is to get the trekkers in Kathmandu when the streets are protest-free and then arrange to send them here or the Annapurnas.

With trekkers' arrivals dropping in the past two months operators are wondering when normal days might return. First the Maoists' blockade sparked massive cancellations and now the seven parties' general strike is the talk of the town.

Then there was the case of the Polish Esperanto trekkers who were extorted by Maoists near Jiri, but the wire services flashed worldwide: 'TREKKERS KIDNAPPED IN LUKLA'. That one erroneous report by Kathmandu-based journalists may have done more damage to the spring trekking season than all the bandas put together.

"Many groups cancelled visits and that meant we did not have any loads to carry," says Arjun Rai, a 19-year-old porter who moves to the region from Khotang District every trekking season. "And now we hear about the parties' strike and god knows how many jobs that will cost," he adds.

That concern echoes repeatedly here. "Thinking that business would pick up, we invested quite some money to expand our lodge," says Nawang Sherpa of Khumbu lodge, which hosted former US President Jimmy Carter during his Everest trek in 1985 and hopes to do so again when he comes this month. "But, things appear to be quite depressing—I hope it will improve next season."

Figures back up the anecdotal evidence. Last year the entrance gate at Sagarmatha National Park recorded about 2,400 trekkers in March. This year they haven't even counted 1,000 and January and February saw similar drops. In the 1990s, more than 25,000 trekkers and climbers visited the Everest region, making it second only to Annapurna.

Yeti Airlines, the major carrier to Lukla has cut its flights by 20 percent this year instead of adding more as it usually does in spring. "We do see erosion in arrivals," says the airlines' executive director Vijay Shrestha. "There has been significant growth in terms of access and aircraft operators but the amount of business is decreasing because of fewer trekkers."

Trekking Agents Association of Nepal President Deepak Mahat says his business has plummeted 80 percent. "This spring season has been the worst for me—it has never been like this," he told us. "Our groups are arriving only from the third week of April and that is only because there are so far no protests scheduled then." ●



PADAM GHALE

Down, but not out

Nepali trekking agencies learn to cope with low volume

ANOOP PANDEY

The barren streets of Thamel and Pokhara's Lakeside are testimony to the downturn in the tourism industry after a decade of conflict. But faced with the slump in international visitors to Nepal, trekking agencies are nurturing a growing Indian market and directing hikers to safe, well-worn trails.

Hindu pilgrimage treks to places like Muktinath, Goasaikunda and Kailash Mansarovar have become great hits. "In a way we are not suffering—the insurgency has hit our market hard but it has only diverted our clientele and shifted it to the Indian subcontinent," says Rabi Shrestha of EcoTrek International.

On the other hand, Shrestha

says his overseas business has dipped 30-40 percent in recent years. Whatever the situation in Nepal, it was the French who kept trekking alive by refusing to heed travel advisories and braving it. But after the ceasefire ended in January and instability picked up, even the French went down. Says Catherine Joriot of Glacier Safari Treks in Thamel: "Last season was pretty good but this year for the first time the number of French trekkers has dropped."

Another survival tactic that tourism operators are adopting is to work in cooperation with neighbours. For example, EcoTrek now sends 500 trekkers a year to Tibet to explore Lhasa or hike in the Kailash regions. Nepali trekking agencies are also getting into the business of

organising mountaineering expeditions in India, Pakistan and China.

Back at home, bookings for remote trails, such as Dhaulagiri and Makalu, have dropped as trekkers fearful of Maoists have switched to more secure, commonly used trails in the Everest (see box) Annapurna and Langtang regions.

"If you choose the proper agency and have the finances, it will guarantee safety. There is no reason why anyone should be afraid of trekking in Nepal," says Shrestha. Indeed, trekkers have never been harmed by Maoists although there is extortion on some trails. Added one trekker we ran into in a Thamel restaurant: "We meet them on the trails and we pay our fees and get a receipt. That is all." ●

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In an age

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

One are the days when locally made ads turned you off the product it was supposed to be selling. With state-of-the-art technology and a new internationally-trained creative producers Nepali companies are beginning to produce some world-class tv commercials, radio jingles and ads in the print media.

The Rs 2 billion advertising industry is today catching up at least in quality with the boom in India. Advancements in printing technology, the spread of television and a vibrant FM radio network have helped the agency. Indirectly, the press freedom that gives media credibility is a factor in this growth.

Nepal's ad industry had the humblest of beginnings. JK Sthapit remembers that till as

recently as 20 years ago, *Gorkhapatra* or a cinema hall were the only outlets. "Our job was to take the material from the advertiser to the press and see that the letters were laid out properly and without typos," he says. This weekend, Sthapit is being honoured with the Lifetime Achievement Award at this year's Citty Awards. Computers revolutionised Sthapit's Echo Advertising but it took the business community sometime to see the role of advertising.

"Back then, people did not believe in the concept of advertisement as an investment and many still see it as extra cost," says Bhaskar Rajkamikar, president of the Advertising Agencies Association of Nepal (AAN).

One of the agencies' main challenges remains Nepal's

DfID call for ideas

The UK's Department for International Development (DfID) is asking for ideas from stakeholders around the world as it writes a new plan of action for the next five years. Called the new White Paper on International Development the ministry says it wants people to email or write opinions in issues such as access to clean water, how to give all children the schooling they deserve, how to provide mothers with the healthcare they need, how to tackle corruption. DfID also wants responses to questions on how the UK Government can work with countries like Nepal to accelerate development and reduce poverty or how should foreign aid be used by the Nepali government? Should aid be provided direct to the government or through local groups? What is the right balance and why? "International development is about more than just aid money," says UK Secretary of State for International Development Hilary Ben, "we want to see how the international development system can be reformed so it is more responsive to the needs of poor people in Nepal and other countries."

www.dfid.gov.uk/wp2006

Nepali power

Himal International Energy (HIEPL) has acquired majority stake in Bhoite Koshi Power Company (BKPC), which runs a 36MW hydropower plant in Sindhupalchok. HIEPL bought the shares of two American companies and now controls 85 percent of the equity in BKPC with the World Bank's IFC keeping its 10 percent. BKPC's new chairman, Siddhartha Rana, said HIEPL plans to keep 51 percent of BKPC shares and float the remainder for the public. The company's new president is Sujeev Shakya while Sandip Shah remains General Manager. The deal is worth \$22 million and was financed by Standard Chartered Bank. After Khimti, BKPC become the second foreign joint venture investment in hydropower in Nepal.

NEW PRODUCTS

UTL PHONE: UTL is now offering limited mobility cell phone lines in Kathmandu. The service is priced at an introductory price of Rs 6,999 (including taxes) or on an instalment basis with an initial payment of Rs 2,499 and monthly fees of Rs 250 over 24 months. Minimum monthly charges are RS 300 and the first 30 minutes are free. Call prices are Rs 1 per minute to either UTL or NTC mobile phones and Rs 2 per minute to the Spice mobile network. All incoming calls are free.

UMAX COMPUTERS: Neoteric Nepal launched the UMAX line of personal computers at the recent CAN-Infotech. Based on technical support from UMAX, a Taiwanese company, the PCs are assembled using parts from companies such as Intel, Asrock and Samsung. The EDU-PC for students is priced at Rs 22,990.

CHEAP CHEESE: Asian Thai Foods is now offering Mama Cheese Balls priced at only Rs 5.



Not doomed to failure

There are ways to raise the SLC pass rate

More than 330,000 students are taking this year's School Leaving Certificate (SLC) exams, which started early this week. In June, we will find out that about 230,000 of those students failed.

We can make such a depressing prediction with confidence because even a casual look at the annual pass rates of

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



the last two decades assures us that there is no other system in Nepal that produces more losers than winners than the SLCs. If we add up only the number of regular candidates who have failed these annual exams since 1980 and compare the total to the number who passed, one conclusion is easy to draw: ours is a nation where a majority of literate adult citizens have repeatedly failed to earn even basic high school diplomas.

The implication of that conclusion is shocking—both for Nepal's multiparty democracy, which requires informed and engaged citizens and for Nepal's economic competitiveness, which demands skilled workers who can adapt to rapid changes in the marketplace. And every June, commentators from all sides of the political spectrum moan obligatorily about the low SLC pass-rates and what that means for Nepal's development. But within a day, they move on to write about the usual party-political *tamasha*, leaving these two questions forever on the table: why do so many Nepali students fail the SLCs and what

can be done to help more of them succeed?

Researcher Saurav Dev Bhatta provides some answers. In a July 2005 study prepared for the Ministry of Education as a part of the SLC Study Team exercise, Bhatta attempts to tease out factors that determine students' performance in the SLC exams and offers policy prescriptions. His method is to run regressions on piles of data gathered from 452 schools, 22,500 students, 5,625 families, 452 principals and 2,500 teachers, to conclude, among others:

- When students in the hinterland receive, at the beginning of their SLC years, grades 9 and 10 textbooks a month late, the likelihood of their finishing the syllabus is



MIN BAJRACHARYA

low. As a result, they are often unprepared for the exams. This problem could be addressed by getting books to students in villages and in remote areas on time.

