Paper crown
FREEDOM AT MIDNIGHT

On Monday night when King Gyanendra restored parliament, we as a nation actually went back four years to 22 May 2002. So it is hard to say we are celebrating. Just go to the internet archivies (www nepaltimes com) to read #95 of this paper and check out the country's state that week four years ago. The nation actually went back four years to 22 May 2002. So it is hard to say we are celebrating.

O

n Thursday the raw energy of democracy in Nepal was captured by the statue of BP感官的吸引力

years ago, the Maoists just had the war against the army. Dhauka had just dissolved the house to save his own skin from a Koirala sauna. In this case: "Now more, we are made to pay for the tiny minds and large egos of our politicians. Once more the nation is held hostage by their myopia. The demonstration of democracy in November elections are just outer manifestations of inflicting in the ruling party."

That was how parliament was run the last time we saw it. On Friday, it reconvenes and the same question is being asked: Is it going to be different this time? Have our politicians really learnt their lessons? It is difficult to be optimistic. Yet, we must be because the alternatives are worse.

The first order of business is to pass a resolution on a constituent assembly to fulfill the parties' pledge to the Maoists—this is the only way to convince the comrades to josh multiparty politics. This is important because without removing loopholes in the constitution that allow for royal mischief, we will keep going round and round in circles and need a street uprising every 10 years. But constituent assembly elections won't happen for a bit, what are the honourable members going to do till then? We hope not go big time fighting for allowances and portfolios.

Before they are ready to move on to the next issue, people need to see immediate proof that democracy this time will mean an improvement in their lives.

I

ever got to know BP Koirala well. He came to a couple of seminars at Columbia University in New York where I taught for many years. I remember one meeting that was very crowded. BP came toward the end of the point and I instantly recognised him. I asked him to come to the front. He politely refused and sat cross-legged on the floor in the back with the students.

Tolstoy met him once more when he came to New York for medical treatment. He gave a talk at the weekly brown bag lunch at the Southern Asian Institute, and it was then that I saw the charisma of this man and learned why he remained the most respected leader of Nepali leaders. At one point in his talk, he announced his return to Nepal. I was someone asked that King Birendra might do him, he said wryly: "I don't think that he will kill me." Unfortunately, I never saw him again, and he died short thereof the illness of the disease that had plagued him for so long. Sometimes after the Anolan of 1960, I received a call in New York saying that a statue of BP was to be unveiled on the campus of the World College. Long Island and asking if I would attend. I consented gladly, and in the company of several Nepali friends made the journey to the University of Western Ontario, the home of the college. There, in a quiet grove on the school grounds, the ceremonies took place and the image was unveiled. The statue itself, done by a Bulgarian sculptor, was an attempt at a likeness of BP in bronze that sat on a tall salmon-colored stone base. It was, though no one said anything, something of a disappointment. The sculpture was not a full bust or head of BP but a small part of his face that emphasised his nose and his glasses. The guests, including Ganesh Man Singh, made the appropriate remarks and we disbanded.

A couple of years after the installation, I received a call from a friend saying that World College was going to close due to financial difficulties and we had a limited time in which to move BP's statue. Otherwise, it would be bulldozed with the rest of the school. The question arose, however, as to where the sculpture could go. Would Columbia accept it and find a place for it? I volunteered to talk to Mr. Sunil Koirala, the son of BP, who I knew might be able to do something. The answer at every level was polite but firm "no." The director of the Southern Asian Institute, the most appropriate place for the statue, said that there was simply no room. The famous had already cluttered the small seminar room of the Institute: Ambedkar, Tagore and Tarakh Nath Das. As time passed, it became increasingly difficult to find a place for BP. There being no room at the inn, I then volunteered to keep it for a few weeks or months. I would house the statue in my office rather than have it undergo some undignified fate.

Years passed, and of course there were new offices, new offices, in Kent Hall, often garlanded by people who had learned of its presence. Even Girija placed a garland on it twice in my university's Columbia campus. My office had become part shrine.

In the end, the statue stayed until I decided that its time had come and departed myself. I remember well when I first saw my books and papers were packed in cardboard boxes and tape. I then watched as the movers covered BP with the same tape and cardboard.

When we got to our new destination, I decided to keep BP safely wrapped until I could find an appropriate place for him. He stood for a long time on the back porch of our house near Washington, dc but gagged and bound, and I never left the present. I took to saluting him of who was behind the tape and wrapping paper. Movement and announced his return to Nepal, the November elections are just outer

Réalisation de la citation en langage naturel.

GUEST COLUMN

Ted Riccardi

When BP Koirala bowed down to the people's movement and announced his return to Nepal, the November elections are just another outer manifestation of inflicting in the ruling party."

The palace secretariat, the Raj Parishad, the palace commanded the management of the palace and the office of the octogenarian thrust upon by the palace. Koirala must succeed if Nepal is to redeem itself. Koirala is all set to become one of the most important tasks. The excesses of the Maoists in the insurgency is challenging in normal times, and these are not normal times for Nepal. Four years of royal rule have all but destroyed the national economy. The diplomatic debacle suffered by palla receptionists has sullied the image of the country in the community of nations. Rapid militarisation has sapped the morale of the police force. Rampant police corruption has sullied the image of service administration and society stands deeply divided, dangerously polarised.

The shroud reputation of some of the lawmakers sitting in the constituent assembly makes their task doubly difficult: they will be considered guilty of even proven innocent as they pave the way to elections for a constituent assembly. During the transition, MPs have to ensure that an all-party government does all it can to deliver development and peace throughout the nation. This transitional parliament must hit the ground running, and mainstreaming the Maoists tops the national agenda. It will not be possible to write a new constitution without bringing the insurgents on board. No less important is the task of demarcating party constituencies. If main parties continue with their waywardness, Maoists will sweep the constituent assembly polls even if the arms of the security forces and rebels are taken care of under the terms of a reliable international guarantee. Formation of a high-level commission for truth and reconciliation is another important task. The excesses of some of the officers of security forces upon peaceful protesters made their own former officers física in heads in shame. The constitution has no provision for forced exile or capital punishment, but the motive force of the uprising was the hope of the resolution of the Maoist insurgency. Peace-building has to be the primary agenda of the transitional parliament reconvening on Friday afternoon in Singha Darbar.

Resolving longstanding conflicts in countries torn asunder by armed insurgency is challenging in normal times, and these are not normal times for Nepal. Four years of royal rule have all but destroyed the national economy. The diplomatic debacle suffered by palace receptionists has sullied the image of the country in the community of nations. Rapid militarisation has sapped the morale of the police force. Rampant police corruption has sullied the image of service administration and society stands deeply divided, dangerously polarised.

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PEOPLE POWER II

I would like to comment on the repeated misrepresentation in the democratic press of EU views in relation to the King’s declarations of 21 and 24 April. The EU position has consistently favoured the full restoration of democracy in Nepal. As I am sure those party leaders involved in our joint meeting on 22 April will confirm, EU Ambassadors were arguing that the peoples’ movement had fundamentally changed the balance of power in this country in favour of the democrats. Far from arguing for compromise with the King, we were arguing that the parties should exploit the dynamics of people power and use that power to implement fully their 7-point program. There are, of course, different routes to achieve the same end. We have argued that the Parliament has been restored and look forward to early moves by that Parliament to implement the SPA program, work towards a cease fire agreement with the Maoists and restore peace to this country through integration of the Maoists into a fully democratic system. 

Keith Bloomfield UK Ambassador, Kathmandu

The best definition of democracy is that it is for the people, by the people. The responsibility is in the hands of the people. As a vestige of a colonial, mature, responsible citizens who can put aside their vested and personal interests and put forward the interest of the country? Can we put faith in the people who will be running this country if the king does give up power?

Name withheld, Spain

I agree with Kunda Dixit that the restoration of the SPA is a ‘victory’ (‘Power to the people’, Nepal Times eSpecial). Does it stop there? Does it mean that anyone who has joined hands with the democrats to support their political agenda, none of the three sides look credible or farsighted.

Shiven Thapa, Kathmandu

The most I have been following the exchange of views which has been initiated to understand the culture and society of the country’s place in the family of nations. It is best for us. The people argue for compromise with the King Gyanendra but do not believe that they represent us?

Dinesh Gautam, Kathmandu

Who do you blame for the failure of the SPA?

POLLS

Name withheld, email

I have always been following the exchange on Plan B triggered by your editorial ‘Conflict of interest’, #293. The main thing is that Nepal should be able to survive and do even better without a monarchy if everyone follows the constitution. There are hundreds of countries without monarchies which are doing pretty well. But the constitution has to be made in such a way that no one can ever monopolize political power and destroy multi-party democracy.

