The Maoist respond to ceasefire with offer of talks

NARESH NEWAR

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Their idea was to make sure that the political parties do not backtrack on their commitment to go through with the constituent assembly, which is a concern also of the Maoists. The parties have underlined their commitment to the 12-point roadmap, but there is a feeling among political activists that someone somewhere could put a spanner in the works.

Although the sight of the same old faces in the core cabinet drew jeers, its declaration of an indefinite ceasefire has raised hope across Nepal that this time it will lead to a restoration of peace and reconciliation. The news was greeted with even more jubilation than the restoration of parliament last week, and the hope is that it will not just provide relief to a long-suffering people but also create the atmosphere for future talks. The Maoists said Thursday they are now ready to begin negotiations.

However, all this is still tempered with worries that it may turn out like past ceasefires which were used as a tactic to regroup. Previous truces were also accompanied by an actual increase in extortion, abductions and intimidation by the Maoists which is also starting to happen now. The shooting of a prominent paediatrician on Thursday morning by suspected extortionists has cast doubts about the hold that the Maoist leadership has on its rank and file and a need for full monitoring of this ceasefire.

The whole world is watching Nepal as it enters a new chapter of democracy. This week has seen a flurry of visits by high-profile foreign delegations. The message from them is: the Maoists must renounce violence to join the mainstream and the international community is willing to resume development support.

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THE TESTING THE TRUCE

It took the seven party alliance nearly a week to cobble together a skeleton five-member cabinet. But the decisions it took at its first meeting were full of dodging and divisions. Unlike earlier truce calls since July 2004 (four in all) the latest overture from the government is backed by the people’s overwhelming yearning for peace. The regime and the rebels are bound by our 12-point understanding to make this ceasefire really work.

Lack of credible monitoring was the main reason past truces failed. It will be unrealistic to expect that no violation of ceasefire will occur in the coming weeks. In a conflict as widespread as this insurgency, lapses at the local level are bound to occur. But they must not be allowed to feed the war process.

Past ceasefires have also meant just an end to confrontations between the Nepali army and the Maoists. They have not prolonged their lives.

The aim of the movement, guerrillas, security of off-duty soldiers, mutually acceptable limits on expansion and arms procurement, and a moratorium on incendiary speeches are other pressing issues that need attention from the new cabinet.

Perhaps it’s a little easy to talk about demobilisation, rehabilitation or reintegration of guerrillas. But that goal needs to be kept on a light as long as a terrible ceasefire. A truce is too serious an issue to be left just to the government and the international community must immediately use their leverage to get the warring sides to use the present ceasefire for peace-building.

KUMAR SHRESTHA

How foreigners can
Listen to the people and maybe you’ll learn something.

P eople power. It dislodges dictators, autocrats, new even god-kings. It’s a glorious weapon. It is powerful and potential in action. The best we can be, or at least, the best a large group has full of emotion and fire.

Now the land lies quiet and the work of remaking Nepal in earnest has begun. People power has gone back to, well, school.

KITCHENS AND OFFICES, WHERE ITS DAILY LIFE EXISTS. NO BARRIERS FOR THESE brave soldiers. The hardest work of all though lies ahead and it’s helpful to keep in mind these examples from elsewhere about peace building, entrenching democracy, inclusion and justice.

One of the main reasons that Truth and reconciliation commission offers an obvious model for Nepal is to start addressing the rampart carnage that Maoists and security forces have inflicted on the countryside. Especially the latter which behaved abominably from the late 1990s onwards, murdering thousands of innocent people, raping, stealing and thus provoking large numbers of alienated people to Maoist ranks.

The guerrillas and their cold blooded ideologues can’t escape scrutiny either, nor the process of justice. There were reason to criticise the Maoists that had nothing to do with any People’s War. Journalist Gaurav Shakya points out the execution in 2003 comes to mind. For a start, I’d like to see arrests in every case for which a politician or party officer was convicted for a brutal act by a regional commander or underling. Just for a start.

And reconciliation also means forgiveness and both sides will have to study South Africa and Northern Ireland for examples of how this helped heal badly damaged societies. What’s crucial is the transparency of the investigation process and that accused people tell the truth to their victims’ families. If they don’t, they should be punished. If they do, then let them ask for mercy and let that mercy be respected, in the name of national healing.

Sri Lanka provides both good and bad examples for a ransacked peace process. Not that the Maoists bear any resemblance to the Tamil Tigers, or the RNA to the Sri Lankan military. Both are far more battle hardened and well financed. The current disarmament in the peace process tells us of the importance of transparency, countersmeasures and it’s ready to play this role, involved, at the front fore, yet consultation with the friend of Nepal among many.

We need to reign in the aid of democritization, ceasefires and monitoring when armed conflict does stop. This will require a broad international understanding of just a single do-good country that shuts other interested parties out of the peace process.

In East Timor, the United Nations and regional powers like Australia backed the transition from rebellious colony to independent state by providing buffer zones to reconcile, Indonesia, in particular, was gaining through political turmoil and had far-sighted enough leaders to reject the notion that an ultra-nationalist response in Timor must entrench Jakarta’s power. Instead, they planned along with the peace process.

Now India bears no real resemblance to Indonesia at the time of Timor crisis, nor was Nepal its errant colony. But let’s face it, India has powerful and reliable armed forces, and will back political and geo-strategic. To deny that would be blitheness and folly. So India needs to be intimately involved in the making of the new Nepal, yet counterbalanced by international and regional powers like India and even god-kings. It’s a matter for us to decide.

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KRISHNA PKoirala, email

The Nepali people want the politicians to promise that they won’t repeat their mistakes. Why isn’t everyone making the same argument? It makes me want to cry.

The same old faces, same old attitudes, everything looks the same. What is going on? A few weeks ago, Chitralekha Yadav had said she has proved she’s in abundance? And will our politicians ever learn about gender equality? I strongly recommend that Chitralekha Yadav be chosen speaker of the house.

Subhadra Beilwa, Kirtipur

Everybody outside Nepal thinks the country got freedom and democracy. What I recall is that MP GK Koirala ruled 80 percent of the time during the so-called democracy from 1990 to 2002. He practically ruined the country’s industry, lead the national flag campaign without any contribution from the government to decay, his relatives became powerful and his daughter a minister. He even changed his name. Finally when the king decided to take power, Gejra raised hell in the name of democracy! Is democracy equivalent to a political party or does it include the people? Our case proves the theory that democracy, instead of rule for the people by the people, is in reality the rule of leaders rich in financial and muscle power, and of course foreign power. I would request Nepal Times to refresh our memories. Those letters and political events before the king took over. Was it the king’s choice? The country’s or some option given by the so-called ‘democratic leaders’? You would do us a favour by reminding the self-proclaimed democrats that if the janata can’t forgive the king they will not forgive the leaders for mistakes committed twice.