- State-run schools hire teachers with BEd degrees. But instead of teaching at their assigned schools, such teachers are often

found to be away—attending the Education Ministry's various short-term training programs. As such, their frequent absenteeism appears to contribute to students' poor results. This problem could be addressed by first acknowledging that the Ministry's approach to teacher training appears to be negatively related to student performance and then taking steps to ensure that teachers stay in schools to actually teach and not hop on the next bus to Kathmandu for another training program.

- Schools with relaxed student-promotion policies, irregular testing schedules and poor homework policies tend to do worse in the SLCs. The stress needs to be on ways to encourage schools to raise student-promotion standards, administer more tests and assign and grade regular homework.

- Janjatis' performance is significantly lower than that of Brahmins except in English and math courses. This indicates that the former might be at a disadvantage in courses that require strong Nepali language skills. Bhatta suggests having targeted policies to help the Janjatis.

Bhatta found out that students' study habits, school conditions, family situations and community contexts have a significant impact on their SLC scores. The policy challenge now is to urgently tweak those variables so that more young Nepalis are on the path to earning their SLC or equivalent credentials. Anything less will continue to raise the cost of doing business in, and for Nepal, in coming years. ●

of advertising



Technology and youth are energising the industry

limited market, which in turn affects advertisers' budgets. "In India, it's normal to spend Rs 50-60 million for a commercial because the market is so large but

here the market is simply not large enough," says Joydeb Chakraborty of JW Thomson, adding, "political turmoil and its impact on the economy

doesn't help at all".

But in the last few years, Nepali agencies have managed to mature, shedding their traditional roles to take up the

tasks of devising marketing strategies, building brands, planning campaigns and promoting events. With more creative youth choosing advertising careers, idea and concept-based ads are also emerging. The industry was growing a whopping 40 percent a year till four years ago, although growth has been negligible this year.

Ranjit Acharya of Prisma Advertising believes increased competition has forced quality improvements and young people with international exposure are also a driving force. "The youth has convinced advertisers that the customer is king and this has changed the industry from a push to a pull market," he says. The biggest irritant for most viewers on television is still to hear Indian actors on commercials with their voices dubbed with a stilted Hindi-accented Nepali. Luckily, this is happening less and less.

Young entrepreneurs who understand marketing have used advertising to introduce new sales. Footwear brand Fit Rite has gone from the brink of

bankruptcy to one of the most successful in the industries largely due to the brand image created by an ad agency. Others have failed because they were 'out-advertised'. Mayalu Soap, which used to be a best-selling Nepali brand, is today almost invisible because Unilever's marketing strategy for Lux drove it off the market. "Advertising as an investment in brand-building is percolating into the industry," explains Thomson's Chakraborty.

However, agencies cite the example of Nepal Tourism Board using an Indian agency for its latest campaign to prove that Nepali companies still don't believe in Nepali professionals. "We understand better what we need to promote—a foreigner will never understand Nepal the way a Nepali will," one advertising executive told us. Perhaps it's time that the government, which spends Rs 270 million a year on advertising, every year gave a little thought to the phrase 'Made in Nepal' and led by example. ●

AAN's 3rd Crity Awards on 2 April will feature the best creatives, production and technical input in Nepal's advertising industry.

“Why would I?”

CIAA Chief Commissioner Suryanath Upadhyay in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 24 March

संविधान
समाचारपत्र

How do you respond to allegations that you have not performed your duties impartially?

The first thing you have to understand is that today's society has developed a negative attitude towards everything for various reasons. It is good to question things but it's not a good idea to have pre-conceived notions. Unfortunately, our society is now acting on prejudices. It is not just me who makes decisions at the CIAA, there are five commissioners and all have equal rights. Since I am the chief commissioner, I have some additional administrative duties but all decisions are made jointly by all the commissioners so there is no way that they can be unfair. The commission has made thousands of decisions. Among them only one did not have our consensus. We have been successful in most of the cases we have filed in the court and we are transparent. But it is natural for those whom we have acted against to say that we are impartial.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

But there has been a controversy about a recommendation you made on behalf of someone's citizenship.

It is about the citizenship of a labourer whose mother ran away with someone else when he was a non-issue. The charge is that I endorsed the recommendation in which this man's father's name has been changed. Do you think I would do such a thing for personal gain? But people have now started asking why this issue is out of proportion. Perhaps it is an organised response to our anti-corruption campaign?

How do you evaluate your work at the commission?

The CIAA has earned a reputation among everyone from Mechi to Mahakali. People holding public positions have now begun to think twice about the right and lawful thing to do before they make decisions. Government offices have become more transparent and accountable and people no more dare ask for bribes openly. The challenge now is to give all citizens ownership of this campaign.

Fallacy

Political analyst Shastradatta Panta in *Gorkhapatra*, 22 March

गोरखापत्र

The Maoist rebels whom the parties had once called the pawns of Nirmal Nibas are now dead against the king. If this was true, how could they unconstitutionally form an alliance against the king today? The point to be remembered is that the Maoists had not gone underground opposing the monarchy. They had done so labeling the rule of the parties' leaders as corrupt, bad governance and undemocratic multiparty autocratic regime.

The king is now seriously brainstorming to get the country out of this fluid and deteriorating situation. That is why he has initiated consultations with senior position holders and respected personalities. The king wants reconciliation with all sides, particularly the seven parties. Some foreign diplomats, and even US President George Bush have remained active to bring the king and the parties together. In the meantime, some political leaders who are mobilised by anti-Nepal foreign forces have begun their bid to establish a wide democratic front continuing their alliance with the Maoists. Toward that end, NC, UML and others held a second round of talks with the Maoists and the meeting was coordinated by India.

The key point now is how much will the parties give themselves to the Maoists' agenda. If the parties get attracted towards the Maoists' proposals for democratic republic and constituent assembly, they will be trapped within the Maoists' fold. But the seven parties have a fallacy that if the two demands of the Maoists are met, the country

will get a political outlet and what would follow is rapid development. What they fail to understand is once the Maoists get those two demands met, their first target will be no other than the parties themselves.

Nonsense

Editorial in *Nispaksya*, 28 March

निष्पक्ष

Both the government and the seven parties are engaged in a fiery verbal war. Straight-talking Home Minister Kamal Thapa threatens to have the seven parties branded 'terrorists'. The response of the party leaders is 'we dare you!' It's really disturbing to hear such nonsense from the mouths of supposedly responsible authorities and leaders. There is no need for the government to make verbal assaults against the party leaders, it is supposed to act according to the constitution and other laws of the land. The irresponsible remarks made in public by the ministers have only put the king in a more difficult position. But these reckless and incapable ministers are only doing everything to create a very disturbing environment for the citizens. The parties should also control themselves. But due to the irresponsible behaviour of both sides the situation is worsening. We should be seriously concerned that the government is working to deepen the rifts within the parliamentary forces, while the parties are keen to make fun of the constitution that they themselves had framed. Today's priority should be to work towards uniting the king and parliamentary forces and to urge the Maoists to give up violence and enter mainstream politics. The parties should not distance themselves from the government by uniting



with the Maoists, who they had once labelled 'terrorists'. But first, both sides have to end their nonsensical mud-slinging.

Steadfast Maoists

Editorial in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 26 March

संविधानपत्र

The Maoists have not stopped committing acts of terror. The killings, violence and abductions continue despite their understanding with the parties. Their only positive step has been to withdraw the much dreaded blockade and indefinite strike, at the request of the parties. When this deal was announced, everyone thought that peace was on the way but in vain. The daily bloodshed has put even more fear into the people. The rebels even attacked an ambulance and torched a public bus carrying civilians. They continue to attack populated areas, wounding many civilians as in Pokhara. The Maoists apologised for that incident and promised never to repeat such a mistake but in only a short time they violated that commitment by firing indiscriminately in a public place in Bara district, hitting a journalist and a health worker. They apologised again but such incidents are bound to be repeated. Do the Maoists realise that such acts of terror are only



हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 March-13 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“There are very dangerous implications when the government says the seven parties will be treated as terrorists.”

- Rastriya Prajantra Party President Pasupati SJB Rana in *Samacharpatra*, March 27

“We dare the government”



Hridyesh Tripathi of Nepal Sadhbhabana Party in *Nepalkhabar*, 28 March

Are you prepared for the movement of the seven-party alliance?

We are all working together and fully prepared to make this a powerful movement.

The government seems set to foil it.

Our movement will adapt to the changing situation. But we will advance it peacefully regardless of how hard the government tries to suppress us.

What kind of support are the Maoists giving you?

They are only giving moral support. Meanwhile, the government is doing its utmost to push us towards violence, for example by sending vigilantes to infiltrate our movement.

The government says it views the seven parties in the same light as the Maoists due to your pact.