B Sudha, Sydney

I am torn and encouraged by the Jana Andolan II that has swept Nepal. Yes the king needs to hand power back to the people, yes we need democracy, but we do not need 14 governments in the next 14 years. The same people who are insisting Part II of our revolution started the Maoist problem with police operations in 1996, they tore our country apart with crony politics and now they have joined hands with the Maoists to harden the country over them. Can we trust them?

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I Bhandari, email

I have very interesting interviews with Mahara and Girija Koirala (‘God save the king’, #294), I live in a country that managed to come out of dictatorship and become a democratic monarchy. This country is Spain. Your country is different but you should never allow acts of violence against your own people destroy you. Freedom is possible but it comes with responsibility. We all need to learn and apply tolerance of each other’s point of view and navigate forever our when peace and democracy are finally restored, whatever changes should immediately begin investing in education, otherwise their restoration will be only temporary.

Name withheld, Spain

I am very glad that the citizens of Nepal are more than worthy to be a unifying force not a divisive one.

Shiven Thapa, Kathmandu

We the Nepalis in the Philippines want the political leaders to be bold and lead this movement to its ultimate goal—people’s sovereignty. They must be more united and responsive to the people’s expectations, reign in the political, socio-economic and developmental agenda. There are demonstrations and rhetoric but nothing about socio-economic plans, educational reform, bureaucratic restructuring or development in general. In the long term, results matter and without results, monarch, commoner or politician, all will be reduced to an ungraceful exit. The Maoists have so far thrived on populist militant tactics but if they are to enter mainstream politics, they’ll have to disclose their economic and socio-political agenda. None of the three

BP Khanal, Manila

I haven’t read such sane writing as your editorial ‘Anarchy in a monarchy’, #294 in a long time. It has no vitriol and at times like these, it is really commendable. Hope all sides listen/read this too. I am all for retaining the monarchy but it must be a unifying force not a divisive one.

Name withheld, email

How strange, there is a country in Asia which could be nearly a paradise on earth. But there is a man who as king is in charge of this country who mixes up his personal destiny with the destiny of the country—to a degree that he destroys so much that he might enter into history as a maniac who used his power to shift his country’s place in the family of nations to one of the last positions. I am full of admiration for the energy of the Nepali people.

Frank Schellaath-hoth, ex-Member of the European Parliament Brussels

We have not heard the voice of the people only that of the politicians who claim to speak for the people or the press who keep telling us what we should be thinking or the authorities who keep telling us what is best for us. The people are speaking now and loud and clear and the powers that be better listen. We are now ready for change and should be prepared to face the challenge of uncertainty. If we don’t, we will never know what is at the end of the tunnel. Let’s face change with the same dignity with which we have been trying to avoid it in the past.

R Bhandari, email

Lokanatra is not for the people, it’s for the political gangsters that are misleading the people. It is just like the Maoist taking the lives of innocent Nepali people and still saying they’re fighting for the people. Right now what the people need is peace. We all have a dream to once again see a peaceful Nepal, like it used to be.

J Thapa, email

From the moment the situation started to change in Nepal, Kunda Dixit has been on a roll with his king-bashing binge (‘A first stop, ‘Least majesty’ and ‘Power to the people’, Nepal Times eSpecial). While his comments are bona fide they have been rather one-sided. I hope that he understands that the status quo is not the end of the story but a mere beginning. Yet again the stars of new game are the same old wicked leaders who are just as responsible for the state of the country as the king is.

Sushil Bogati, USA

In ‘Least majesty’ (Nepal Times, eSpecial) Kunda Dixit has drawn a far-fetched analogy between Ferdinand Marcos and King Gyanendra to augment his piece. He is aware of the quotes but ignorant of the geo-political situation. Outspoken critic of communism, Marcos enjoyed enthusiastic support from the US for 21 years of rule from 1965-1986. As he was serving the US geopolitical and ideological interests in the region, he was able to rule the country till he had to fly out in a US Air Force jet in 1986 to exile in Hawaii. Though the US ambassador to Nepal still has not understood the culture and society of Nepal, it would be remiss not to thank him as his statement (about King Gyanendra having to fly out in a helicopter) also played a role in restoring democracy.

Dinesh Gautam, Kathmandu

Less majesty? We know the country belongs to the people but without the kings to build this country we would still be in bullet carts. This country is nothing without the king. Stop making the monarchy the issue and start focusing on the Maoists who are standing with you. Long live the king.

Name withheld, email

I agree with Kunda Dixit that the restoration of the SPA is a ‘victory’ (‘Power to the people’, Nepal Times eSpecial) Does it mean that anyone who has joined hands with the democrats to support their political agenda, none of the three sides look credible or farsighted.

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Who do you blame for the failure of the SPA?
Kunda Dixit is right that the country belongs to the people not only to the king (‘Less majesty’, Nepal Times eSpecial). The king isn’t going anywhere. He is just the symbol of elections and handover power to parliament to defuse the current situation. KJ Shrestha, email

Kunda Dixit’s ‘First step’ in the Nepal Times online edition is a sobering piece amidst the revolutionary fervour and chaos in the streets. It is the people who have the ultimate power, not the king, the politicians or the insurgents. The people of Nepal will not be held hostage by the triad of doom. Here is my own 12-point building:

1. King becomes a ceremonial monarch with no powers
2. Army is brought under parliament
3. The king’s royal expenditure budget is to be brought down to the pre-2001 level and his assets are to be made public on a yearly basis, income will be taxed
4. The seven parties form a unity interim government
5. Party hold talks with the Maoists
6. Maoists to lay down weapons and control their cadres, the government will decide on changes to the constitution
7. Only political leaders who are 55 years or younger, and who have a clean ministerial past will be allowed to lead the unification government they and their family members disclose their wealth and tax information
8. No one can serve more than two terms as prime minister
9. Political parties practice internal democracy: people’s representatives can decide on changes to the constitution
10. No political party cadre or member can interfere in the process by making certain candidates to the public resulting in a deathly weightless society
11. Participation of jirgas, dalits and women in the political party structure, bureaucracy and the unity government
12. Mandatory taxation and appropriate utilisation through good governance

SN Singh, email

It is appreciable that even in these polarized times you have proved yourself an unbiased media outlet. Unlike the others who have been supporting a single side blindly, you have given the views of all sides. However, your editorial (‘Take stock’, Nepal Times eSpecial) missed an important point. Your last line: ‘We just hope and pray that the price paid is not too high and that the country moves on’. We have fought long and hard. We have suffered much. And we have come far. We shouldn’t stop half- way. It is the time to step out of 250 years of feudalistic mental slavery and learn to shape our own future, instead ofcowwing with fear and wondering what we are going to do if we have no king. If we can stare down the barrel of Mi’s and bear brutal beatings from the army and police we can surely fight the Maoists’ oppression should they dare to do so. Having said that, let there be a referendum on whether we should keep the monarchy. I vote for a republic but let’s see what the majority wants.

Sanjey Norbu, email

I have appreciated your balanced reporting and editorial. Even CK Lal II, as he seems, had an epithaph about the Maoists (‘Insurgency of the intelligentsia’, Nepal Times eSpecial). At some point we had to hit the middle in politics and move on. In politics, it is not to transform Nepal or more accurately, its culture.

P Rana, email

Kiyoku Opara is correct in saying in her Guest Column that the Nepalis of 1990 should not be repeated. There should be an end to infighting. It is the people who will run their political parties as their personal fields and act as if they know everything. And after they got democracy in 1990, they thought they were indestructible and did ill-disciplined and corrupt activities in the name of democracy which led us to today’s mess. The so-called democratic practices after 1990 left the Newars and Janjatis isolated from these political cheetahs. Now the tables have turned and the cheetahs are appealing to the same people they once betrayed. If this isn’t power lust, what is it? The Nepal Times must understand the aspirations of Nepalis and must not support these corrupt leaders blindly. What about making them apologise first to Newars, Janjatis and to all Nepalis?

Kanchan Dhahal, Shantinagar

The biggest surprise was the US, UN, EU, China and India welcoming the king’s first speech of 21 April calling on the parties to the national assembly elections. The EU went a step further and tried to coax the seven-party alliance to accept the king’s offer. The diplomats even went to Koirala’s residence and tried to influence the alliance leader but it could not instill its confidence in the King’s speech. India, on the other hand, heartlessly welcomed the speech one day and upon seeing the logic of the speech, expressed caution the very next day. Hasn’t it now become obvious that these foreign powers are more concerned about the plight and sentiments of the Nepali people? Can we rely on friends at times like these? We need to enquire which among the masses, the police raining down blows, the police with their guns aimed at the crowd, the security forces portrayed as inhuman beasts. The tv cameras never highlighted instances when officers helped to defuse a volatile situation and protect civilians from harm. The Nepal public has a right to be informed on the situation in its entirety, and not be led just one facet of the issue. The public deserves more respect from the media who should offer a balanced view of how we can proceed with our future with sound decisions. Telling only half the truth is lying. Thanks to Mr Newar for showing us the other side.