Rahul Shrestha, by email

‘Letters’ have always been my favourite part of Friday morning reading of Nepal Times but when I read a few that had pre-king anti-kalomati sentiments I got rather surprised and angered. But after having read the entire issue (15 pages) I came to the conclusion that this is a loktantantrik space, a microcosm where remarks like ‘Loktanka is not for the people’ from J Thapa and ‘This country can’t be weighed in the balance of the King...Long live the King’ from Name Withheld would not be censored. Those letters and people who feel that the people’s movement was nothing but

For more details see the full article online at www.nepaltimes.com

LETTERS
help

agencies who’ve left this new period as yet another opportunity to convince their home governments to show them what they’re supposed to do. This is a recipe that won’t leave the Kathmandu valley and the usual circle of suspect advisors. There’s enough expertise among civil society in Nepal, which includes those who work in the aid and NGO sectors, to tell the donors what is needed and who it is to be given to. If the foreigners want democracy, they should behave democratically. Cambodia in the 1990s is a case in point of aid agencies and the UN run amok, with disastrous effects on the local economy and polity.

Military assistance from abroad is both essential and part of the picture. Here India will want to restore its links to the RNA but they must be patient. So must Washington but we’re not dealing with reasonable people in the US government these days. We must rely on the likes of Human Rights Watch and Senator Patrick Leahy, feeling them with plenty of information, to keep tabs on the Pentagon and the State Department.

If there’s an underlying point here, it’s that the people have spoken. Nepal has asserted sovereignty and a long silenced voice in their own affairs. They need information, support and resources to solidify their victory. But mostly, they need the respect of the international community that’s about to come pouring into Nepal to try to win the peace.

Listen to the people and maybe you’ll learn something. Do what they want, which is return to a democracy without consultation and you’ll fail, yet again.

Sameecha Jhangad, Jhapa

POLITICAL PLAYERS PLAYING PUPPET WITH THE PEOPLE

The political players are playing puppet with the people undermine the feelings and values of thousands of people who took to the streets, defied curfew, risked their lives and kept hope alive despite having no political affiliation. I fought for loktantra, was jailed and now I live in a budding loktantra. I am also aware of the long and arduous road ahead but I believe that I will not be suppressed for having an opinion. Please do not withhold my name.

Sanmeecha Jhangad, Jhapa

BLOG

Malika Aryal’s informative and concise highlights Nepali blogs’ role in providing an invaluable alternative news angle to the outside world. Aryal also rightly suggested problems around access and online credibility. But there are deeper issues for Nepali bloggers that seem to affect off-line problems. Nepali blogs, like offline media, are not havens of complete free speech. Comments are moderated by bloggers and self-censorship is in place, as Dinesh Wagle of UWB has admitted (there are certain topics he refused to post on). More important, reasoned debate is very hard to find. Most comment boxes are filled with repetitive and intensely personal attacks against all political leaders and fellow commentators. Anonymous comment box posting seems to encourage a strong and aggressive online attacks. Worse, many blogs develop their own online orthodoxy. Blogöt’s site, for example, appears to reinforce like-minded readers and chase away any alternative views. This all sounds negative but hopefully recent developments in democracy offline can be matched in greater democratic debate and self-reflection across the Nepali blogsphere.

James Sharrock, Kilburn, London, U.K.

PAPER CROWN

Congratulations for the front-page picture (‘Paper crown’, #295). This time, it’s really ‘under your hat’!

Anonymous, by email

Purple rhodoendron revolution

Mixing the red of the left with blue of the centre against the yellow of the right

perplexed by the intensity and impact of the Second People’s Movement Nepal’s international mediators have been lining up to visit Nepal. They may still be uneasy with the six-point roadmap of the seven party alliance and their 12-point understanding with the Maoists but the parties have for now been given the benefit of doubt.

After the success of the Kathmandu Spring slips and donors grudgingly accept that the insufferable parliamentary party leadership do a serviceable job.

Contrary to the fears of widespread violence, the civil disobedience movement was characteristically peaceful. And despite doubts about their ability to guide and control the agitation, party leaders were able to move the movement from an orderly manner as soon as their main demand, reinstatement of lower house of parliament, was met by a reluctant monarch.

The movement may have looked unplanned but it wasn’t as chaotic as everyone feared. Nearly everyday, millions poured out into the streets all over the country for three weeks but not a single shop window was broken by agitators anywhere even though some government buildings were vandalised. Protestors face batons, tear gas, rubber bullets and live ammunition but not a shot was fired in self-defence from the streets. Studious in urban uprisings show that crowds of over 50,000 inevitably descended into lawlessness resulting in arson, looting and brutal killings.

In Kathmandu, more than half a million protestors marched past army barricades defying shoot-to-kill curfews but the multitudes maintained restraint in the face of provocation. This was the first-of-its kind political upheaval involving widest possible cross-section of population. Is this the way oppositional politics will unfold in the twenty-first century? It seems the world wants to know and is willing to see Nepal without Cold War blinkers for the first time since the Maoist insurgency began a decade ago.

Even hard-boiled Marxist firebreathers in India seem to be fascinated by the success of Nepal’s Purple Rhododenron Revolution. CPR-M leader Sitaram Yechury graced the VIP visitor’s box of the inaugural session of the reinstated parliament. Richard Boucher, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs paid a much-publicized visit soon after. Norwegian Minister for Development Erik Solheim was here this week.

Apart from high-profile visitors, hordes of policy wonks and highbrow journalists have been camping in the city to know more about the chemistry between Maoists and the party, their usual refrain being will the fragile bilateral ceasefire hold? Nobody knows for sure, but we hope that it does. This country has tried several for Development Erik Solheim was here this week.