The state wishes that we carried guns but we are dedicated to a peaceful movement for the sake of civilians. We dare the government to declare us terrorists.

There seems to be a lack of participation in your movement.

The situation has changed. It is true there was low public participation because we lacked clear demands. Now everything is clear so you will see more people participating.

But isn't it true that the parties themselves lack clarity?

No, they are very clear—the only issue is which path each party will choose. The main focus is a constituent assembly and we will all be clear about this soon.

Will the king agree just because the parties and Maoists have reached an understanding?

The king will eventually agree. Around 1951, the monarchy favoured a constituent assembly.

“Advisers are isolating the king”

Prakash Chandra Lohani, co-president of the Rastriya Janasakti Party, *Agenda*, 23-29 March

successful in isolating him from the international community and the nation's intellectuals. And the Maoists have benefited from that.

How do you evaluate the latest agreement between the parties and Maoists?

There has been no agreement. Rather, efforts have only been made to continue the previous one, to ensure that it doesn't fall apart.

Why do you think the king's advisers are like that?

Personally, I feel that they have links with the Maoists. The Maoists have said that their strategy is to drive the monarchy from the country at any cost. If those in power continuously support that strategy, then it's logical to assume that they are in fact supporting the Maoists.

We hear the parties and Maoists are jointly coordinating the 6 April protest?

Their agenda was political change but neither side has changed its stance. They haven't even signed a statement together. This shows that there hasn't been any progress in their dialogue. There can't be long-term cooperation between one side that carries weapons when the other wants to conduct peaceful protests.



So what brought the constitutional forces and Maoists together?

If you beat a cat in a closed room, it will either attack you or try to escape. That's the case here but the leaders prefer to remain ignorant. The king's advisers are trying to isolate him and they seem to be succeeding. They have certainly been

In a situation like this, what can your role be?

From the beginning, we've been saying that most of the issues the Maoists have raised are fair. That's our agenda too. But to work for political reforms, one has to follow the 1990 constitution. The Maoists' intention now is to replace that constitution with a new one. The Supreme Court's definition of the constitution can provide an outlet in the current situation. It said that sovereignty lies with the people not the king. If this definition is followed and a dialogue held, definitely a solution can be found.



RABI MANANDHAR

Students in a torch rally at Tribuban University on Tuesday calling for support for the seven party rally on 7 April in Kathmandu.

समाचारपत्र

distancing them from everyone? They even extort and harass tourists, weakening the all-important but faltering tourism industry. The parliamentary forces have been endlessly urging the rebels to walk towards peace by giving up their arms but to no avail. The understanding in New Delhi only proves that the parties have very little or no influence on the Maoists.

Buffer people

Krishnaprasad Bhurtel, chairman of the Royal Chitwan National Park Buffer Zone Management Committee, in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 March

The government's poor conservation management was what led to the creation of the Buffer Zone Program after the

reinstatement of democracy. Since then, more people are participating in conservation efforts and we are seeing the benefits. But the recently issued ordinance to hand over management of national parks to an NGO is just one indication that the government is trying to shirk its conservation responsibilities and usurp the people's rights. When the state

and the people have been working together, even earning international acclaim, why do we need this ordinance? What basis is there to believe that an NGO will be responsible towards the people? Unless the government can make it clear that handing over (management) to an NGO will not hamper conservation efforts, such a policy should not be implemented. Our program is

not only providing relief and compensation to those affected by wild animals but also to those affected by floods. The proposed policy could have a direct effect on these efforts. Laws cannot be implemented in such an opaque manner. The government must not make moves that will weaken the people and hurt conservation efforts. If it does, the people will reject it.



SURYA NEPAL



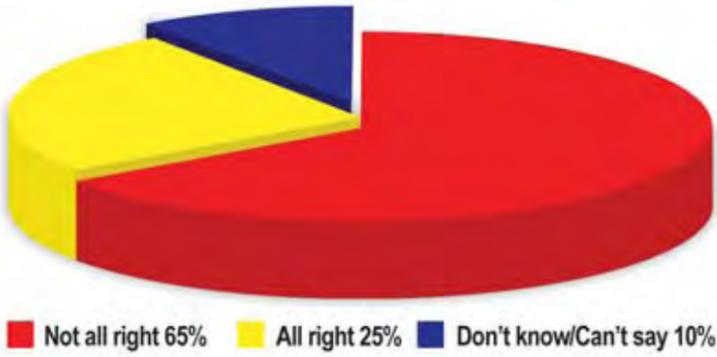
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STATUTORY DIRECTIVE: SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

Was it all right for the king to remove the parties and rule by himself?



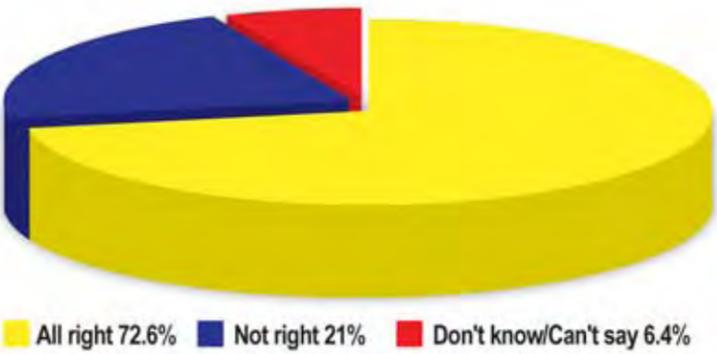
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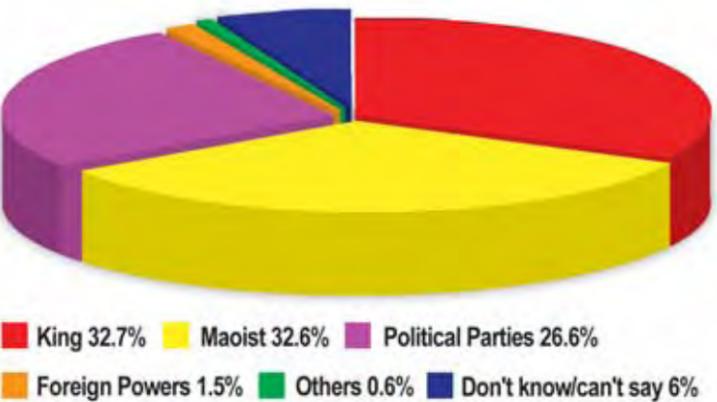
If you know about the party-Maoist pact, what do you think about it?

(Of the 54 percent who knew about it)

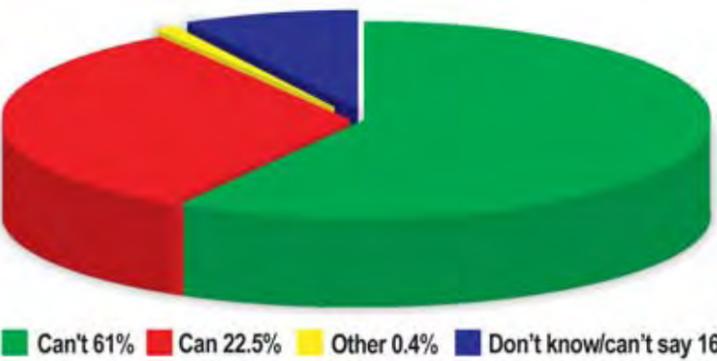


Who is responsible for the state of the country?

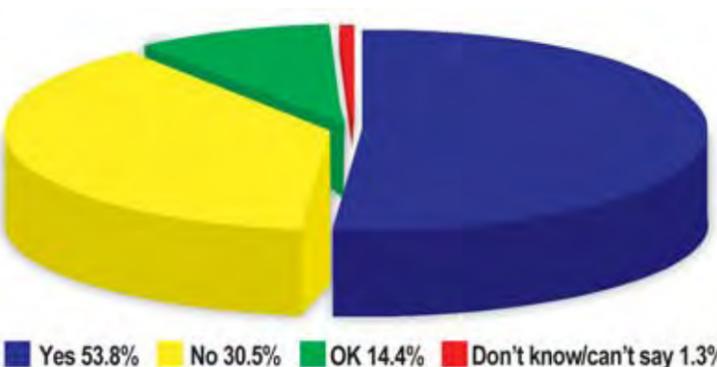
(91 percent felt the situation was 'bad' or 'distressing'.)



Can parliamentary polls be held within a year under current circumstances?



Are you happy with your present job/work?



KUNDA DIXIT

The Nepali people are fed up of incessant fighting, endless political wrangling and have no high expectations from the Maoists, the parties or the king. They just want to be left alone to get on with their lives.

That is the main message from the Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll carried out nationwide two weeks ago. The results are sometimes contradictory, but prove that ordinary Nepalis have a fairly good idea why things have gone wrong and know how they can be fixed.

The poll allows us to quantify for the first time the national mood after 1 February 2005. For example, a full 65 percent of the respondents say direct rule by the king is 'not right' (25 percent agree with it and 10 percent don't know). But they blame the king and Maoists equally for the present situation.