Srikhala Sharma, Kathmandu

Photographs of bloody riots and reports of the wounded can communicate the effects of the present crisis but how can you help to engage people in finding the best way out of it? During my last visit to Nepal in February, I could find a one who was well prepared to support the politicians, the Maoists or the king. The family was their first concern and how to earn enough money to survive today, let alone tomorrow. Winning the understanding, support and respect of the People for these priorities must now be the first objective of all right thinking people in Nepal. As I have thought for a long time that Nepal forced to watch the present situation unfolding from a distance, may I be allowed to suggest that it could be better for each of the political parties to set out its political manifesto? What are they committed to delivering for the benefit of the people? Apportioning blame is no longer helpful. What is important is to present the politicians of all colours with a clear challenge and opportunity to lead the way out. It is up to them to give this leadership. I imagine that all Nepalis will want to learn what it is that they have to offer.

Tim Harwood, Central Himalaya Project, UK

We the people may have won but there are some ifs and buts. The mistakes of 1990 should not be repeated. There should be a referendum on whether to keep the monarchy or not and if we do, under what arrangement. There should be adequate provision for Maoists to join the mainstream. Armed forces should be Nepalised so that they are not under the king. Those who committed atrocities during the protests should be brought to justice. Banks should open. And, how the American Consular Office should reopen so folks can get visas.

B Yonzon, email

In his Strictly Business column (‘News as a public good’, #294) Ashutosh Tiwari labels news excludable to the public resulting in a non-excludable—non-rival like fresh air. News cannot exist outside the realm of public good because even though its non-rival, i.e. “consumption” of news by someone doesn’t lead to depletion of news for others, it still can be excludable. Cable news and the Nepal Times with its hefty cover price are other examples. However, it is a market-determined excludability. But, the present government is trying to interfere in the process by making certain news excludable to the public resulting in a deathly weightless society.

Santosh Pokharel, Maine, USA

I had a good laugh reading Kunda Dixit’s Under My Hat (‘Job Openings in Kathmandu’, Nepal Times eSpecial). They are the type of the younger generation a chance too? They have made. Don’t restart infighting again which then will conduct constituent assembly elections. Don’t they have any plan? We can’t forget the last 15 years easily nor the 10 years of Maoist insurgency. Dixit’s duplicity and double standards goes: ‘We just hope and pray that the price paid is not too high and that the country moves on’.

SN Singh, email

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The credit for the photograph accompanying News as a public good (#294) is by Dambar Krishna Shrestha.
Now for the hard part

The parties will find that fighting for democracy was easier than crafting a new constitution

SHIVA GAUNLLE

S o far so good. The parties have their parliament, the king gets to keep his throne for now. But the Maoists need something to show their cadre that the last 10 years were worth it: and that something is a constituent assembly.

Under the 12-point road map agreed by the party leaders and the comrades in the New Delhi assembly. Since the parties and the constitution was met. long as their demand for a new constituent assembly. The parties to deliver the pound to the Maoists. They have put a resolution supporting a constituent assembly as the number one point in the agenda for the reconvened parliament on Friday.

If it is passed, it will be the first time in Nepal's 237 year history that the people will get to craft their own constitution. The main platform in a future election for a Constituent Assembly will be the future of the monarchy. The astonishing success of the People's Movement II surprised everyone, most of all the parties. Having sidelined the king, it is now crunch time for the parties to deliver the pound of flesh to the Maoists. They have put a resolution supporting a constituent assembly as the number one point in the agenda for the reconvened parliament on Friday.

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Straw polls done recently among young pro-democracy protesters in Pokhara and Kathmandu showed an overwhelming swing towards a republic. But a nationwide Himalmedia poll taken last month is less clearcut (See ‘Poll’, #292). It showed that although the king is personally unpopular, nearly half the 5,066 respondents said they wanted a constitutional monarchy.

Constituent Assembly

Direct participation of the people in framing a new constitution, first mooted in 1949 after the overthrow of the Ranas but never revisited.

Mechanism: A nationwide election based on proportional representation of gender, caste, ethnicity and regions is held and people vote for candidates with manifestos that lay out their vision for a new constitution. For example: republican, constitutional monarchy, civil control of the army, etc. A constituent assembly made up of elected candidates is then formed to draft a new constitution.

Advantages: Earlier constitutions have been ‘given’ by the kings of Nepal to the people. With a constituent assembly, the people will have a direct say in the new statute.

Problems: Not all parties and not everyone within parties agrees on the technicalities, for example on how the candidates should be weighted in proportion to the population. There is also divergence on whether there should be international supervision.

There are also doubts about whether a constituent assembly election should be held without demobilisation of the warring sides and whether there should be international supervision.

CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

HOW IT MAY GO

The main platform in a future election for a Constituent Assembly will be the future of the monarchy.

Straw polls done recently among young pro-democracy protesters in Pokhara and Kathmandu showed an overwhelming swing towards a republic. But a nationwide Himalmedia poll taken last month is less clearcut (See ‘Poll’, #292). It showed that although the king is personally unpopular, nearly half the 5,066 respondents said they wanted a constitutional monarchy.

Fourteen percent wanted the monarchy abolished and only one percent supported absolute constitutional monarchy and a quarter said a monarchy in some form is still necessary. For example: republican, constitutional monarchy, civil control of the army, etc. A constituent assembly made up of elected candidates is then formed to draft a new constitution.

If you have heard of the Constituent Assembly, do you understand what it is?

(Of the 57 percent who said they had heard of it.)

- Understand well: 15%
- Hardly understood: 48%
- Did not understand: 37%

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Fourteen percent wanted the monarchy abolished and only one percent supported absolute monarchy. The brutal suppression of the pro-democracy movement of the past three weeks could have increased the number of those in favour of abolishing the monarchy altogether.

However, the Himalmedia poll also proved that a future constituent assembly election must be explained clearly to the people. In last month’s poll 57 percent said they had heard of a constituent assembly and when asked if they understood what it stood for, 40 percent replied ‘heard but not understood’ and 15 percent said they didn’t understand.
Interview with Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai by Rabindra Mishra of the BBC Nepali Service, 25 April

Rabindra Mishra: Why do you call the parties' decision to welcome the reinstatement of parliament a betrayal?

Baburam Bhattarai: It is a betrayal of the movement. When we signed the 12-point agreement, we agreed that none of the sides (the parties and the Maoists) would hold talks with the king or reach an agreement with him. But the parties talked to the king by themselves, thus violating the agreement. The minimum meeting point of the 12-point agreement was election for the constituent assembly, but the parties went for the reinstatement of the parliament.

The 12-point agreement had clearly stated that the power of the movement would reinstate the parliament through which an all party government would be formed and that in turn would hold talks with the Maoists to move toward the constituent assembly. That was the demand of the seven parties who had conducted this movement and you had only supported it. So, how was that a betrayal?

The first thing to be made clear is that this movement was not led by the seven parties. We had fears that the demonstrators would be called terrorists if we had called it a joint movement. Therefore, we had agreed that the parties would call for the reinstatement of the parliament, we had expressed our disagreement just when the 12-point agreement was signed. We had then said that we need to proceed towards constituent assembly through political conference and an interim government.

If it was a joint movement of the parties and your party, why have people been bringing out victory rallies in the streets? Shouldn't they have intensified the anti-king agitation? The rallies you are talking about actually went to surround the place where the leaders of the parties were holding a meeting. They had then demanded that the movement had to be continued until the election for the constituent assembly.

The parties have been saying that they would go for the election of constituent assembly by the means of dialogue and agreement and the same has been stated in the 12-point agreement as well. Even after rearmourances by the parties in that regard, would you create any obstacle or not? It is not about creating obstacles. What we have been saying is that it is still not clear under which law or article of the constitution the king reinstated parliament. Reinstatement through a royal announcement means the parliament which was not a constitutional course but a political one.

See, you just contradicted yourself again. Your party and leaders have been saying that they would accept any result of constituent assembly even if that means active monarchy. Your Chairman Prachanda had said that and now you are saying that you have no other goal than the end of monarchy. What our chairman had said and what our party's policy has been is that we would in principle agree to the result of the constituent assembly. But we have not said that we would accept monarchy. Agreeing to the result of constituent assembly does not translate into acceptance of monarchy.