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Megawealth
How to turn falling water into wealth

The ongoing bloody insurgency might have been avoided ten years ago if someone could have given Prachanda and Baburam a pocket calculator and a map. Here’s some number crunching. The surface area of Nepal is 140,800 km². Arable land covers 16.07 percent which is 22,627 extorsionate would-be revolutionaries who oppose private stable, security can be provided in the countryside, and the Such investment will not be possible unless Nepal is politically governments, multilateral organisation and private businessmen. Nepal has passed its carrying capacity as an agrarian society. There is only one practical solution: it must have a realistic plan to be redistributed. Developing hydropower in Nepal would create (PTC) India Ltd for the 750 MW West Seti hydropower project. Nepal is a key player for solving India’s energy problem. Of 20,000 MW. Within the next 10 years India will need an equivalent to putting a 25 Watt light bulb in every house on Planet Earth and there would still be power left over. The market is just next door. Right now the adjacent States of India have a short-fall of 20,000 MW. Within the next 10 years India will need an additional 100,000 MW of installed capacity to grow economically. Nepal is a key player for solving India’s energy problem.

Harnessing Nepal’s hydroelectric potential will be capital There is not a fixed amount of wealth in the world that needs to be redistributed. Developing hydropower in Nepal would create wealth. This would not only benefit Nepal but the rest of the economies of South Asia. Harnessing Nepal’s hydroelectric potential will be capital intensive and the Nepalese would require upstream support from foreign governments, multilateral organisation and private businessmen. Such investment is not possible unless Nepal is politically stable, security can be provided in the agrarian countryside, and the government is favourable to investors. An atmosphere for transformative investment will not be possible while Nepal is suffering an insurgency being led by extorionate would-be revolutionaries who oppose private capitalism and foreign business. 

How is Nepal going to find the hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars necessary to achieve this goal? Currently, the only known resource for doing this is Nepal’s huge undeveloped hydropower potential. A common national goal accepted by all would undermine the apparent support for the insurgency. Theoretically it is technically and economically feasible to develop about 43,000 MW of hydropower. All of Nepal could be electrified with up to 5,000 MW. The remaining power would be equivalent to putting a 25 Watt light bulb in every house on Planet Earth and there would still be power left over. The market is just next door. Right now the adjacent States of India have a short-fall of 20,000 MW. Within the next 10 years India will need an additional 100,000 MW of installed capacity to grow economically. Nepal is a key player for solving India’s energy problem.

The Snowy Mountains Engineering Company (SMEC), have been negotiating power sales with the Power Trading Corporation (PTC) India Ltd for the 750 MW West Seti hydropower project. When this project is online the annual royalties alone would be about $20 million. Of this money the Local Self-Governance Regulation stipulates 10% go to DDC who is this? There is not a fixed amount of wealth in the world that needs to be redistributed. Developing hydropower in Nepal would create wealth. This would not only benefit Nepal but the rest of the economies of South Asia. Harnessing Nepal’s hydroelectric potential will be capital intensive and the Nepalese would require upstream support from foreign governments, multilateral organisation and private businessmen. Such investment is not possible unless Nepal is politically stable, security can be provided in the agrarian countryside, and the government is favourable to investors. An atmosphere for transformative investment will not be possible while Nepal is suffering an insurgency being led by extorionate would-be revolutionaries who oppose private capitalism and foreign business.

Dr Steve Gorzula worked in the Department of Electricity Development from 1998-2004 for USAID’s Private Sector Hydropower Development Project.

The west is hungry
Just as the political crisis cools down word of a serious food shortage in the Karnali

T he rains of the past weeks may have given Kathmandu respite from load-shedding and a false sense of hope that the long drought is finally over. But nearly six-months without rain from October to March has devastated farming in western Nepal and the full impact is only now becoming apparent. The arid Karnali Zone, which includes Humla, Mugu, Kalikot, Dolpa and Jumla used to be a food deficit area even in the best of times. But the conflict and the drought has made the situation much worse than most can remember. “Many people have already run out of their food stocks and are now eating herbs and roots to survive,” says Chandu B Shahi, MP from Mugu from where he recently arrived in the capital to take his oath of office. Farmers across western Nepal couldn’t plant their barley and wheat and where they did, the plants just withered away. Early warning of the crisis had already been flashed in March in a food and nutrition survey conducted by the French INGO, Action Contre La Faim (ACF), also known as Action Against Hunger.

The food crisis is said to be especially serious in southern Humla, north of Kalikot, the southern belt of Mugu and Dolpa. In Humla the situation is so bad that the Maoists have allowed their ‘wholetimers’ to return to their families to find food for their families. “We don’t want to sound too alarmist but the food crisis is already widespread in these districts,” says Minerve Senacoura, Oxfam. Farmers have also exhausted all their coping mechanisms, livestock is facing danger from lack of grazing and even if villagers get money from relatives in India there is no food to buy.

Confidential documents made available to Nepali Times of a crisis meeting of food organisations and donors on 13 April drew attention to the seriousness of the situation and noted ‘time is running out’. But no action has been taken so far. The crisis was also eclipsed by news of the political upheaval in Katmandu and other cities. “There is no time to lose and now donor agencies need to mobilise their resources to increase the supply of rice and other food grains as quickly as possible,” says Rick van Keulen from the Dutch development agency SNV. During his trip to Humla in March, he was shocked to see that wheat plants had barely grown 5-10 cm instead of the usual half-metre. Most of the farms had not even bothered to sow seeds. The Ministry of Local Development (MLD) has been flying in rice from Nepalgunj and Pokhara to Jumla and Simikot. But these airlifts are limited to the district headquarters. “The poorest villagers have to walk for five days to get 5 kg of rice and they never get them,” explains Shahi. The Royal regime had till last month stopped food supplies fearing it would get into the hands of the Maoists. Estimates of people affected is hard to come by but aid agencies and local officials say in Mugu alone, about 18,000 villagers from 10 VDCs are severely affected. The UN’s World Food Programme with support from FAO and SDC have sent assessment teams to seven food deficit districts of Karnali and will present their findings in 10 days. “We are starting to have a contingency plan for a possible or potential response,” said acting WFP country director FP Mugerini. Some relief organisations say the situation is so serious that sending rice to the towns is not enough, food now has to be dropped from helicopters directly into affected VDCs.
Tourism tops

The Nepal Tourism Board has bagged a top prize from the Pacific Asia Travel Association. NTO’s promotional cd on Nepal won the Gold Award in the category from among more than 500 entries. Shikhar Prasai, honorary secretary of the NTO chapter of PATO and director of Natraj Tours, was named the Face of the Future as an exceptional young tourism professional and PATO Nepal was awarded the Award of Excellence from among more than 45 chapters worldwide for its continued effort in promoting Nepal even while the country was facing a crisis. Meanwhile, the NTOA Chapter of Tourism and Travel Agents has sent letters to various diplomatic missions in Kathmandu asking them to remove travel advisories that discourage their nationals from visiting Nepal and asked to issue announcements stating that the country is now a safe destination.