As in previous polls, Nepalis reject extremism of both the right and left. Nearly half the respondents said they want a constitutional monarchy (a quarter said a monarchy in some form is still necessary, only 14

percent wanted the monarchy abolished and less than one percent supported an absolute monarchy).

Cross-tabulating by age group, nearly 20 percent of younger people said the monarchy should be abolished, while 16 percent in the 31-40 age group and only 8.9 percent in the 51 and above bracket felt the same way.

Plotting trends from past surveys the parties seem to be bouncing back in the public's eye. In response to the question 'If the Maoists were to give up arms and elections were held who would you vote for?' the UML and the NC have come back into the double digits, while those who said they would vote for the Maoists if they renounce violence went down from a high of 20.9 percent in 2003 to 11.4 percent today.

The message for the Maoists is clear: if they renounce violence and join mainstream politics they will be the third largest party in parliament. But since 20.8 percent were undecided on this question, it is even conceivable that a Maoist party could have the most seats in a future house.

For the moment, though, a majority of those polled (nearly 70 percent) didn't like the Maoist

insurgency and surprisingly there isn't significantly more support for the rebels among youth.

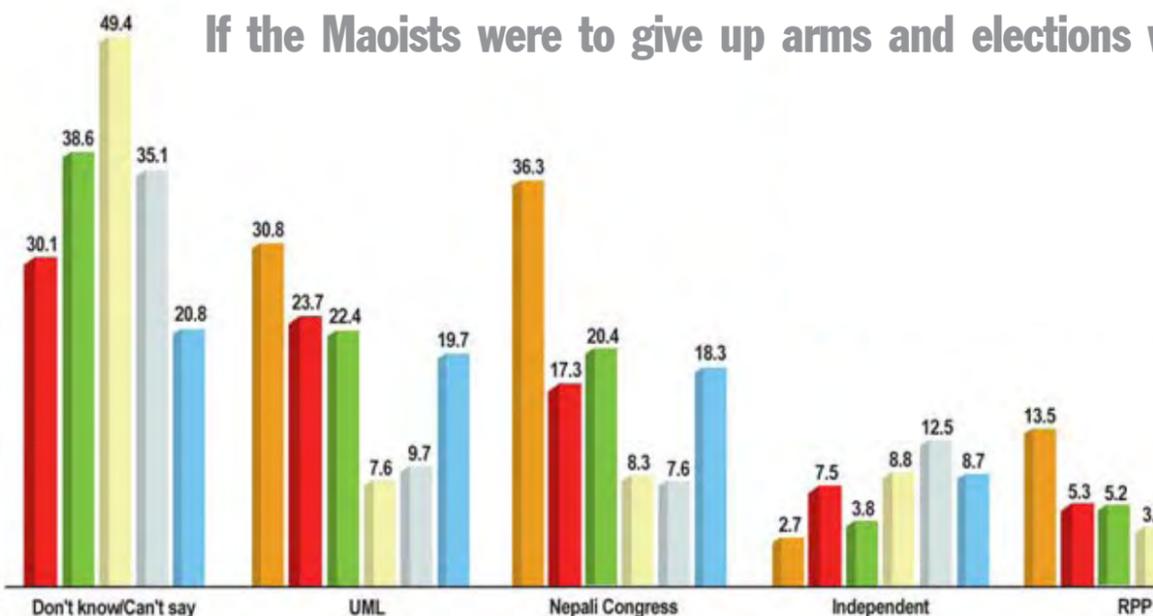
Even though the answer to the question 'Who should solve the country's crisis?' was mostly in favour of the king, parties and Maoists talking (60.6 percent) three-fourths felt that since the king had taken over, it was up to him to resolve the problems.

More than half the respondents had no idea what the 12-point agreement was all about, and there was similar ignorance about the constituent assembly. But among those who knew about the party-rebel pact, 72.6 percent supported it. Nearly half felt the way to resolve the current political impasse was for all the parties to agree on an interim government. The constituent assembly option got only 10.9 percent of the votes.

Asked 'Can next year's general election be held in the current situation' 61.1 percent said no and 22.5 percent said yes. Among those who said no, a majority cited Maoist violence.

The conclusion: the Nepali people know where the problem lies and they have a solution. If only the political forces battling it out for power in Kathmandu would listen. ●

If the Maoists were to give up arms and elections v



to us

Polling in a time of conflict

Himalmedia's enumerators are experienced in their work, but even they were aghast at the deterioration of conditions in the hinterland.

Some kept diaries in which they recorded their own impressions of the people they met and the things they saw. Many respondents weren't just satisfied with giving yes or no answers, they wanted the pollsters to take their message to rulers in Kathmandu. Most wanted to unburden themselves and needed someone to talk to. Sometimes the enumerators themselves ended up answering questions about the state of the country.

One team was detained for three hours by the security forces in Dolakha and another in Dhading. Blockades meant the team covering the far-west had to travel back to Kathmandu via India like in the old days. Many had to walk past booby-trapped barriers on highways.

In many villages, people requested to sit for interviews would at first refuse. There is a new fear and suspicion of strangers. "We don't know which side you are from, and maybe we will get into trouble," some would say. But once enumerators explained the purpose of the poll and ensured anonymity most would agree. Ironically, educated people, especially teachers, were more reluctant.

In Syangja the team was interviewing an elderly man who said he was being harassed by the security forces, and while answering the questions he suddenly broke down and wept. A woman in Morang wanted to read a poem she had written about the hardships and violence. A middle-aged man in Syangja was answering questions openly even though his wife wasn't happy about it. She kept telling him: "Why are you acting smart, you want to get into trouble?" Half way through the questionnaire, she came out of the house and slapped him in the head. He wouldn't continue and his answers were not counted.

In Morang, a woman told her son who was being interviewed: "Tell him you don't know anything." At Lakuri near Charikot, villagers were distrustful of the pollsters, many would walk past without making eye contact, women looked too scared to speak and others would say: "We don't like to talk about these things."

In Dang, a bomb went off nearby while enumerators were conducting an interview, locals looked blasé and continued answering questions. In Dolakha, an elderly man called his neighbours out and instead of answering questions, started asking his own: "Which side are you on? You will write down our answers and go but we have to live here and they will start harassing us. We will help you with food and a place to stay, but the days when we could give others help are gone."

The Udaypur team walked up to the mountains from Gaighat for a whole day. Two villagers had just been abducted by Maoists and a group of women was nervous but wanted to talk. "They ask us for five percent tax, we don't have any money, how can we pay them?" asked one. Another woman said the Maoists kept threatening to abduct her but she was determined to finish her drinking water project for the village. She said: "I'm not going anywhere until I bring water to the village."

How it was done

This year's Himalmedia survey was conducted 6-17 March by 50 experienced enumerators who interviewed 5,066 respondents in 102 VDCs, 32 municipalities and 32 districts all over Nepal.

Psephologists selected respondents using Stratified Random Sampling technique, dividing up the country between himal, hill and tarai, five development zones and 15 ecological development regions. The sample size for each region was determined by population proportions.

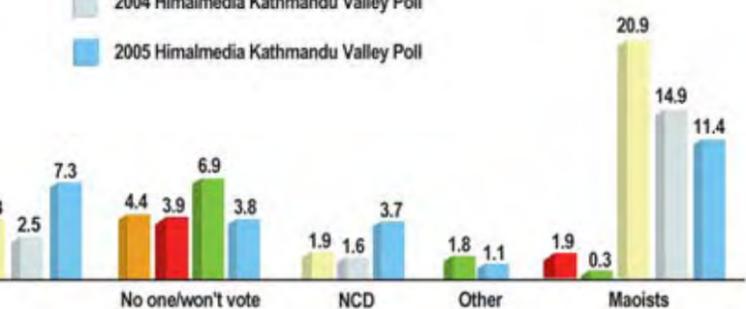
Thirty-five percent of respondents were urban, 65 percent rural. Men made up 60 percent, and this adjustment was necessary to compensate for the greater say that Nepali males have over political issues. Of the 33 questions, most were on the conflict, politics and the economy. These were pre-tested in Kathmandu Valley and finetuned before the actual interviews.

Pollsters ensured interviews were conducted discretely and the respondents were answering freely and without fear. They were allowed to explain or probe for the right answers in case they didn't understand. Entries were analysed and cross-tabulated using SQL Server. The survey team included: political scientist Hari Sharma, psephologists Navin Subedi and Hiranya Baral and software expert Pravin Subedi.

The full report will be available by 15 April and will be posted on www.nepalitimes.com. The 2006 Public Opinion Poll was a partnership between Himalmedia, the Norwegian Embassy and the Kathmandu-based Centre for Investigative Journalism/ESP. To book hardcopies, write to: letters@nepalitimes.com with 'Opinion Poll' on the subject line.

were held, who would you vote for?