When the parties have been saying that they would go for the election of constituent assembly, why have you been creating obstacles by announcing blockades against the capital and district headquarters? We have not said that we would obstruct the road to Parliament. They (the parties) can go to Singha Darbar, we will only create blockades in highways.

That means you will continue your military activities. They are being continued now.

And that means you will carry on fighting with the army under the parties.

As long as there is no forward looking political outlet and people's democracy, we will be in war, and everyone is clear about it.

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Exactly, what we have been saying is there no constitutional way now. But they took the way of the parliament which was not a constitutional course but a political one.

You seem to be in the habit if everything that doesn't go your way. When the Sher Bahadur Deuba government wanted to hold talks with you, your party said it would not hold talks with a puppet government and that it would hold talks with the king directly. When the king took direct power, you backtracked and said you would talk to the parties only. And now that the parties have come to power, you are still having problems.

The main point here is the monarchy should come to an end and there should be the establishment of republic. Our saying has always remained the same.

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Exactly, what we have been saying is there no constitutional way now. But they took the way of the parliament which was not a constitutional course but a political one.

You seem to be in the habit if everything that doesn't go your way. When the Sher Bahadur Deuba government wanted to hold talks with you, your party said it would not hold talks with a puppet government and that it would hold talks with the king directly. When the king took direct power, you backtracked and said you would talk to the parties only. And now that the parties have come to power, you are still having problems.

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The king finally retracted his hour-long address of 1 February in just seven minutes with his statement on 21 April handing executive power back to the people’s representatives. But he did not want to accept that his power had been taken by the people’s movement of the previous 16 days and instead thanked those who helped him in his oppressive 14-month rule.

There were already many clear indications that handing back power was the only real choice the king had. Like rats jumping from a sinking ship, his aides like foreign minister Ramesh Nath Pandey and members of the royal council permanent committee Sachi Shumsher Rana were already distancing themselves from the monarch in public. In his last days the only people the king trusted were home minister Kamal Thapa and the three security chiefs. Although the king gave India’s special envoy, Dr. Karan Singh, his word that he would return democracy to the people, the king played parallel politics by trying to make Krishna Prasad Bhattarai prime minister under Article 127. But Bhattarai refused, saying the king should first take back his 1 February move publicly, accept the people’s sovereignty and form an interim government with a maximum tenure of one year. After this attempt it was clear even to the Indians that the king could not be trusted.

This was why both the US and UK publicly supported India’s efforts before the king made his statement on Friday. According to one source, the king was worried about the future government’s possible action against those who helped him put down the movement, especially the security chiefs. Although the king realised he needed to give in, he didn’t have the courage to correct his mistake. He invoked Article 35 to ask the parties to name a prime minister.

Senior Congress leaders saw it as capitulation but because they knew the Maoists wouldn’t agree they were forced to reject it. But diplomatic sources say India is putting pressure on the Maoists to agree to renounce violence and also suggested that the parties get the constituent assembly proposal passed. The bottomline is that this episode has proved once and for all that authoritarianism is disastrous for Nepal.
Management lessons
The current crisis makes a great case study on fundamentals

Students of management, business and economics: here’s your opportunity. A study of the current political crisis would yield great examples to support the fundamental rules that govern management.

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

The key ingredient to any successful management is trust between the various stakeholders. Shareholders of companies will only listen to the same promises about planned changes or improved governance if one or two AGMs before they become dissatisfied with mere words. They have too much at stake to just listen to speeches at meetings and take it all lying down. If management doesn’t deliver what it promises, the trust is lost. The fall of India’s BJP-led government is a classic example of such loss of trust.

Similarly, it is known in any way it can.”

“The UN will assist in any way it can”

United Nations Resident Coordinator in Nepal, Matthew Kahane spoke to Nepal Times just after King Gyanendra’s proclamation restoring parliament. Excerpts:

Is there a sense of optimism that political resolution is on its way? Nepal now has an opportunity to move forward because the political framework for this has been established. Of course, great challenges lie ahead. The new government will need to work out quickly how to both deliver services and political solutions. But, Nepal now has the best basis on which to move forward and to address some of the fundamental development challenges facing this nation, which is still among the poorest in the world.

What is your message for the king, seven-party alliance as well as the Maoist leaders on this positive development? Many details need to be ironed out but fundamentally this new development presents a real opportunity to address some of the political issues holding Nepal back. The Maoists have the opportunity to renounce violence and to find a place in the normal political process.

What are some of the other issues? The parties have talked about restructuring state institutions in a way that there would be stronger checks and balances between, for example, the executive and other arms of the government, the army and judiciary. The UN could be a good source of that advice.

What role will the UN/EU now play in helping Nepal to move the peace process ahead? Many areas that the new government will need to address are ones that the UN has extensive experience in. The party leaders know that we stand ready to help, in the area of monitoring elections for example. If the people of Nepal and the government seek the help of the UN, we are more than happy to assist in any way that we can.

What about the Maoists in particular? Much more discussion is needed about the Maoists giving up armed struggle. Those are the kind of discussions where some sort of third-party assistance is useful and may be necessary. For example, to ask probing questions like, “when you say yellow, do you mean yellow or do you mean orange-yellow”? The Maoists have also previously said that they would agree to supervision of their arms in the yellow or do you mean orange-yellow”? The Maoists have also previously said that they would agree to supervision of their arms in the development challenges.

Inequality and exclusion, which are the root causes of the insurgency and in many ways have enabled it to spread, need to be addressed. Disadvantaged groups, women and others who have been traditionally excluded now need to be assisted in participating fully in society through education, health and other opportunities.

All these activities will require resources. Do you think donors will be willing to contribute? A number of donors have assured us that resources would be forthcoming as they’ve been forthcoming for the UN human rights office.
his picture of Durga Thapa leaping out of a crowd of protesters in the 1990 People’s Uprising became an icon for the era. It represented the euphoria and hope of the restoration of democracy 16 years ago, hope that was later dashed only to be revived this week with King Gyanendra’s restoration of parliament.

Durga was 22 then, a student activist at Padma Kanya. She was attending a mass rally at Tundikhel on 9 April 1990. The protests against King Birendra’s absolute rule were spreading and Durga remembers listening to democracy activist Padma Ratna Tuladhar speaking to the crowd.

“Suddenly, I couldn’t hold it back any longer,” she recalls. “I just leapt into the air to give a double victory sign.”

Durga didn’t know Min, and Min didn’t know he had the photograph of the decade. Min Bajracharya was only 17 then and remembers: “Those were the days before digital, so I had to be economical with film. Suddenly I saw this woman leap up with her hands thrust out, and I took three quick shots.”

The two met by chance three years later in a blood donation clinic, and kept in touch. When the seven party pro-democracy movement got underway last month, Min tracked Durga down and decided to follow her around. This picture of her last week in Baneswor leading a group of civil servants was a turning point in the agitation because government employees for the first time descended on to the streets. Durga is now a member of the Nepali Congress youth wing, and feels her place is on the streets to keep fighting for democracy not to rub shoulders with the party leaders.

“I feel very happy because the king has reinstated parliament,” she told us on Tuesday, adding a warning to all political leaders, “parliament should quickly arrange a constituent assembly as the public is demanding. The politicians must not be negligent and ignore the voice of the people—that was why the king took power.”

Her husband is a trader and Durga has a 12-year-old son. She says it is for his future that she is fighting now. “Our generation is moving on, now we have to make sure that people of his generation can live in a free country,” she says. Durga had kept out of politics since 1990 and hadn’t even met a NC central committee member. But when the seven parties launched their agitation, she was convinced it was time to put up another fight.

While most activists of her age have mellowed and started raising families, Durga has lost none of her fervour. Some of her friends accuse her of being extreme leftwing, but she is not deterred. She replies: “Extreme times demand extreme measures.”
or Kumar Shrestha, Day Five of the pro-democracy demonstrations on 11 April began routinely enough. He had packed his helmet, several handkerchiefs and water to ward off the tear gas, and headed off towards Gongabu.

This area near the Bus Park on the Ring Road had been a hotspot, but the demonstrators that afternoon started peacefully enough. Party flags raised pro-democracy and anti-king slogans and taunted the police. It started raining and the protests died down somewhat.

Suddenly there was a sound of a rapid burst of automatic gunfire. Some demonstrators had started throwing stones at the house of Additional Inspector General (AIG) of Nepal Police Rupsagar Moktan and security inside the house started firing back with SLR and pistols. The sound of gunshots spooked the riot police who were already conditioned into believing that the Maoists had infiltrated the demonstrators. In fact Home Minister Kamal Thapa a few days before had said Maoists had fired shots in the Gongabu area.