Overseas work

The number of people leaving Nepal for jobs surged by 44.5 percent during the first nine months of the current fiscal year compared to the same period last year, according to the Department of Labour and Employment Promotion. Topping the list were destination countries was Malaysia, which accepted 65,216 workers, versus 45,569 in the same period last year. Next came Gulf countries Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In all, 138,131 people left the country to take up jobs abroad between mid-July 2005 and mid-April 2006, compared to 93,942 for the similar period last fiscal year. The number of women going abroad for work more than doubled, increasing by 110 percent.

NEW PRODUCTS

GORKHA BEER: Gorkha Brewery, makers of Carlsberg, Tabung, and Sam Miguel beers in Nepal have launched their proposed flagship brand, Gorkha Beer. Brewed in Nepal using the finest hop, pure water and barley malt, it is available in 650-ml amber bottles and has an alcohol content of 5.5 percent. Gorkha Beer is available in select outlets and there are plans to export it to various Asian and European countries.

KELON FRIDGE: Prime Trading House has introduced Kelon brand fridges and chest freezers in the Nepali market. Made in the US, the appliances are available in various models in the Kathmandu Valley.

BABY DIAPERS: Jasmine Hygiene Products, part of the Sharada Group, have launched the Gold Diapers Pad and Cuddlers Diapers. Manufactured using the latest technology, the diapers are 100 percent chlorine free and available in three sizes. Cuddlers Diapers cost Rs 180 for a packet of 10 while the Cuddlers Diaper Pad is priced at Rs 100 for 10.

Democracy 2.0

It’s time to end groupthink, nourish small parties

The head of Nepal’s UN Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OCHCR), Ian Martin, spoke to Nepal Times on how the UN can act beyond its fixed mandate towards the new political developments in Nepal.

Nepali Times: The role of the UN seems to be more challenging now.

Ian Martin: There are clearly a number of areas that the UN could assist if asked to do so beyond our human rights mandate, humanitarian and development but that is not so much for the UN to propose. That is up to the government and their negotiations with the Maoists what they are looking for. The assets we have got in the past year include effective engagement for Maoists at different levels and also include the security forces whom we criticised and we have a respectful relationship with both. The security forces are interested in the UN’s opinion of them. The political parties have also appreciated our role in this movement as we visited most of them in detention. So I think we have opportunities through those relationships to play a constructive role in trying to make sure that tensions among them are kept under control.

Do you think that the ceasefire this time will last?

Ian Martin: That is not just a military ceasefire but that civilians have nothing to fear. There needs to be a clear discussion on what those modalities for the ceasefire are going to be, has to be properly negotiated and what kind of monitoring goes with whatever agreement is reached. The ceasefire has a military aspect and you have to be sure that the PLA and PLA are not going to attack each other. Once the ceasefire is agreed, the real risk is tensions among the different sectors of the population before there is an opportunity to establish strong democratic local government.

Transitional justice seems to be a buzzword today

Our presence has significant effect on the actors in terms of degree of deterrence in terms of committing violations but we haven’t seen any satisfactory progress towards accountability in ensuring that those who are committed abuses are effectively investigated and brought to justice.

There is clearly a strong demand in many sectors of the population, which is focusing initially on recent deaths and injuries but already people are looking beyond that to clarify the fate of long term disappeared and much broader question to impunity and responsibility for human rights abuses for now. It is important for the political process to tell the Nepali what it should do in those areas, but what we do can be made international experience available so that political and civil society actors decision what they want to do can have access to our experience.

Maoist leaders have told us that they are open about a new national army and ready to join if its formed and that they trust only the UN to help in that. But let us not be naive about how difficult this process is going to be.

民主的2.0

该是结束集体思维的时候了，滋养小党

尼泊尔时报：联合国的角色似乎变得更加具有挑战性。

伊恩·马丁：目前，虽然尼泊尔的环境存在挑战，但联合国并不需要提出自己的建议，而是应该根据政府与毛派的谈判来回应。我们拥有与政府和毛派的不同水平的资产，并且还拥有安全人员，他们在我们批评他们时，仍然与我们保持尊重的关系。安全人员对我们有关尼泊尔的意见感兴趣。

你认为这次停火会持续吗？

伊恩·马丁：这不仅仅是军事停火，而且普通百姓也不必担忧。我们需要进行清晰的讨论，以达成关于停火的协议，确保其充分谈判并进行适当的监测。停火协议具有军事性质，必须确保人民解放军(People's Liberation Army, PLA)和尼泊尔人民解放军(Nepal People's Liberation Army, NPA)不会互相攻击。

一旦停火得到协议，真正的风险将是不同群体之间的紧张局势。在建立强有力民主地方政府之前，需要有建立这种地方政府的机会。

过渡性司法似乎是一个热门话题

我们存在的作用对涉及者具有重大影响，能够在一定程度上阻止犯罪行为，但是我们没有看到令人满意的进程，以确保那些被指控的人员受到有效调查并受到司法制裁。

目前，普通民众对许多领域的强烈需求，对某些政治群体群体有特定影响，他们正在密切关注最近的死亡和受伤案件，但已经有人在考虑更广泛的问题，即对长期失踪人员的死亡和消失的问题。
Mission accomplished

Dhruba Simkhada in Himal Khabarpatrika, 14 May

For four years, the president of the NC Girija Koirala had just one demand: restoration of parliament. His party went to the supreme court, but it didn’t listen and nor did the king. In the beginning, only the NWP and the NSP (Anandadebi) supported him. Halfway through the process, the NC-D and the UML abandoned the house restoration demand and joined the king, saying ‘repression has been corrected’. It is not just because he is the senior-most leader that the seven party alliance unanimously voted Koirala for prime ministership this time. “If the NC had also gone and joined the king we wouldn’t have seen a return to democracy for another 30 years,” says Baldeb Sharma Magalaya of the NC.

So the 84-year-old leader stuck stubbornly to his demand. Many said Koirala’s demand will never be fulfilled but he never gave up. In fact, every opportunity he got, he advised the king repeatedly not to violate the constitution. He said once: “If I slip, I will go and live in Biratnagar but if His Majesty slips just once it will be his last slip-up.”

Although he was hounded by the king, it was from his own protégé, Sher Bahadur Deuba, that he never got any support. The party split over the question of whether or not to extend the state of emergency. The party said no, but Deuba was then prime minister refused and without consulting his party colleagues he dissolved parliament on the night of 22 May 2002. The party expelled Deuba and he set up his own NC-D.