- 1999 General Election Results
- 2001 ORG-Himalmedia Nationwide Poll
- 2002 ORG-Himalmedia Nationwide Poll
- 2003 AC Nielsen Himalmedia Nationwide Poll
- 2004 Himalmedia Kathmandu Valley Poll
- 2005 Himalmedia Kathmandu Valley Poll



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“Not knowing if they are Families of the disappeared can't take it any longer



Amrit Kandel



Arjun Pokhrel



Arjun Maharjan



Arun Nepali



Badri N Twayana



Baikuntha Bhujel



Basudeb Chawal



Dilli Bajakhat



Gangaram Shrestha



Gyanendra Tripathi



Harka Majhi



Indrabahadur Aryal



Kaushalya Pokhrel



Naniram Kafle



Nabaraj Thapa



Sagun Shrestha

SHIVA GAUNLE

Motimaya Poudel, the frail 70-year-old mother of Purma Poudel who disappeared with two others in 2002 can't stand the uncertainty anymore. She just wants someone to tell her whether Purma is dead or alive.

In February, she went on a hunger strike but that didn't do anything. Increasingly desperate, she joined a group of other families of the disappeared to padlock the office of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). Motimaya was arrested in the middle of the night. All this high-profile pressure finally forced the NHRC to agree that it would launch a detailed probe into the fate of those missing.

Nepal has more state sponsored



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

MISSING: (Left) Motimaya Poudel and Rajmati Maharjan as they relate their struggle to find a son and a husband. Pictures of some of the people believed to have disappeared while under army custody.



Rebakala Tiwari

disappearances than any other country going through an armed conflict. In 2001 alone, 1,726 people were reported missing to the NHRC. The whereabouts of 708 of them are still unknown. There are said to be many hundreds more who haven't reported their missing relatives.

Nepali human rights activists are working to raise the issue of state

Raining bombs

There is no safe haven as the army uses helicopters to bomb schools where Maoists take shelter



PICS: JB PUN

JB PUN in SYANGJA

Indrakala Gurung was busy teaching fourth graders at Thanpati Primary School in Kichnas Kharikot village on 12 January when a group of Maoists ran into the classroom to hide from an army helicopter.

"I asked them to leave at once as the children would be in danger but they said don't worry the army won't attack a school," recalls Gurung.

Soon, two helicopters hovering overhead started strafing the school. A machinegun bullet hit one of the Maoists spraying his blood and scattering body parts across the room. The young boys and girls were so traumatised by what they saw that most have stayed away from school since then.

"We just can't concentrate on our studies," says Parbati Gurung, 13, who is gradually recovering. But her classmates Apsara Bhandari and Mamta Acharya remain in shock, which is causing serious concern to their parents and friends.

CHILDREN OF WAR: Seema Thapa of Thanpati Primary School is a witness to a rebel being killed in her classroom (left) Daughter of abducted Ram Bahadur Gharti's daughter sobs as she describes what happened.



This week, a school being used for a Maoist meeting in Sindhupalchok was bombed by army helicopters killing at least six people including a civilian. Since January, there has been a sharp escalation in the army using air support against Maoists and the rebels using schools and civilian homes for protection. This has inevitably led to increased civilian casualties.

As the Maoists start targeting the choppers with their GPMGs, the army has been forced to fly higher for attacks making their aim less accurate. The army's weapon of choice is the 'torabora'—81 mm mortar rounds simply dropped from helicopters.

The children and the elderly are most at risk. Last year, 60-year-old Rel Bahadur Gurung of Mankamna VDC was killed along with 18 Maoists when an army helicopter fired at Matribhumi Secondary School, where the militants had established a defence post.

Besides the dangers of being hit in clashes, villagers have to constantly bear torture and

intimidation. Maoists force them to provide food and shelter at gunpoint, and the army tortures them for supporting the rebels. At Sapaude and Gahate villages, members of every household, including a 14-year-old boy and a 70-year-old man were severely beaten by soldiers for allegedly sheltering militants. One of the victims, Pritam Gurung, 69, died of his wounds two weeks later.

The Maoists have launched attacks against the army in populated areas using shops and terraces of residential buildings knowing fully well that civilians will be hit in return fire.

Another emerging and dangerous trend is that the army is also using local youth as porters for ammunition and as spies. On 18 February, two young boys from Nawalparasi were made to carry army supplies during a clash in Doredara. "We jumped over a cliff and managed to escape when the firing started," 12-year-old Sunbahadur Gaha, told us. Sunbahadur saw two soldiers gunned down right next to him. ●

dead or alive is killing us...



Bhim Giri



Bhimraj Maharjan



Bipin Bhandari



Dipendra Pant



Dhirendra



Dilbahadur Rai



Nabin Rai



Lila Panday



Purna Poudel



Pushparaj Basnet



Rajan Dangol



Rajendra Thapa



Buddhi Ram Tharu



Pati Ram Tharu



Ram P. Acharya



Renuka Dulal



Satya N. Prajapati



Ujwal Baham

The number of disappearances increased sharply after the RNA became involved in the conflict in November 2001 and during the state of emergency in 2002. However, rights activists say incidences of disappearances have decreased since the UN's human rights office was set up here last year. The NHRC and others are now allowed to inspect army detention centres and the RNA has become more sensitive to international criticism. The conditions of detention have improved somewhat and Maoist-affiliated members like Parbati Thapa and Rabi Thami are not being detained secretly and their cases are being tried in the courts.

Even so, there are examples that impunity continues. Among those allegedly involved in the atrocities in Bhairabnath Battallion, one has been posted to the Nepali embassy in Bangladesh and another has been sent on a UN peacekeeping mission. The UN's human rights office in Kathmandu knows about the two.

And many families are still struggling to learn about disappeared relatives. Tinam Rai's brother Dil Bahadur Rai went missing in 2002 about 15 days after his arrest. He has been sighted by other inmates but no one seems to know where he is now. "Other than the fact that he is frail and his hair is long, we haven't been

told anything else," says Tinam.

Rajmati Maharjan from Kiritpur hasn't stopped looking for her husband since he disappeared in 2003 after going to the market. A father of two, Arjun Maharjan was last seen being shoved into a taxi by three people. "In the evening I was told not to worry because security forces took him away but it has been three years and he is still not back," says Rajmati.

Sharmila Tripathi's husband Gyanendra Tripathi, the leader of the Maoist-affiliated student union, was

taken away from Shantinagar in 2003 and hasn't been seen since. "If we knew he was dead, we could deal with the pain," says Sharmila, "but not knowing if he is dead or alive is killing us." The family members of those arrested for their Maoist links says they are not asking that their relatives be released but to be told where they are. They are also critical of the Maoists. "He is my son but he is also their leader, why aren't the Maoists also looking for him?" Motimaya asks. But there is no one who can answer her. ●

sponsored disappearances in the June meeting of the UN Human Rights Council (the 'reformed' Human Rights Commission, which was closed earlier this month). Meanwhile, members of the NHRC's new working group have started visiting detention centres across the country.

The focus of the investigation is the alleged disappearance two years ago of up to 47 detainees at the Bhairabnath Battalion in Maharajanj who were executed and buried in the Shivapuri National Park (See: 'Prison diary', #290).

A team has been dispatched to do a DNA analysis of hair and bone samples suspected of being the remains of Sharada Sapkota. Forensic experts involved in the Doramba massacre investigation in 2003 are involved in investigations of disappearances in Kalikot and Dhading. Said one NHRC official privately: "Sooner or later the truth will come out."



Bhaban's mother

The mother of 21-year-old Bhaban who was among seven people arrested by the security forces and taken to the Rambhapur barrack shows her son's citizenship certificate to journalists last week.

The seven were on a bus and travelling to India. Three of the seven the RNA now says were killed in a clash, but doesn't say where it took place and when. Last year, eye witnesses told us they had seen the seven being beaten mercilessly after being arrested. "They must have been killed right there and then," he said. The NHRC's regional office in Nepalganj says 169 people have been disappeared from Banke and Bardiya. But the rights group, Advocacy Forum's count is 247. In reality, the true figure is probably higher than both.

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The sky is the limit



KUNDA DIXIT

But why isn't Kathmandu linked to Lahore or Bangalore with Dhaka, Madras and Karachi?

As I board Jet Airways 9W261 from Kathmandu to Delhi, a spanking new Boeing 737 800 series recognisable by its winglets, it is time to let the imagination fly about the possibilities of civil aviation in the region.

SOUTHASIA BEAT
Kanak Mani Dixit



We have had the Delhi-Lahore, Madras-Colombo, Dhaka-Calcutta, Karachi-Bombay flights going for a long time. But why isn't Kathmandu linked to Lahore? Why is there no air corridor between bustling Bangalore and upwardly mobile Dhaka or between Madras and Karachi and Colombo?

In some ways, we are going backward, because for a brief period in the late 1980s, Royal Nepal Airlines did operate the KTM-CMB route and a more exotic flight from start to finish was hard to find. Taking off to the east from Kathmandu, flying astride Mount Everest before heading south and cutting across the Deccan heartland of the subcontinent, the plane would descend over the coconut plantations on the Sri Lankan coast to land at Katunayake. It was a flight that should have survived but air routes are not managed by romantics and Royal Nepal cancelled when the expected tourist traffic did not emerge to fly between Serendib and Shangri La.