The riot police were out in front facing a narrow side street leading into Gongabu. The blue-uniformed Armed Police Force were lined up behind them on the Ring Road and then there was a unit of the army that had taken up battle position as soon as they heard the shots.

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The riot police were out in front facing a narrow side street leading into Gongabu. The blue-uniformed Armed Police Force were lined up behind them on the Ring Road and then there was a unit of the army that had taken up battle position as soon as they heard the shots.
My home is in Taplejung, but last year I came to Kathmandu to go to school and live in Banasthali in Kathmandu. I am in Grade 5 of Sauryadeep Boarding School. On 8 April, some policemen came into our house. It was 4:30 in the morning and we were fast asleep. There were five of them and they weren't wearing uniforms. They woke us up and asked us, “Are you Shiva Gurung?” My uncle answered, “Yes, I am Shiva, why are you asking for me this early in the morning?” They answered, “We are police and we've come to arrest you.” Then they gave my uncle a 90 day arrest warrant. We put on our clothes quickly. My uncle said, “I can't leave my little niece here.” The police spoke on the phone and asked, “Shiva Gurung has his niece with her, what do we do with her?” The police at the other end replied: “Bring her along also.” So they drove us to this armed police barrack in Duwakot. The guard at the gate asked us who we were. The policeman said “We are also police” and they opened the gate. They asked my uncle his name and asked, “Do you have any mobile or radio?” My uncle replied that he didn’t have a radio, but had a mobile. The policeman said, “No one here is allowed to take a mobile inside.” My uncle and me went inside. I had thought we were the only ones to be arrested, but inside there were other people, many were my uncle’s friends. I didn’t know anyone and I was sad.

Every morning I wake up and wash my face and then go for a walk, and after that have snacks at the police shop. After that I read or study till about 11 o’clock. Then I go to eat. We get meals in the mornings and evenings. I rest for a while after that. Then study till 3 o’clock. Then I go for the evening meal and then go for a walk again.

There are 195 people here who have been arrested from protests. Many of them can’t talk too much and can’t walk around alone. There are only three women among us. Later 26 more human rights people were also brought here. On 26 Chait we observed Jana Andolan Day and on 27th had a 15 minute blackout. The UN and human rights council were also here and asked us everything. I answered all their questions.

I am all right here. I am happy. Everyone likes me. I am just worried about one thing. I don’t know if my school has reopened or not. If they let me go I could go back to school. I am waiting for that.

Pratikshya Gurung
Duwakot, Bhaktapur
Armed Police Barrack

Note: Pratikshya was released with her uncle and all other political prisoners on Tuesday.
Citizen scribes

Blogs offer a grassroots view of the pro-democracy movement

MALLIKA ARYAL

Blogs offer a grassroots view of the pro-democracy movement

TIMELINE

Royal rollback

1 February 2005 - King Gyanendra takes over. Declares emergency, sacks Deuba yet again, cuts phone lines, sends army into newsrooms. Hundreds of politicians and civil society activists are jailed. International condemnation begins.

April 2005 - After debate at the UN in Geneva, an office of the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights is set up in Kathmandu. Nepal.

May 2005 - Maoists blow up bus in Madit, killing 37 passengers and injuring 70. Worst ever terrorist attack in Nepal.

September 2005 - Maoists demand a three-month unilateral ceasefire. King G continues walkabouts in various parts of the country.

October 2005 - Tourism bounces back with ceasefire.

November 2005 - Seven-party alliance (SPA) and Maoists sign 12-point agreement. Governance cracks down on media and prepares guidelines for NGOs.

December 2005 - Maoists extend ceasefire by one month, still no government response.


February 2006 - In anniversary speech, King Gyanendra says he will continue direct rule and calls for elections by April 2007. Paupass attacked. Maoists shut down court before municipal polls. Twenty percent turnout in local elections. Maoist insurgency enters 10th year.

March 2006 - Maoists impinge three-week blockade. King and queen leave for Pokhara. Seventy parties and Maoists reaffirm 12-point understanding and press for April elections.

April 2006 - National protests, roads blocked, buildings vandalised, mean 12-day D.G inaugures World Hindu Convention in Birganj.


2 April 2006 - 12-hour curfews become routine. Maoists blockade highways. One killed at a pro-democracy demonstration in Banepa.

3 April 2006 - Professionals and civil servants join the movement. A woman officer in police firing in Chitwan dies. Demos spread nationwide.

4 April 2006 - Curfew hours reduced. Peaceful rally in Gongabu turns violent. Tourists join the pro-democracy movement, dozens arrested in Thamel. Two protestors shot dead at a rally in Pokhara.

7 April 2006 - Daytime curfew lifted. King and queen return to capital from India. Over 500 arrested at Thamel. Human rights observers and professionals arrested. Protester shot dead in Nawaparosi.


10 April 2006 - King addresses the nation on the occasion of Nepal New Year 2063. Maoists and parties say protests to continue.

11 April 2006 - UN Secretary-General Kati Kimaru urges the king to take steps to solve the crisis. Over 20,000 march in Dhading. Nationwide protests intensify.

14 April 2006 - Businesses remain closed for 11th consecutive day. Journalists arrested; protests flare around Ring Road. Shortage hits Kathmandu. King Gyanendra meets ambassadors from the US, India and China.

18 April 2006 - Pokhara tense and under daytime curfew. Civil servants at the Home Ministry in Kathmandu protest, many arrested. King meets political parties.

22 April 2006 - 18-hour curfew in Kathmandu. Clashes in Jhapa leave three dead. CPN-UNM General Secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal and other senior leaders arrested. Indian special forces in Singhari campaign.

23 April 2006 - 25-hour curfew. Three protestors shot dead at Kalimati when曲曲曲奏 fue or fan in to Kalimati. Curfew passed to media and the UN. K.P. Bhattrai refuses the king's offer to become prime minister. Karian Singh returns to India optimism.

24 April 2006 - Ring Road filled with over 500,000 protestors, several killed hundreds injured. King Gyanendra addresses the nation, hand over power back to people and give people to return to a prime minister.

25 April 2006 - Seven parties reject king's offer to form a prime minister. Thousands of protestors defy curfew, break security cordons and march towards the palace. Thunderstorm intensifies. Mobile out again.

29 April 2006 - 11-hour curfew in Kathmandu. SPA leaders announce manifesto. Ring Road rally for 25 April over 200,000 people participate in demonstration in Dang.

24 April 2006 - King addresses the nation near midnight and reinstates dissolved parliament. Jubilation on streets.


28 April 2006 - Massive rally at Tundikhel. Maoists announce rally for Friday to coincide with reconvening of parliament.

19 April 2006 - Corruption is expressed by Joy of Road Blog. Also criticises the royal government and especially the behaviour of security forces, which becomes brutally clear in viewing the work of photographer Sagar Shrestha in the blog Bijaya Paudel's journal.

Many political activists and academics under house arrest.

Meanwhile King G inaugurates World Hindu Convention in Birganj.

Curfew hours reduced. Peaceful rally in Gongabu turns violent. Tourists join the pro-democracy movement, dozens arrested in Thamel. Two protestors shot dead at a rally in Pokhara.

Lawyers injured in police crackdown on demo. Development workers join the movement. Civil servants strike. Massale rallies in Kirtipur where students recite poems and sing revolutionary songs.

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Maoists release blockade. Soldiers stay six in Morang. 27 April 2006 - Maoists declare three-month unilateral ceasefire.

Massive rally at Tundikhel. Maoists announce rally for Friday to coincide with reconvening of parliament.

International Nepal Solidarity Network, also blocked by authorities in mid-2005 and also accessible via a mirror site, has a wide collection of images on pin drives.

Blogging has its limitations in Nepal, where only 0.7 percent of the population has an internet connection. But because of its non-news format, blogs give people interested in Nepal a much more detailed and nuanced picture than the international media about what is happening here.

Blogging can be considered free speech at its purest because it makes information interactive, takes it out of the hands of journalists. But for the same reason, the bloggersphere has a credibility problem, an image of being home to self-indulgent rantings of the over-enthusiastic.

But its future in Nepal looks bright thanks to bloggers like Blogger Nepal's 'Sej', who posted recently: "I may support a republic but if a majority of Nepalis still support a constitutional monarchy, so be it."
Nepal’s people phenomenon

Very late in the modern era, long after other countries of Southasia had experienced their uplifting cathartic moments, Nepalis by the millions stood up against feudalism. People Power simultaneously pushed back a despotically inclined king making space for pluralism and created the conditions for peace. The mission now is to bring the Maoists in from the jungles while ensuring that kingship is forever barred from mischief.