The leader who dissolved parliament has been single-mindedly focussed on restoring the house that was dissolved that night. When the king took over complete power on 1 February 2005 Koirala said: “The last struggle of my life is going to be the struggle to restore democracy so that future generations will not have to keep fighting for it. All I want is a democracy that no one can take away from the people again. Then I will rest.”

Sociologist Max Weber used to say there are three kinds of leaders: traditional, charismatic and legal. Koirala is a third kind, he is a ‘leader of continuity’. And that is why at this juncture in history, Koirala has the support of the Maoists, the international community, other parties, civil society and even the king. To be sure, Koirala has his kinks. He has made a lot of mistakes in the past 12 years, and even his own colleagues in the party are critical of him. He pushed a majority government through a needless mid-term poll to a minority, he refused the supreme court verdict on Tarakpur, he refused to let his own colleague Krishna Prasad Bhattarai remain as prime minister, and as president of the party he failed to keep it united. And then this week he sacked Taranath Ranabhat as speaker even though the man had served as speaker for four years while parliament was in limbo. The public perception of Koirala who has now become prime minister for the fourth time is still not very positive. Despite all this, what Koirala will now be remembered for is his tenacity that forced the king to give in to the will of the people. Finally, parliament was restored last week. But even though he doesn’t want future generations of Nepalis to have to keep on struggling for democracy, the process is still fraught with challenges. Foremost among them is the implementation of the 12-point agreement with the Maoists along the lines of the people’s movement.

What unity?

Gistana Na Rijhar, 3 - 9 May

Delay in forming the cabinet due to squabbling within the seven parties has made a mockery of the democratic aspirations of the people’s movement. After hearing the atrocities of 14 months of the king’s autocratic rule, the people expected their leaders to be united but were let down. No one has been willing to sacrifice positions and show generosity. The CPN-UML, currently the largest party in parliament after the division of the Nepali Congress, surprised everyone with its behaviour. Had Maoist leaders and others from the seven-party alliance not interfered, bickering within the CPN-UML have continued. In the reinstated parliament, leaders seem to be in a fix about how to take political decisions: whether to abide by the constitution or respect the demands of the people’s movement. Parliament itself was created by the 1990 constitution and owns all its powers to the same. Thus there is compulsion to follow its rules at the same time that pressure is being applied by the movement. During the king’s rule, decisions would sometimes be based on the spirit of the constitution and at other times on the sole whims of the king. Now the people have taken the place of the king, so the parties are compelled to work according to their desires as well as in line with the constitution. While this confusion might be understandable, fighting among the leaders at this early stage is deplorable. From the beginning they were unable to come together. Nepali Congress President Girija Prasad Koirala did not really want to become the prime minister, he had hoped the CPN-UML’sMadhav Kumar Nepal or some other leader would take the job. But the CPN-UML was the only party that agreed to this alternative. As a result, Nepal, who wanted to become prime minister, had to propose Koirala’s name for the post. As prime minister, Koirala will have to bear responsibility for the government so it was natural that he want edo keep the prime posts for the NC. But the CPN-UML, dissatisfied and demanded the ministries of Home, Communications, Foreign Relations, Local Development, Water Resources and Finance. Their reasoning was: “We are the largest party in parliament and most of the movement’s martyrs were from our party.” When the Maoists got wind of this they argued that their party had an equal hand in the movement and
suggested that if the UML really cared for the people they must be able to work from outside the government. On Monday, the UML informed the NC leadership that it would support the UML if the NC leadership would agree to call and urged the UML to join the government under any circumstances. The UML was unable to ignore the call and eventually agreed.

Unconditionally

Krishna Pahadi in
Kantipur, 2 May

There were three main reasons for the April uprising. First, when the people saw that the parties and Maoists had come to an agreement via the 12-point pact, they understood there was still hope that the Maoists would give up arms and take the peaceful way out. Secondly, anger was growing towards the royalty after the king took direct power and, thirdly, the state started suppressing the non-violent movement with force and torture. To encourage the Maoists to give up arms, we need to move towards an unconditional constituent assembly without delay. The word ‘unconditional’ is needed because in Nepal leaders are not known for putting their words into actions. We are certain that via a constituent assembly the majority would vote for a democratic republic so that the monarchy, like an epidemic, will forever be eradicated. If such action is not taken, those who were responsible for suppressing the movement this time will soon organise under the king’s leadership again. To ask for a constitutional monarchy will be a betrayal to the martyrs. The main responsibility of this government is to hold peaceful demonstrations as soon as possible. To use it for an inclusive government the new interim minister should be women, dalits, mahas and indigenous people. The 12-point agreement already touches on human rights and freedom but the state should be representative of social justice. The new constitution should reflect the feelings of the people’s movement, which was the ideal example of a non-violent movement and a lesson to the rest of the world. We, the members of civil society, are not interested in power. To suggest that we become ministers is to offend us. We are here to make people stronger, ensure permanent peace, protect human rights and to strengthen the culture of democracy. We will continue our movement without self-interest for many years to come.

Unconditionally

Kantipur, 2 May

..continued on next page..

We believe in equal opportunities and particularly welcome applications from disadvantage groups. Please submit applications in writing by email (application should clearly mention the position applied for and should include a motivation letter of 1 page describing why you are suitable and a table for the position described above, and a full resume/cv and sizes to: Email: vosegal@yosamail.org

Deadline for the completed applications:
May 10th 2006 for Programme Support Manager
May 31st 2006 for Regional Finance Officer
Telephone enquiries will not be entertained.
When the going got tough for trekkers during Nepal’s democracy spring, the tough, the committed (and those with non-changeable, non-refundable flight tickets to Pokhara) got creative.

Outside the Khumbu, trekkers and climbers had few choices but to wait it out in Kathmandu or Pokhara, pay an exorbitant amount of money to helicopter to Besi Sahar or do it the old fashioned way—walk to the trailhead.

While the Khumbu continued to be serviced by regular flights (bad weather and a short pilots’ strike aside) getting onto the Annapurna circuit was another story. My own trekking group was luckily able to roll out of Kathmandu on 4 April, a day before our scheduled start date, and beat the strike. With security forces this time as they were not commandeered by the last People’s Movement in geographical centre of Nepal after the last People’s Movement in 1990 and although his premises from people uncertain of what the next few days would bring. Among those hundreds of sets of feet were those of trekking porters embarking on the four-day walk back to Kathmandu—a sobering sight.