Indeed, the hard realities of economics as well as historical distancing are what determine links between Southasian cities beyond the difficulties of visa application and approval. Simply put, the Partition was such a

radical, invasive surgery that the social, cultural, familial and economic sinews were torn asunder.

While rail and bus links should certainly be favoured over air connections for the movement of the public at large, one could at least start with more flights between more cities. That would be less threatening to all the home ministries concerned.

The economic links between the various regions of erstwhile, undivided India, between cotton producers in Sindh and ginning factories in Gujarat, between mango orchards around Multan and the mandis of Old Delhi—all have been turncated. It will take years to revive these connections, which means that there will not be an immediate demand for flights, say between Delhi and Multan, based on the needs of trade and commerce.

The families that were torn apart during Partition might have provided some passenger volume to fuel new airline networks but that link, too, now is weathered and withered. The generation that went across during Partition in their late teens is now in its late seventies. Familial continuity is now the stuff of faded photo albums and memories. What remains is cultural affinities between peoples who speak with the same lilt, who share a history and heritage. This is a link that is required to energise inter-regional travel but is not enough to be an effective catalyst.

As the countries of Southasia continue with the process of opening up their trade regimes, granting each other MFN status, simplifying visa procedures the demand for increased flights between existing destinations is

bound to pick up. We need coordinated moves by the civil aviation authorities of the seven countries of SAARC to encourage each other's carriers in flying between Southasian airports.

SAARC immigration counters could be set up at arrival halls, visas-on-arrival could be considered, drastically reduced landing and handling charges for SAARC airlines must be granted, as also support for stationing of immigration and customs personnel in cities which are keen to go regional. These and other inducements to the regional flag carriers and private airlines would be the least that could be done to ensure that cities of great heritage, ebullient cultures and economic strength communicate with sister cities.

We are by now half-hour out of Kathmandu and the jet banks sharply to the right on its programmed flight path, turning over Lucknow and setting course for IGI. Looking down from 36,000 feet (so says Capt Tomar), the city of Lucknow is spread out beneath us like a carpet. The Bada and Chota Imambaras are too small to tell from this height but there one can see the straight line of Hazratganj, pointed like a staff at the serpentine Gomti which flows past the stadium and there is the sprawl of Mahanagar on the other side.

Come to think of it, this great capital of Avadh, this jewel of Southasian heritage, is not linked to any other country by air. This is the city where the airline Sahara (recently acquired by Jet) is based and yet Lucknow is not linked with Lahore, with whose high culture it shares so much. Neither is Lucknow linked to Dhaka, nor Kathmandu. ●

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Getting into your swing

Memorise how it feels to hit a good shot

You know you are swinging at the wrong speed and you know how to correct it—or so you thought. Yet after many frustrating hours on the course and at the practice range, you find that correcting the timing or rhythm of your golf swing, that magic formula that allows you to make proper contact with the tiny golf ball, is much harder than you imagined.

You might be wondering if there is a rule of thumb to getting the speed right. The answer is a resounding 'no'. Swing speed is probably the most illusive aspect of the game and finding the right one is very difficult. Generally, each golfer has a different swing

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



according to their physique and ability. When players are performing well, subconsciously they begin to swing at a very consistent pace and start to believe that it is easy. But when their game falls apart, they realise that swinging well is much tougher than they believed.

A well-timed shot can produce a great result and a great deal of satisfaction. This success leads to better and more consistent ball striking and soon you're keeping your drives on more fairways and hitting more greens, ultimately reducing your score.

During my teaching career, I have found that most weekend golfers are aware that they need good pace and timing on their swing to produce a decent shot, yet they seem to put in very little effort to get into a groove. Most club golfers spend hours at the practice range, lunging and lurching with the club aiming to shoot big numbers. They focus on hitting hard and long and almost never work at getting a consistent swing speed. But without it, the result will be wayward drives and overall inaccuracy.



What can you do to get better?

Next time you visit the practice range, work towards swinging at a consistent speed. When you hit a good shot, memorise that feeling. To make solid contact with the ball, ensure that your body rotates at the same speed as your swing. Try to stay relaxed so that you can get the most out of your big muscles. Being 20 yards short of the tee is far better than going into the rough so accept that you might have to sacrifice distance for accuracy.

These techniques apply not only to your drives but also for approach shots, chipping and pitching. Remember: swing at a consistent speed and you will finally start to improve your game. ●

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

Driving us up the wall

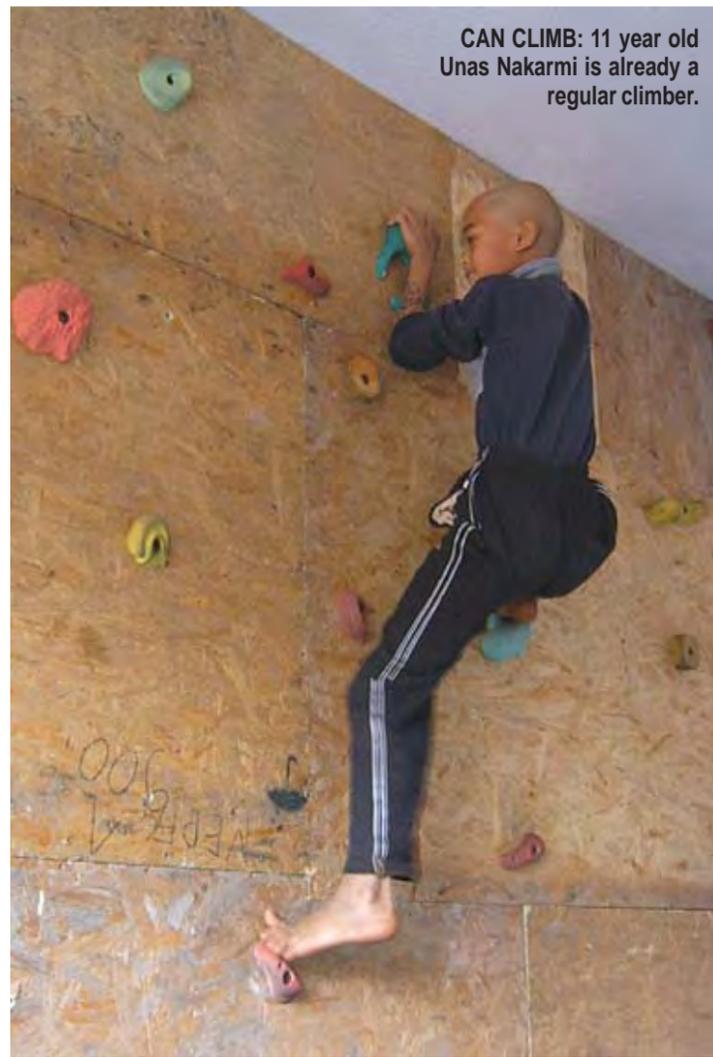
A climbing buff remodels his house to get kids hooked

The Pasang Lamu Mountaineering Foundation's (PLMF) climbing wall sparked a new sporting rage when it opened in Dhumbarahi four years ago, attracting up to 10 climbers a day.

But interest has flagged off and these days the club is often almost empty. "It's the exam season," explains Pemba Yanji Sherpa but it is evident the climbing wall needs more publicity.

One former PLMF regular has used the club as a stepping-stone for his own project—building climbing walls in his own house. Paresh Krishna Shrestha's 'Project Climb' will include climbing walls in four rooms of his house in Patan made from recycled wooden containers and grips imported from Singapore. Today, one eight-foot wall is complete and Shrestha says the others will be more challenging with overhangs and traverses.

Layers of thick mattresses have been placed on the ground below the walls to cushion falls. "My main problem is budget because this is expensive and I am building it entirely out of my own pocket," says Paresh. One way he plans to save some money is with locally carved stone grips. "The walls may look amateurish to professional climbers but the intention is to get young kids interested in climbing and they can start



CAN CLIMB: 11 year old Unas Nakarmi is already a regular climber.

here." Once completed Paresh plans to charge Rs 1,000 a year for membership.

Wall or rock climbing can be an excellent way to not only improve your physical stamina and endurance but also to strengthen your character. The challenge to reach another inch further to get a hand or foothold helps to build willpower, self-

confidence and determination. That is why Paresh hopes some of his clients will be corporate houses teaching their managers team-building and overcoming challenges.

He says: "This is one reason why climbing as a sport is so addictive because it constantly tests your will power." ●
Alok Tumbahangphey



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THE ADVENTURES OF HEROJIG

PART Vx. Planet Thamel

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O' Master, the FORCE is weak this season, ke game?!

KE GARNE? WHATEVER.

But avoid the Dark Side whenever possible.

Quote of the Week

"The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things that surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together."