The Kathmandu Spring suddenly turned into a people’s movement of colossal proportions fuelled by the scorn Gyanendra expressed their uplifting cathartic experiences their uplifting cathartic experiences.\n
Meanwhile, even as Gyanendra was receiving felicitations as a ‘Hindu Emperor’ from conservative Hindus in Birganj last month, the movement sparked and took off. The bottled-up anger unleashed a political tsunami of a kind no one had imagined. And the regime in parallel. The political rallies suddenly began to attract more and more people because the parties were able to promise a return to both democracy and peace.

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Chernobyl's turning point

It was Chernobyl and not perestroika that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union

The very morning of the explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear station, 26 April, 1986, the Politburo met to discuss the situation and then organised a government commission to deal with the consequences.

It was Chernobyl and not perestroika that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it was the general consensus that we should openly deliver the information upon receiving it. This would be in the spirit of the glasnost policy that was by then already established in the Soviet Union. Thus, claims that the Politburo engaged in concealment of information about the disaster was by then already established in the Soviet Union.

The nuclear meltdown at Chernobyl 30 years ago this month, even more than my launch of perestroika, was perhaps the real cause of the collapse of the Soviet Union five years later. Indeed, the Chernobyl catastrophe was an historic turning point: there was the era before the disaster and there is the very different era that has followed. The Chernobyl disaster, more than anything else, opened the possibility of much greater freedom of expression, to the point that the system as we knew it could no longer continue. It made absolutely clear how important it was to continue the policy of glasnost, and I must say that I started to think about time in terms of pre-Chernobyl and post-Chernobyl.

The price of the Chernobyl catastrophe was overwhelming, not only in human terms but also economically. Even today, the legacy of Chernobyl affects the economies of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

Some even suggest that the economic price of the USSR was so high that it stopped the arms race, as I could not keep building arms while paying to clean up Chernobyl. This is wrong. My declaration of 15 January 1986, is well known around the world. I addressed arms reduction, including nuclear arms, and I proposed that by the year 2000 no country should have atomic weapons. I personally felt a moral responsibility to end the arms race. But Chernobyl opened my eyes like nothing else: it showed the horrible consequences of nuclear power, even when it is used for non-military purposes. One could now imagine much more clearly what might happen if a nuclear bomb exploded. According to scientific experts, one SS-18 rocket could contain 100 Chernobyls.

Unfortunately, the problem of nuclear arms is still very serious today. Countries that have them—the members of the so-called nuclear club—see no hurry to get rid of them. On the contrary, they increase their arsenals, while countries without nuclear weapons want them, believing that the nuclear club’s monopoly is a threat to world peace.

The 20th anniversary of the Chernobyl catastrophe reminds us that we should not forget the horrible lesson taught to the world in 1986. We should do everything in our power to make all nuclear facilities safe and secure. We should also start seriously working on the production of alternative sources of energy.

Project Syndicate

Mikhail Gorbachev, the last president of the USSR, is chairman of the Gorbachev Foundation in Moscow and the head of the International Green Cross.

Freedom imperilled

World Press Freedom Day is on 3 May

In the post-1990 wave of liberalisation, media in South Asia has multiplied many times. In the place of one or two television stations controlled by the state in each of these countries, now there are dozens of channels with overlapping satellite footprints all over the region and beyond. Cable networks now bring up to 100 channels into living rooms across the subcontinent. Staid old newspapers that filled their pages with tender notices of government contracts and handouts from press information bureaus have jazzed themselves up to full-colour and respected national dailies have turned into tabloids.

Pop music and chat radio crowd the airwaves with names like Radio Mirchi and Hits FM. Glassy magazines compete in the marketplace with lifestyle supplements in daily papers. Pink papers with pages upon pages of stock market prices are helped by upwardly-mobile investors. On the face of it, everything appears to be hunky-dory in a region on the rise. But look at the surface and you encounter the seamier side of South Asian media.

Media Monitor—2005, an annual publication of the Lahore-based South Asia Free Media Association does one better. It scrapes the sheen, and slims, off the media scene to show the different world within in its true colours. The country report for Bangladesh begins with Alastair Chowdhury’s report on the Most Dangerous Place in the World for journalists. Bhaskara Rao exposes the obsession of Indian TV channels with trivia and the country report shows that corporate interests have begun to dictate the agenda of the media in India. In the chapter on Pakistan, the case of Arif Mir under the title ‘No Buyers of Free Expression’ is a damming indictment of media owners who don’t hesitate from silencing critics under their umbrella.

The media in Sri Lanka is parochial and partisan. Perhaps it’s so because it has to operate within a very narrow space, caught as it is in the nutcracker of insurgency and counter-insurgency firepower. Maldives is rightly characterised as a ‘prison for journalists’ and the overview about Afghanistan is appropriately titled, ‘Surviving under Pressure’. It sums up the status of journalists in the entire region.

Media Monitor does not hold itself under pressure. However, becomes the second nature of journalists fighting simultaneously on several fronts. State authorities, non-state militias, drug-dealers, religious bigwigs, security agencies and shady businessmen are united in their hatred for free media. Nowhere have all these factors been at play as forcefully as upon Nepal’s media. The overview of the Nepali media has a self-explanatory title: Press in Chains. Perhaps that is the reason journalists in the faraway plains and mountains of this country have fought hardest to safeguard their freedom.

“If they snatch my ink and pen, / I should not complain; / For I have dipped my fingers / In the blood of my heart.” Thus sang Faiz Ahmad Faiz about the intensity with which writers defended freedom. Committed journalists shine brightest in the darkness of the night. Nepal was under the spell of two daunting predators of press freedom—King Gyanendra and Chairman Prachanda. But the media held its ground and have triumphed over the monarch. There is a lesson here for Maoist totalitarianism as well: the Nepali people will never tolerate any curtailment of freedom. Shooting the messenger is the worst form of politics. Media doesn’t just hold up the mirror to society, it is the mirror. Media monitors almost everyone but there aren’t many who monitor the media. SAFA’s effort of self-monitoring is commendable and there is a need for South Asian countries to have national ombudsmen. That said, there is no point in producing such lavish books to document a profession often operating on shoe-string budgets. A humble production may even remove the necessity of finding Western donors.

MEDIA MONITOR SOUTH ASIA SAFA, Lahore, Pakistan, 2005

This is just the beginning...
Time for Nepalis to decide

Editorial in The New York Times, 26 April

India's mumbling policy in Nepal

New Delhi's problem is that it opts for the least line of resistance

Now that King Gyanendra has backed down, how the seven-party alliance will decide the future of democracy is the real challenge before Nepal. Although the Maoists have rejected the revival of parliament, a rapacious coalition is possible in the interest of the present age. The parties and the Maoists have been on opposite sides except when they started their joint struggle against the king.

New Delhi's muddling policy in 1996 after it had mulled democracy would not bring about social change. Can a violent solution now be grafted onto a peaceful democratic structure? Unlike the political parties, the Maoists are fighting an ideological battle and the monarchy is a sticking point. Technically motivated. The crisis in the country is whether this king takes over as a constitutional head.

No longer the prodigy modelled on his brother King Birendra, King Gyanendra is no longer the king they need now. The king has become a king without a country. Nepal continues to be a country with a king, but the establishment in New Delhi isolated the king, ignoring urgent appeals for military supplies from the people. It is laughable that a man who has relentlessly fought war against all semblance of parliamentary democracy is now the guardian institution of the state, such as they exist in Nepal, and has threatened to trample his guns on India after undermining the monarchy.

The first step towards the formation of a republic has been the revival of Nepal's parliament by the king, who had no choice but to do so. The time has come to put the country out of the ruins of the decade-long civil war. It will have to convene a constituent assembly to decide the future of Nepal. The Maoists have a decisive factor in Nepal, have been demanding so and should cooperate with mainstream political parties to give shape to a new nation. New Delhi should respect the legitimacy of this process since it has been invited by the people. The Anger among people is targeted not at Gyanendra but at the entire edifice of monarchy. As an institution it stands discredited. It will be impossible now to visualise even a constitutional monarchy, which will leave the king as a titular head and without any executive functions.

New Delhi has to gauge its steps therefore since every sign and statement will be scrutinised closely in Kathmandu. The charge for the foreign office is to be proactive without appearing to be so. Open battles with the Anger of a huge Nepali workforce in India leave New Delhi with no option but to walk the tightrope.

A guiding principle in this exercise has to be that people's will should prevail in Kathmandu. All possible diplomatic channels should be used to ensure that the interests of New Delhi and Nepali society converge.