There was, however, enough fuel for my group to cook 30 meals a day and then we headed off to Besi Sahar for our final night on the trail. The following day we walked 12 km into Pokhara to the sounds of hundreds of feet on hot asphalt and the hubbub of conversation from people uncertain of what the next few days would bring.

Back in Pokhara checking email, I fully expected to see my in-box filled with cancellations for my October trips. Not so. I will be back.

There’s always one bad apple

Many trekkers devoted extra time and energy not only to the trek but also to helping out local communities.

TREKKING IN TIMES OF TROUBLE: Trekking tents in Manang, after they braved the strikes and altitude to get behind the Annapurnas (left). Stopping for lunch at Nar Phu Valley. But by the time they got down to Pokhara on 23 April, the city was shut down.

From talking with fellow trekkers it was evident that their efforts to get onto the trail were a measure of support for the Nepali people. Not scared off by travel warnings and prepared to walk an extra three days to see some of the most beautiful mountains on earth our way of saying we won’t give up on this country.

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There’s always one bad apple

During the strike, trekking guide Purna Bahadur Thapa Magar got a last-minute request from a friend to guide a lone client from Australia. He wishes he had said no. Here is his story:

“We went to the Everest region to avoid any strike-related problems. From the beginning this man had a threatening, superior attitude. When I explained the need to go slowly because of the high altitude or to respect local cultures he didn’t pay any attention. He said ‘I’m your boss and you are my porter, I’ll decide where we go. He walked 9-10 hours a day. When I told him that I couldn’t walk for so long because of my load he said I could leave if I wanted. Since we were at Gorak Shep I said he would have to pay half my salary. He refused, even after I begged. I had a return ticket and some money so luckily I was able to make it home, after a long walk.”
Tourist attraction
Kathmandu Spring has actually improved Nepal’s image as a tourist destination.

For the tourists stuck in Kathmandu in April it was hardly what they had planned for a holiday in the Himalaya. Locked inside their hotels, unable to see the natural Nepal sold to them many left within the first few days of the beginning of the People’s Movement while those who had already booked flight tickets and hotel rooms cancelled their slots. But there were tourists who not just stayed back, but staged pro-democracy demonstrations and even briefly got themselves arrested. Now, that should be something to write home about.

Johannis Jappen, a German tourist who has been visiting Nepal since 1998 remembers sitting for breakfast in Thamel trying like everyone else to figure out what was going to happen next. He remembers discussing with other tourists the consequences of them joining in the protest. The next thing he knew a waiter came and said, “Have you heard, tourists are going to join in the protests.” That night Johannis went back to his hotel and with the management’s permission wrote pro-democracy slogans on pieces of bed sheet provided for by the hotel.

“It was spontaneous, word had already spread among tourists here,” he recalls. The next day, 11 April, several dozen tourists gathered in Thamel Chok, with slogans like ‘Loktantra Jindabaad’ written on pieces of bedsheets. As they expressed their solidarity with the people of Nepal in the rain drenched streets of Thamel many locals cheered and clapped them on.

Because of the proximity to the royal palace, the riot police was edgy. Pretty soon they were charging with canes raised. Four Germans, three English, one Russian and one Israeli were arrested. They were all taken to the police station in Sorakhutte. “I have no complaints about the treatment,” recalls Johannis. Four hours later, their respective embassies arrived in blue plates and took them back to their hotels.

On the worst day of the curfew, there were Spanish and Israeli tourists who had arrived on a flight from Bangkok. Asked if they were not deterred, they said they came to see democracy in action. Tour agents in Kathmandu have reported queries from individual travellers who suddenly want to visit the country where people power triumphed.

Johannis and others defied the curfews even more from the next day, going out taking pictures including a rare photographic evidence of police removing three protesters shot dead in Kalanki and tossed in the back of a van.

(See: www.himalkhabar.com)
No easy struggle

The Dalit movement can’t let internal rifts distract it

The recent incident of a Dalit woman being barred by her neighbours (see: ‘Water for all’, #291) from using a village water tap on the outskirts of the capital proves that untouchability remains an entrenched social crime. That is why the first edition of a book on the country’s Dalit movement is both timely and frustrating. Although the Nepal Daily Social Movement describes in the afterglow of 1980’s democratic revolution, it’s likely the scene has changed completely in the past six years so it would have been useful to hear the latest. Yet in the Preface, author Yash Bahadur Kisan’s argues: “Adding new content to reflect these changes would have entailed writing an entirely different book.”

This, that book, published by the Legal Rights Protection Society Nepal with support from Danida, is a readable introduction both to the origins of the caste system in India and to the inner workings of the anti-discrimination movement here that simply hardly seemed unified enough to deserve the ‘movement’ label of the title.

To a neophyte, the abundance of material is through struggle, struggle and more struggle’.

At times the text reads as if Kisan is listing promises outlined in the groups’ constitutions or position papers. What would be more interesting is his own evaluation of the main body’s activities and a description of trends within the movement over the years. Admittedly, the book has been compiled as a text for readers that is irrelevant—they just want a fulfilling read.

Bharat Bishwakarma is not ashamed of his roots, but he wants to be free to define them

Kisan argues that no government before or since 1854 has championed an end to the caste system, not even the democratic ones. And despite prohibitions against untouchability in both the Constitution and the revised Mulki Ain whose provisions are cancelled out by reference to the sanctity of religious acts, ‘The ruling class… appears as yet psychologically ready to accept changes in the caste system because of the ayodhya issue.’

That is one reason for the proliferation of organisations created to erase the caste system, described in the final five chapters of the book. This is also where the weaknesses of The Nepal Dalit Social Movement begin to show. Primarily, the author has no basis or vision of the organisations themselves to describe their positions and activities rather than an unstructured collection of texts.

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Yet Kisan does not say that Kisan is not critical of the movement and its leaders, he doesn’t hesitate to point out flaws and offer his own recipe for success. For the movement to succeed, Kisan concludes, it will require more acts like 1954’s forcing open the doors of Pashupatinath to Dalits. Law, says Kisan, will ultimately triumph over the caste system through unification and struggle… (but) the most important means for Nepali Dalits to achieve their freedom is through struggle, struggle and more struggle.”

As an activist in the 1990 democratic spring, Bharat Bishwakarma remembers how the euphoria of freedom slowly ebbed as his friends colleagues joined the political mainstream. But because of his Dalit background Bharat found it much harder. “I kicked off from being this kind of sidedefended, I didn’t have easy access to the parties. I would have joined...” he recalls.