- Obi-Wan Kenobi, Jedi Master, Star Wars (1977)

Next change: Herojig attempts to leave for planet Dantooine, but then realizes that space travel is not yet possible from Nepal.

#116 2062 by jigme gaton - read. love. write. Any similarities to the (c) STAR WARS cartoons is purely accidental and in no way intentional. Send all lawsuits care of "EDITOR", this newspaper.

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

❖ **Shanti Yagya** by Uma Shankar Shah, Siddhartha Art Gallery. 26 March - 18 April. 4438716



EVENTS

- ❖ **Munich** showing at Lajimpat gallery cafe on 31 March, 6.30 PM
- ❖ **Open House** at French School of Kathmandu. 31 March
- ❖ **Why People Fall: Spinal Injury in Nepal** a lecture by Kanak Mani Dixit. 31 March. 9.30 AM. Shankar Hotel.
- ❖ **Rang de Basanti** and today's youth, 31 March, 3PM, Martin Chautari. 4256239
- ❖ **Purification: clear mind, clear view, peace** at HBMC, 1 April. 4414843 **Training** on youth for advocacy at FNCCI, 1 April only 25 seats left. 2041674
- ❖ **Women in Concert** 1 April. Babar Mahal Revisited, Rs. 2000
- ❖ **Chaite Dasain** 6 April.
- ❖ **World Health Day** 7 April.
- ❖ **International artists' residency** by Sutra art till April 10. Bhaktapur. 4242106
- ❖ **Good Friday** 14 April at KISC 6.30 PM. 5525146
- ❖ **Easter Sunday** at the British School 16 April, 11AM. 5525746
- ❖ **Collage** an inter collage fest 22-23 April, BICC, music, theatre, art and more.
- ❖ **Children's Fun Fashion Parade** fund raiser for AmaGhar - home for children 15 April. 4PM at Kiran Bhawan, Rs 1500. 5560652

MUSIC

- ❖ **Shanti Thatal** Paleti 31 March. 6PM_nepa~laya R sala.
- ❖ **Live Concert** with jazz vocalist Sachal Vasandani from New York at Shangri-La, 4 April, 6.30 PM. 4412999
- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** with Anil Shahi and Maya Mantra Rs. 1000 7-10PM. 5 and 26 April. Poolside Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle.
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM at Upstairs Lajimpat.
- ❖ **Reggae Night** with various artists at Moksh Live, Tuesdays, 7.30 PM.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711

DINING

- ❖ **Grilled lobsters** at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Nepali Cuisine** at Krishnarpan Restaurant. Dwarika's Hotel.
- ❖ **Lunch** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage 25 March. 9841 371927
- ❖ **Weekend Brunch** at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Beat the heat** with milkshakes and smoothies at Hyatt Regency.
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** at Godavari Village Resort, a special package of Swimming & Lunch. 5560675
- ❖ **Breakfast** at Singma Restaurant. 8.30 - 11.00AM daily. 5520004
- ❖ **Strawberry time** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Stupa View** vegetarian creations, clay oven pizza, espresso & latte. directly at the Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- ❖ **Mexican and Italian** food at Fuzone Café, Lagankhel. 5542935
- ❖ **Barbeque** at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- ❖ **The Shangri-La Express** Soups, make your own sandwiches and salads and choice of dessert. Everyday from 11AM-3PM.
- ❖ **BBQ Dinner** at Summit Hotel every Friday. 6:30-9:30PM. 5521810

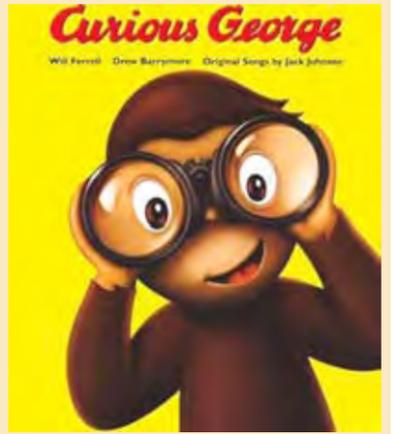
GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tea House-Inn.** Nepalese Salads with Nepali Thali every Saturday at the terrace garden. Nagarkot. 668-0048.
- ❖ **Club Himalaya Chiso Chiso Hawama** package from Rs.1700.00 per person with dinner, breakfast, accommodation and shuttle service. 668-0080, 668-0083
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- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
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- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

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Presentation Skills
April 25 - 27

Announcement

Upcoming Training
In May / June 2006 in Thailand

Developing Project Proposals May 22 - 26

PM&E May 29 - June 2

Facilitation Skills June 5 - 9

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NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED

Just look at this astounding satellite picture taken on Wednesday afternoon as the total eclipse of the sun traversed across the Atlantic. By the time this picture was taken the shadow of the moon was covering nearly the entire northern part of Africa. Later, it moved across the Mediterranean, into Turkey and then Central Asia. From Kathmandu, the eclipse was partial and clearly visible to the unprotected eye because the thick haze naturally filtered the sunset. Now to get back to weather, we also see a wide swathe approaching over Afghanistan which may get into Kathmandu this weekend, bringing some respite from the haze and wind-driven forest fires.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

<p>Fri 27-11</p>	<p>Sat 28-10</p>	<p>Sun 27-11</p>	<p>Mon 27-12</p>	<p>Tue 28-11</p>
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रेडियो सगरमाथा

नेपाल कृषिप्रधान मुलुक हो । यहाँका ८० प्रतिशतभन्दा बढी जनता कृषि पेशामा आधारित छन् । कूल राष्ट्रिय आयको फुडै ४० प्रतिशत हिस्सा अहिले पनि कृषि क्षेत्रले नै ओगटेको छ । सिङ्गो मुलुकको आर्थिक, सामाजिक मेरुदण्डको रूपमा रहेको कृषिक्षेत्र उपेक्षित हुनु हुँदैन । कृषकहरू देशका वास्तविक नायक हुन् । उनीहरूलाई सम्मान र कदर गर्नुपर्छ । कृषकहरूले पनि आफ्नो पसिनामाथि विश्वास गर्नुपर्छ । नयाँ नयाँ कृषि प्रणाली अवलम्बन गर्नुपर्छ । पढ्दैमा खेती गर्नु नहुने होइन । कृषिक्षेत्रलाई आधुनिकीकरण गर्न शिक्षित र सचेत कृषकको खाचो छ । त्यसैले कृषि पेशालाई आदर गरौं, कृषकलाई सम्मान गरौं ।

श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग



PARAS IN PARIS: His Royal Highness Crown Prince Paras at a photo-op with UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura at his office in the French capital on Wednesday.



MY HORSE WON: Home minister Kamal Thapa deep in conversation with COAS Gen Pyar Jung Thapa during the Ghode Jatra parade at Tundikhel on Wednesday.



MAYADEBI'S DREAM: Actress Nisha Sharma in Abhi Subedi's play *Mayadebi ko Sapana* being staged at Gurukul Theatre this week.



RELAXING TIMES: An Australian tourist on Sarangkot last week perhaps finds the contents of *Nepali Times* more scintillating than the spectacular backdrop of Machhapuchhre.



JET SETTER: One of the two rhinos gifted by Crown Prince Paras to Vienna Zoo last week as he waited for transport at the Royal Chitwan National Park.

Dr Upendra's brainchild

In 1983, a young Nepali doctor got a scholarship to specialise in neurosurgery at the renowned Glasgow Neuroscience Institute. On his very first day, he found himself under the tutelage of the professor, Graham Teasdale.

Upendra Devkota remembers seeing famous surgeons from the United States and Canada being in awe of his professor.

But while he learnt the skills and craft of neurosurgery from his guru, Devkota would stay awake nights in Glasgow dreaming of one day building an institute as good in Nepal. It would take more than 20 years but that dream is finally coming true on 12 April when the National Institute of Neurological and Allied Sciences opens in Bansbari. And Devkota has invited Prof Sir Graham Teasdale to be guest of honour.

It is difficult to imagine that this construction site with bulldozers moving earth will be open for business in two weeks, but Devkota brushes aside skeptics. You can tell this is a labour of love for Nepal's best-known neurosurgeon who on a recent morning was personally supervising the finishing touches: telling the foreman not to scratch the epoxy floor tiles, ordering the lift doors to be widened so beds can be wheeled in, directing carpenters to adjust the reception desk.

One third of the cost of the Rs 250 million hospital is financed



KUNDA DIXIT

through a bank loan for which Devkota has put up his family home as collateral. The hospital has three state-of-the-art operating theatres, a casualty ward and an ICU that can take 11 patients and 65 beds and besides treating patients will also be training Nepali neurosurgeons.

The hospital's layout was designed by the Swiss consulting firm, Baumann, and every tiny detail is carefully planned to meet international standards. There is a central oxygen and compressed air supply for surgical instruments, the vital signs patients is transmitted to nurse stations on wireless systems and their CT scans can be

downloaded in operation theatres. The waiting area for relatives is bright and relaxed and even has a multi-denominational prayer room.