India's folly

Kanchan Gupta in The Pioneer, New Delhi, 25 April

India's mumbling policy in Nepal

The message that has been successfully conveyed to the king, politicians and people by Nepal by the UP Government is clear to all: India lacks the integrity to make tough choices and the courage to take tough decisions. Those who have viewed India's Nepal policy with gay abandon, including senior bureaucrats in the Ministry of External Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office who need not name the three who have been unashamedly associated themselves with anti-prince forces and broken bread with Gyanendra in New Delhi and those who have blood on their hands, may now seek to see the moral high ground by pretending solidarity with the people.

The establishment in New Delhi isolated the king, ignoring urgent appeals for military supplies to fight the Maoadhis and hatched conspiracies with those who have been waging a murderous and rapacious campaign of Red terror--simply because unlike his brother King Birendra, King Gyanendra is nobody's fool and endowed with sharp intelligence.

It has been looking in the wrong mirror. There is plenty for New Delhi to ponder over in the recent weeks of crisis. The seven-party alliance is also straining every nerve to persuade the Maoists to accept the parliamentary concept of government.

A protracted crisis could spark a humanitarian disaster. A constituent assembly is now the best way out of the impasse. A protracted crisis could spark a humanitarian disaster. A constituent assembly is now the best way out of the impasse.

Ruling on borrowed time


Ruling a poor and remote Himalayan kingdom sandwiched between giant China and India is always going to be difficult. So it is perhaps no surprise that King Gyanendra of Nepal has been consulting the stars to guide him during the recent months of crisis and protest. He has been looking in the wrong mirror. There is plenty for New Delhi to ponder over in the recent weeks of crisis.

A constituent assembly is now the best way out of the impasse. A protracted crisis could spark a humanitarian disaster. A constituent assembly is now the best way out of the impasse.

India's mumbling policy in Nepal

New Delhi's problem is that it opts for the least line of resistance

The Nepalis who put their eggs in the basket of the bullets to get power. At best, India was a sympathetic spectator.

A constituent assembly is now the best way out of the impasse. But the tough job is going to be the selection of members. No doubt, a free and fair election can throw up people's representatives. But how do you hold free and fair elections if the monarchy remains untouched and is now seen to be on the side of the king.

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Dirt ball time
Clay court specialists will slide all the way to the French Open finals

It's April, time for tennis on the red European clay. For eight years now, 1500meters and a ATP and a WTA have been grinding it out on the dirt. For the Spanish and South Americans, this is the surface they shine on. For the Americans, Aussies, Brits and many others, clay is a nightmare.

The clay court season climaxes with the French Open starting on 28 May. When all is said and done, two champions will be crowned at Roland Garros and their names inscribed on the trophy alongside such men's champs as Borg, Brugera, Kuerten and Courier, and on the women's side, Evert, Navratilova, Graf and Sanchez.

Why is playing on clay so difficult? The main reason is it slows the game drastically and neutralises power. You have to work hard to build a point and nothing comes easy. Longer rallies equal to more time on the court so fitness becomes a critical factor. Another challenge is footwork and movement. It is much more difficult to change direction on clay courts and the ability to slide to maximise reach becomes essential for survival. Players skilled at topspin, under spin and drop shots adapt to the surface much more easily. I truly believe that learning to play on clay courts helps you become a complete player.

This is the one surface where you have to good defensive and offensive skills, the ultimate challenge for players at any level.

Who will be the contenders at this year's French Open? In the men's field, Nadal and Federer are clear cut favourites and it would not surprise me one bit to see them play in the finals in Paris. Nadal has a dazzling 36 straight wins on clay going into this week's master's event in Monte Carlo. Federer has had his share of success on clay and is no stranger to the surface, having grown up on it in Switzerland. Unlike Pete Sampras, Federer will some day win this event but I am convinced that it will be this year. There will be plenty of challengers waiting. Among them Ferrer, Nalbandian, Gaudio and Coria will pose the biggest threats to Nadal and Federer.

On the women's side, Henin and Clijsters are the favourites. They move well, which is a huge advantage they have over heavy hitters like Sharapova, Davenport, Kuznetsova and Petrova. The health of these two Belgians will be an important story line to follow.

Africans get their kicks
But not everyone is cheering the success of these import footballers

MANOJ GHIMIRE

Be it the Martyrs' Memorial League in Kathmandu or big football tournaments outside the valley, African footballers ruled Nepali grounds wherever they played last year. They even raised doubts about the skills of Nepal's national team, holding it to a draw in a friendly match when the team was preparing for the AFC Challenge Cup.

Africans get their kicks
But not everyone is cheering the success of these import footballers

British Embassy - Kathmandu
The British Ambassador and Mrs Bloomfield are pleased to announce that this year's postponed Queen's Birthday Party will now be held on Friday 5 May at 1800. Please bring your invitations with you.
**Peace is on its way**

Villagers and female comrades are all weary of the war

**NARES HS NEWAR in DHADING**

There were 10,000 villagers who were gathered at Katuji in Dhading to listen to Maoist leaders on Wednesday morning and there were smiles all around.

This is part of a series of public meetings the Maoists are holding nationwide to express their position after King Gyanendra's restoration of parliament and the comrades seemed intent on selling peace to a war-weary population.

“We firmly believe that peace is on its way and there will be no more deception from the political parties,” said Pushpa Banskota, the Maoist’s former western regional chief as she applauded the meeting eight hours walk from the district headquarter.

The meeting took place just before the Maoists announced their three-month ceasefire. But it came too late for 13 guerrillas who were killed by the RNA in a skirmish on Tuesday west of here. Some of those killed were friends of Maoists here.

“We are not here to kill people,” says 21-year-old Yonge Lama from Thamel, who joined the Maoist army a year ago, “we all want to live peacefully with our families but that is not possible unless we all want to live peacefully with our war as the civilians. “I hope this will be the last day that I will be holding this gun,” says 15-year-old Anish who composes revolutionary songs, “all we want is that peace will return and the king will give up power,” says the 20-year-old, “I have seen so many of my friends die that I have lost all fear.”

Dhading villagers appear happy that an end to the conflict seems at last at hand with the ceasefire. And the comrades seem as weary of the war as the civilians. “I hope this will be the last day that I will be holding this gun,” says 15-year-old Anish who composes revolutionary songs, “all we want is that our vision for which we have been struggling the last 10 years is fulfilled.”

Sonu Lama joined the Maoists two years ago when she was barely 16. She put her gun aside and joined her friends in a dance that ridicules King Gyanendra. “I want to go to Kathmandu and tell a lot of people about our struggle,” says Sonu with a radiant smile.

The battle-hardened guerrillas are less sanguine about the future. “The UN should mediate,” says Ram Bahadur Bhandari, head of the “United Revolutionary Council” of Dhading, “if we have two armies with equal strength this war will just drag on.”

Adharsila, a medical worker with the Maoists is still sceptical. “It’s still hard to believe everything will be fine, that peace will return and the king will give up power,” says the 20-year-old. “I have seen so many of my friends die that I have lost all fear.”

Bhandari is even philosophical about it: “We are often seen as people who want to rule the country with guns but no one can go against the will of the masses.”

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**STAR GAZING**

Kedar S Badu

(42x267)28 APRIL - 4 MAY 2006

**Great celestial gathering**

Only Janaadolan-II can outshine the May sky

If you stay outside a few hours past sunset in May you will witness a sky that is moving into its summer phase. Rising from the eastern horizon about an hour after sunset is the brilliant star Vega, the first star of the Summer Triangle. Vega is 50 times brighter than the Sun and only 26 light years away so it beams strongly in our night sky. (See sky chart).

**Possibly the most fascinating of all celestial attractions is the passing Comet 73P/Schwassmann-Wachmann-3. Throughout May it will become prominent in our norther sky after midnight. In 1995, Comet 73P split into at least three minor comets' flying single file through space. Train your binoculars towards the constellations Cygnus and Pegasus on 12-14 May to locate it.**

Don’t miss the great celestial gathering of the crescent Moon, Saturn, Mars and the Beehive star cluster (M44) just above the western horizon on 31 May. Consider and compare the astounding distances of these celestial attractions-240,000 miles to the moon; 50,000,000 miles to Mars; 800,000,000 miles to Saturn and 3,400,000,000,000,000 miles to M44.

**Other May highlights:**

**Sun** The Sun is in the constellation of Aries at the start of May, moving into Taurus on the 14th.

**Moon** The Moon meets Saturn on the 3rd and Jupiter on the 11th, before coming close to Venus on the 24th. It passes just to the right of Mercury in a conjunction on the 27th and meets Saturn again on the 31st.

**Mercury** Mercury is behind the Sun on 14 May. By the end of the month it will be just above the western horizon after sunset but in the twilight it won’t be easy to see this elusive little planet.