Nepal’s society wasballorising in the 1990s and Dalit rights groups were on the rise. Bharat was offered positions in some of them but declined. “I didn’t want to be labelled as part of a limited group,” he says, “I should have the right to live as a Dalit without any other category being imposed on me. If someone wants to be known as a Kastri or a Dalit or a Tarai that’s their right, but I choose not to.”

Bharat introduces himself by his surname and says he’s not a Dalit. “They say, how come, and I reply don’t know why I should be labelled a Dalit, is it in the constitution? Is it in the Veda? If someone has the right to accept this label then others also have the right not to accept it,” he reasons. Bharat finished his bachelor’s degree and got a job at the NGO, South Asia Partnership (SAP) which he credits for his solid foundation in management and human relations and is now the financial controller for the Asia region, at the Canadian Centre for International Studies (CGEI) where he is responsible for an annual budget of US$7 million.

He says his success is due partly to luck, partly to hard work but mostly to his parents’ recognition that their six children should be educated. “In Trisuli there weren’t many people from my community studying, but where I am today it is not unusual,” says Bharat who is the father of three children and is enrolled at a night college for an EMBA degree.

Bharat is a member of various cooperatives and professional organisations, and strongly believes in the movement to improve the lives of Dalits but he thinks it should be renamed. “The word itself means downtrodden, oppressed,” he explains. “I would prefer that it be called the movement for social justice so that all Nepalis who believe in it are free to join.”

Bharat has a surprisingly upbeat take on the recent incident of the woman in Bungmati who was abused for taking water from the village tap. “It’s sad but what does it mean? Earlier, people wouldn’t have dared to take water from the tap because there was peace but the cost was that someone was suppressed. Now, people are aware, so that when there’s an action, there’s a reaction.”

He thinks it is important that all Nepalis be prepared for that reaction and understand that change doesn’t mean that the country must continue to have winners and losers. Says Bharat: “As social activists we should be able to convey the message that this change is good for everyone in the long run because they will be seen as people of the society, where no one needs to suffer.”
It’s perfectly (eco)logical

Godavari’s unique appropriate technology theme park trains farmers from across the Himalaya

- It is hard to believe that this small hydraulic ram pump that makes a rhythmic popping sound could transform agriculture across Himalayan valleys and make farmers self-sufficient.
- The ram works without electricity or diesel. It just uses the power of gravity to pump water up at least 100 m. Water comes down a thick pipe and one-third of it can be lifted through a narrower pipe for irrigation.
- Eighty percent of Nepalis depend on agriculture and 80 percent of their farms are rain fed—a hydraulic ram could allow monsoon-dependent farmers to grow up to three crops a year. But few farmers in Nepal use it.

- Legend has it that the ban mara weed came to Nepal through American wheat aid in the 1960s. Indigenous to Mexico it quickly spread across the tarai and midhills, smothering undergrowth and killing forests. It couldn’t be used as fodder, it spread too fast to control and for decades no one knew what to do with the weed.

Now, a Nepali inventor has found a way to burn ban mara bushes and turn the ash into briquettes that can be used as fuel for special smoke-free stoves. It is cheaper than firewood, cheaper than gas or kerosene. Yet, few people use it.

- As afternoon temperature in the low valleys get up to 40 Celsius, it is difficult to keep water cool. But the technology exists to build your own cool box. Make a one-metre square box with two layers of brick and cover with it with a thatch roof. Fill the gap between the bricks with sand. The rhythmic popping sound could transform agriculture across Himalayan valleys and make farmers self-sufficient.
- Scientists have often wondered why appropriate technology that is economically viable, ecologically sensible and suited to our conditions are so difficult to sell to the public. And they figured it was because they couldn’t demonstrate how they worked.

- We figured we should show people how things work instead of just telling them about it,” explains Milan Tuladhar of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Kathmandu. “That is why we set up this demonstration centre.”

- “Tucked away in a side valley opposite the Botanical Garden at the base of a thickly-forested mountain in Godavari is ICIMOD’s Demonstration and Training Centre for mountain agriculture. Every year, hundreds of farmers, trainers and academics from Pakistan, China, India, Bhutan and Afghanistan come to Godavari to learn about everything from terrace farming to water harvesting.”

- ICIMOD has set aside one hectare to demonstrate how to optimise agriculture on a sloping mountainside using simple. A frames for continuous and interspersing nitrogen-fixing plants for erosion control. A water harvesting site shows how to store rain or running water and household use with a simple impounding technique using plastic sheets.

- “We have farmers visiting us from Doti and Khotang and they actually give us ideas about improving the techniques,” says Samden Sherpa who looks after the centre, “when they see it with their eyes, they think, oh I could use that back home and they immediately come up with ideas about how they could adapt it to their use.”

- ICIMOD’s Godavari site was gifted by the government 15 years ago and is an ideal location. The Pulchoki hill that towers above is a biodiversity treasure house with at least 102 species of birds, 96 species of butterflies and is a richclad paradise with some 35 species. Of the 7,000 types of plants found on Pulchoki, 83 have medicinal properties.

- “We have Pakistani and Bhutani agriculture specialists who come here and they are so impressed they want to build similar demonstration centres in their own country,” says Samden.

The centre also conducts experiments in, for example, erosion control. A 30-degree slope is divided into three portions with terracing, hedgerow, without hedgerow and a control slope without terracing. The slope without terrace loses 40 tons of topsoil per hectare per year, while a terrace with peach trees at its edges loses only four tons.

On a recent visit, the centre brought in Dr Uma Pratap from Himachal Pradesh to train a group of 20 beekeepers from across Nepal who were learning hive maintenance and honey collection techniques for Asiatic bees, which are more resistant to disease than their fussy European cousins.

Says Pratap: “I can’t think of a more scenic place to learn by doing. It is much more effective than sitting in a classroom explaining people about bee hives.”

- It’s perfectly (eco)logical

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Godavari’s unique appropriate technology theme park trains farmers from across the Himalaya
China’s roadmap

Despite growth, inequality and poverty remain a concern

China is about to adopt its 11th five-year plan, setting the stage for the continuation of probably the most remarkable economic transformation in history, while improving the well-being of almost a quarter of the world’s population.

China’s role in the world and the world’s economy has changed, and the plan reflects this, too. Its future growth will have to be based more on domestic demand than on exports, which will require increases in consumption. Indeed, China has a rare problem: excessive savings.