Devkota has come a long way from his missionary high school in Gorkha where he was a classmate of Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai. After returning to Nepal he has served at Norvic and Bir and did a brief stint as health minister after the royal takeover of October 2002.

Asked why he returned to Nepal, Devkota replies: "My philosophy is that it is more satisfying to grow vegetables in your own garden than to buy them at Sainsbury." ●

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April fools

Once a year on April First we of the journalistic persuasion are allowed by royal ordinance to officially let our hair down. This one day when we can scrupulously tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth and still get away with it.

Not that we hacks don't stick to facts the rest of the year let's just say we are economical with the truth. As a matter of fact, many of us were caught with our pants down (in a manner of speaking not in real life, silly) while inadvertently telling the truth in the past fiscal year. That is why we welcome the chance this April First to tell the truth without ruffling any untoward feathers.

This All Fools' Day on Saturday we would strongly recommend all you fools out there to believe everything that is written in the papers because your editors have made that special extra effort to print only facts that are first verified, cross-checked and are certified to contain permitted flavours, raising agents, preservatives and ammonium bicarbonate.

(Statutory Disclaimer from the State Law and Order Council: The Lese Majeste Decree, Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act, Provisions of the Media Ordinance, the Defamation Bill and Libel Laws, all Codes of Conduct, Censorship Regulations, the Fifth

Commandment and what remains of the 1990 Constitution are hereby suspended for 24 hours beginning midnight on 31 March-1 April, 2006. But remember, we are keeping

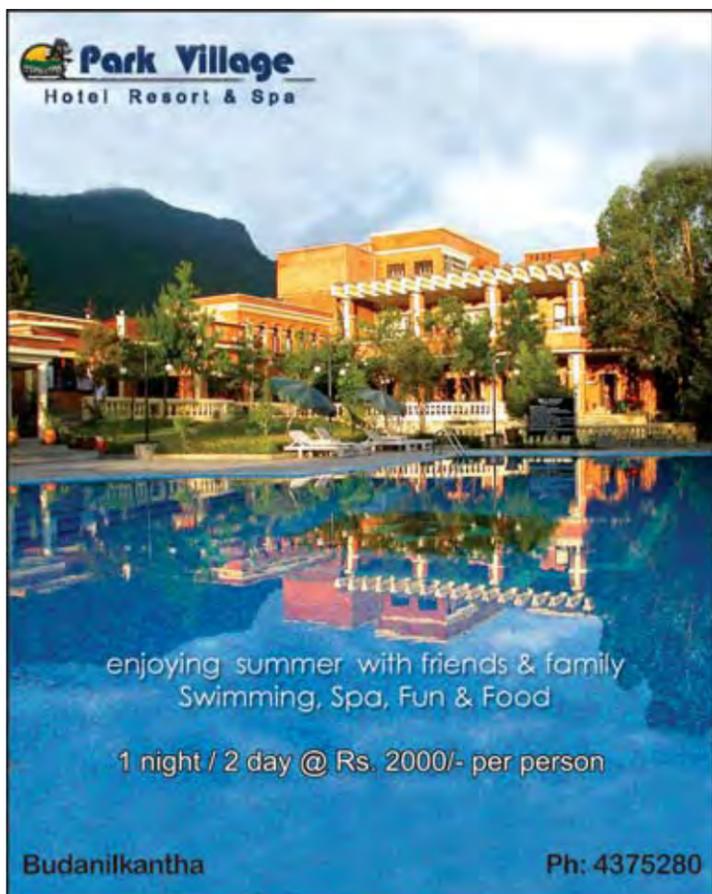
a close eye on you and perpetrators could be prosecuted retrospectively.)

So, without wasting any more of your and my wakeful hours, let us get right down to the facts of life and list the stories that we are currently working on for the April First edition:

● Rhinos Grant Audience: Two Nepali rhinoceri Thursday granted separate audiences to the Director of the Vienna Zoo and Der Österreichische Bundespräsident. Matters of mutual interest and of a bilateral nature were discussed between the two sides with the one-horned Nepali dignitaries expressing their satisfaction with the lodging and fooding arrangements. Later, the rhinos granted more collective audiences to other long-serving inmates of the zoo, including Messrs Okapi, Hippo, and Gnu.

● The Home Minister has warned people not to come to Kathmandu while the Tourism Minister has said people should come to Kathmandu. Those already in Kathmandu are requested by both ministries to stay put or go underground during the coming week. People on non-essential business may be allowed to go to Tundikhel to observe horses rehearsing hole jumping and galloping very fast for no particular reason.

● Following a trend set by Nepal's booming distillery industry, the government has requested businesses to start using the suffix 'royal' wherever and whenever possible in daily discourse (as in "The expedition climbed the mountain without paying royalty", or "I'm sorry but I've run out of royal blue ink", or "I woke up this morning with a royal pain in the butt"). As the largest revenue payer to the government, the alcohol industry has a headstart in this matter. It has already introduced Royal Stagger Whiskey, Royal Challenger Beer, Kingfisher Lager and will soon launch the Royal Bengal Tiger Premium Arrack.



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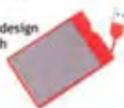
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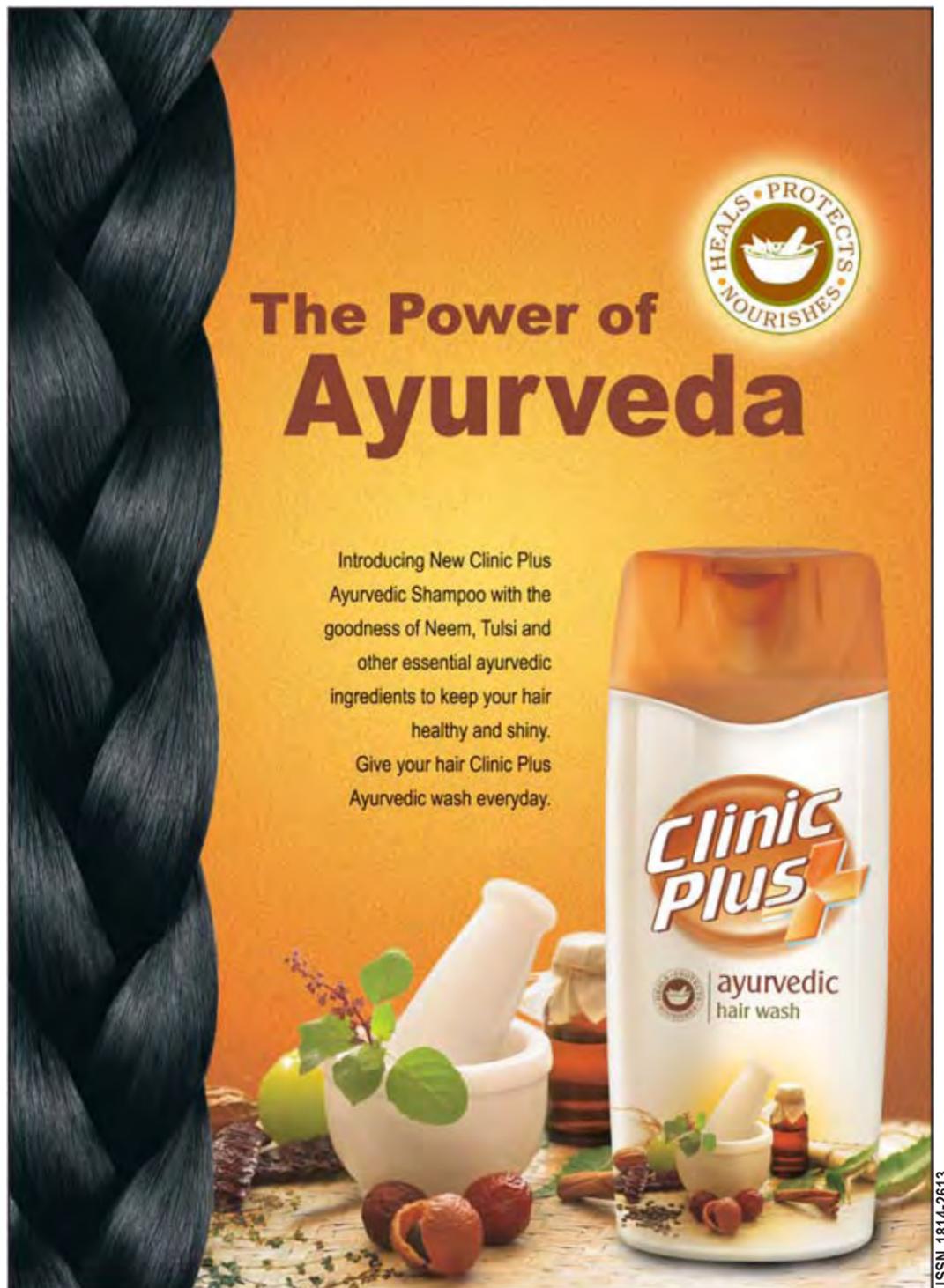
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