**Venus** Venus is a brilliant morning star, visible low in the east at dawn, an hour before sunrise. After five months of flight, the European Space Agency’s Venus Express spacecraft has arrived at our cloud blanketed evil twin to scan its atmosphere and surface.

**Mars** Mars is moving rapidly eastward across the constellation of Gemini, below the twin stars, and towards Saturn. Mars is 20 degrees above the western horizon at sunset and sets close to 11:30 PM.

**Jupiter** The King of Planets, Jupiter reaches opposition on 4 May. However, it is at its brightest of the year and nearest to Earth one day later. Retrograding in Libra, it is out all night.

**Saturn** Saturn is moving slowly south-eastward in Cancer. It’s in the western sky after sunset, to the left of the Gemini Twin stars Castor and Pollux. Saturn looks like a bright star, brighter than the twin.

**Meteors** The Eta Aquarids peak on 5 May as the Earth passes through the centre of a debris trail left by Comet Halley in 1986. These showers appear to come from the constellation of Aquarius. At their peak, we may observe up to 30 ‘shooting-stars’ every hour.
EVENTS

- Pateli 26 Marjul solo, 28 April, 5:30 PM Nepali stage (opposite Patan CD office), Manoharan. Rs 500, 5552839
- A brief history of Nepal and three true stories with Cisco Flana, 28 April, 8AM at the Shankar Hotel. Non-members welcome.
- How to develop new products with Kathrina Bebe, training till 28th April. Fair Trade Group, Nepal. 554308
- World Book Day celebrations at the British Council, 23-24 April. 4410798
- World Press Freedom Day 3 May.
- Buddha Jayanti 13 May.
- International Day for Biological Diversity 22 May.
- Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival 2006, 7-10 December, calling for entries. Forms available at: www.himalassociation.org/kimff

MUSIC

- Heartbreakers live every Friday at Run Doodle Bar & Restaurant
- Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday and Saturday, 8PM at Upstairs Lajimpat.
- Live Music at New Delhi Café. 4700311
- Pakessa Night dance authentic Mughlai cuisine every Friday 7:30 PM at Far Pavilion Restaurant, The Everest Hotel. 4780100
- Reggae Night with various artists at Mokoko Live, 7:30 PM. 4526622
- Best of jazz JCS trio and friends. Niek’s Place, Tuesdays and Saturdays.
- Jatra Friday nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- Unplugged sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- Live Music at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l’Annapurna. Rs 1,600. 5552839

DINING

- BBQ every Friday at Jalan Jalan Restaurant. Kupondole Height. 5548472
- Beat the heat with milkshakes and smoothies at Hyatt Regency. 449234
- Cafe U for organic Japanese homecooking. Near International Club, Sanepa. 11AM-6PM. Closed on Tuesdays. 5524202
- Wet & Wild Summer Splash at Godavari Village Resort, a special package of swimming & lunch. 5560875
- Breakfast at Singma Restaurant. 8.30 – 11AM daily. 5520004
- Barbeque at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212
- BBQ Dinner at Summit Hotel every Friday. 6:30PM - 9:30PM. 5521810
- Breakfast with Birds Lunch with Butterfly at Farm House Cafe. 4372729

GETAWAYS

- Tea House-Inn, Nepalese Salads with Nepali Thali every Saturday at the terrace garden. Nagarkot. 668-0048
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, relaxation and massages in Pokhara. 4361000
- Junglewalks, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- Park Village, Budhanikhar, Full room Rs 1,600. 4372820
- Conferences at Godavari special packages available. 5560875
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4372820
- Star Cruises in April, take your companion at 50% discount. 2013245
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

ABOUT TOWN

- Kathmandu Valley

- BERRY FLOOR BELGIUM
  - The Wooden laminated flooring from Belgium
  - 10 years to 25 years Written Guarantee
  - Lifetime Guarantee on Berry Loc
  - Resistance to traction 550 kg, to 850 kg
  - Transferable as you wish upto 50 times

NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

The rains of the past two weeks have been abundant, and in the Valley the 100 mm of precipitation was double the quota for April. This latest satellite picture taken on Thursday afternoon shows the stirrings of the monsoon in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. The pre-monsoon showers are still driven by westernlies bringing moisture which rides along the Himalayan foothills. The monsoons are still more than a month away and these thunderstorms will continue with short sharp bursts of afternoon and night rain. Expect a partly cloudy conditions through the weekend with passing showers and moderate western winds.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

BBC Nepal (94.0) 5560598
BBC World Service (96.9) 5455689
BBC World Service (104.2) 5402000

Daily 2045-2115 on 102.4

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radio@sagarmathachannel.org, www.radiosagarmatha.org
OVERARCHING ALLIANCE: UML leader Madhab Nepal flanked by other members of the seven-party alliance at the residence of Girija Koirala before announcing the unanimous selection of Koirala for the post of prime minister on Tuesday.

REJECTED SLOGANS: Billboards with famous soundbites of King Gyanendra after they were toppled by demonstrators on Tuesday at Ratna Park.

AFTERMATH: Journalists covering the the big pro-democracy demonstration on Saturday return through rain-drenched streets littered with slippers in Thapathali.

As Bhikhshu T Sato chants the Lotus Sutra and softly beats a drum, he faces the massive wall and swaying bamboo groves that hide Narayanhiti Palace from view. In between chants, the Japanese monk has this to say: “You have to open your eyes and minds, the time is coming. Life here is unbalanced—few people have many things, and the majority of people are still poor.”

The resident monk at the Nipponzan Myohoji World Peace Pagoda in Lumbini came to Kathmandu two weeks ago. Sato and two other monks prayed at Boudha for four days, and after his colleagues returned he decided to stay feeling that this is an important time. “I believed that after four days something would change but it didn’t, that’s why I’m still fasting,” Sato says from his prayer mat where he has set up a small altar in one corner of the park at Nagpokhari.

The monk’s day of prayer starts at 5AM and ends at 6.30 PM, when he goes to the house of a nearby resident. He doesn’t eat or drink during the day and sips water only at night, a routine he plans to follow for 21 days. “We are very happy that a foreigner came here and is praying for the peace that Nepalis have been unable to create,” says the monk’s host Manoj Tamrakar.

Asked if he believes Sato can bring peace, Tamrakar says he prefers the monk’s approach to the ongoing street battles. “His steps will lead to peace, fighting among brothers will not,” Sato himself is clear about why he has to do this. “I’m Buddha’s disciple. I’m not political. Buddha teaches non-violence so I have to teach non-violence, this is my duty,” he says.

This afternoon, rain simmers on the surface of Nag Pokhari, a positive sign, according to Sato but few people are sitting on the benches surrounding the pond. On other days he has greeted numerous visitors. “Many people come to pray. They don’t know how to pray but they sit and namaste and automatically they feel something.”

Fifty metres away, two soldiers cradle M-16s and keep a vigil on the eastern wall of the palace. “They don’t say anything but they feel it too,” says Sato. “They are friendly people, they’re human beings. We’re all human beings, even the king is.”

Mary Logan
Declaring a state of urgency

For a country with the world’s most advanced calendar (we are 57 years ahead of our nearest rival) and a nation with the tallest bonsai on earth (at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Godavari) and a rejuvenated parliament with the oldest Young Turks (NC central committee members have to be at least 70 years of age to qualify for young turkhood) it is no wonder that we have more revolutions per minute than any other country.

The regime that was just changed told us a lot of lies. But it was right when it said one thing: that during its tenure there was complete freedom of speech. (It’s just that there was no freedom after speech.)

So, now that we have once more earned ourselves the right to be completely partisan, speak utter and absolute nonsense without fear of some draconian ordinance or other making its ugly presence felt, let me just say that this is not the time to be cynical and poke fun at the honourable members who have fought long and hard to revive the August House.

Some people are under the impression that the royal climbdown was triggered by pro-democracy protests on the streets. Um, not exactly. Actually it was pressure building up from the Kathmandu’s upper crust who were getting sick and tired of staying at home for three weeks without having their blackheads squeezed by professional beauticians. Others suffered severe withdrawal symptoms from not being able to frequent their favourite nightspots, and the strain was beginning to tell. Then there were those who couldn’t tear around town at breakneck speed in their Harley Davsons and enter discos with guns blazing. All these inconveniences were putting pressure for regime change.

Members of the council of ministers were also getting a tad impatient because they weren’t able to inaugurate any seminars and give speeches from the podium for over a month. Now that normalcy has been restored these activities can resume, and we have to extend a vote of thanks for all those who suffered prolonged disruptions in day-to-day lives. We wouldn’t be where we are today without their active support.

Finally, now that the king is ceremonial we’ll have to come up with a whole lot of ceremonies to keep him busy. But first, he needs to sack the royal astrologer.