People save partly because of weaknesses in government social-insurance programs; strengthening social security (pensions) and public health and education will simultaneously reduce social inequalities, increase citizens’ sense of well-being, and promote current consumption.

If successful—and, so far, China has almost always surpassed even its own high expectations—these adjustments may impose enormous strains on a global economic system that is already unbalanced by America’s huge fiscal and trade imbalances.

With such a clear vision of the future, the challenge will be implementation. China is a large country, and it could not have succeeded as it has without widespread decentralisation.

This year’s World Bank World Development Report explains why inequality, not just poverty, should be a concern, and China’s 11th five-year plan attacks the problem head-on. The government has for several years talked about a more harmonious society, and the plan describes ambitious programs for achieving this.

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While much of the rest of the developing world, following the Washington Consensus, has been directed at a quixotic quest for higher GDP, China has once again seen the virtue of pragmatism and vision.

China’s 11th five-year plan provides a roadmap for that response. The world watches in awe, and hope, as the lives of 1.3 billion people continue to be transformed.
It’s simple: know your swing plane

So how to get this right?
To avoid the back swing flaw, you need to turn your shoulders to 90 degrees to be in the proper position. Don’t forget: only a good back swing can lead to a proper downswing and follow-through. The chances of making an error are much higher on the downswing. From the top the first move is: clear (turn) your left shoulder and let your arms drop down, without unhinging the wrist and because of their exposure feel comfortable in any cultural milieu. The most direct problem is one of language, they have more than one to learn and bilingualism among mixed parent children is common.

As individuals who have grown up in a country other than their own learn that country’s native language, children of mixed race often embrace both of their parent’s languages. A German-American student explains that the reason he speaks both his parents’ languages is because he grew up being constantly exposed to these two cultures and languages.

On the other hand, there are factors that can determine whether a child is bilingual or not. Children will tend to speak whatever language their parents speak, as that is what the child is exposed to (therefore, if parents speak in English with each other, then English will most likely be that child’s first language). The country where they spend their young years can also play a role. If parents speak in English with each other, then English will most likely be that child’s first language.

So how do you feel for it? If you watch them at the practice range, you will probably see most of them swinging on a plane that moves from the outside to the inside (the opposite of what’s required).

There are generally two reasons for this mistake.
1. If you move your back swing outside the line of your target, chances are that you will hit from the outside plane, resulting in a slice and a huge loss of distance.
2. The most common mistake golfers make is after getting into the right position at the top of their swing, they rush to hit the ball, using their wrists and arms too much and again making contact from the outside of the swing plane to produce a pull or a big slice.

Dr. Britta Drzyzga

May-June Himal Southasia now on the stands!

Notice: Starting July, Himal goes monthly!
ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- Khukhri Dhoka exhibition of painted doors at Dhokaiya Café 5 and 6 May.
- Nick Dawson’s photography exhibition at Indigo Gallery III 14 May.

EVENTS

- Jatra making with Wave and Chandan Chitrakar, 6 May, 8.30 AM, meeting point Nabi Bank, Kantipath.
- Constituent Assembly for Inclusive Democracy, peaceful rally 7 and 8 May at TAM, assembly at Royal Nepal Academy.
- Prayer flags: a survivor returns documentary at Jatra Cafe, 7 May, 7.15 PM. 4256622
- Dorzu Usta film screening at NTB, 7 May. 5.30 PM.
- Buddha Jayanti 13 May.
- Walk with Wave 13 May, 8.30 AM, Champadevi clean up campaign, meeting point St. Xavier’s School.
- Peace ride to Lumini with Himalayan Enfielders, 12-14 May.
- International Day for Biological Diversity 22 May.
- Life Skills Training Camp 26-28 May, call to confirm by 23 May. 410799.
- 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 Ram Doodle Bar.
- Special Reggae Session with Jerry (Caribbean island) and the Reggae machine at Mokhi Live, 5 May, 8PM, Rs 200.
- Coda Collective live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- Live Music at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- Pokhara night dance, authentic Mughi cuisine every Friday 7.30 PM at Far Pavilion Restaurant, the Everest Hotel. 4780100
- Reggae Night at Mokhi Live, 7.30 PM, 5526212
- Best of Jazz JCS trio and friends. Neik’s Place, Fridays and Saturdays.
- Jatra Friday nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- Unplugged sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- Live Music at June Hotel, Hotel de l’Annapurna. 4491234

DINING

- BBQ every Friday at Jai Nepal Restaurant, Kupondole Height. 5514872.
- Beat the heat with milkshakes and smoothies at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Imago-Dei café and gallery, food, dessert and coffee, Nagpokhari, open Monday-Friday 9AM-9PM. 4442464
- Café U for organic Japanese homecooking. Near International Club, Sanepa, 11AM-6PM. Closed on Tuesdays. 5524202
- Momo & Sekuwa Revolution every Saturday at Tea-House Inn. 668-0090.
- Wei & Wild Summer Splash at Godawari Village Resort, a special package of Swimming & Lunch. 5560675
- Breakfast at Singhra Restaurant. 8.30 – 11.00AM daily. 5520004
- BBQ Dinner at Summit Hotel every Friday. 6.30-9.30 PM. 5521810
- Breakfast with Birds Lunch with Butterfly at Farm House Café. 4375279

GETAWAYS

- Buddhism Saranam Gacchami special offer 13 May weekend Rs 1250.00 per person. Club Himalaya. 668-0080
- Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, relaxation and massages in Pokhara. 4361500
- Junglewalks, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bandipur, junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- Park Village, Budhanilkantha, full room Rs 1,600. 4357280
- Conferences at Godawari special packages available. 5560675
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4357280
- Star Cruises in April, take your companion at 50% discount. 2031245
- Escape Kathmandu at Shiva Pokhari Heights Cottage. 9851012245

NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED

This is the time of the year when the searing heat of the Indo-Gangetic plains rises along the Himalayan foothills, creating towering thunderheads that bring serious localized rain. That is what we have been seeing this week—nothing unusual, but just a bit premature. These pre-monsoon showers are supposed to arrive towards the end of May. Showers will be localised, like on Tuesday when Nagarkot got 16 mm in one hour and the Valley was left nothing. If you are in the tarai, don’t complain about the 44 degrees heat because it is this heat that is instrumental in creating the conditions for the monsoon winds to start blowing inland from the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Mission Impossible III Ethan Hunt is out again. This time the retired IMF team leader’s mission is not just about saving the world from the Big Bad Guys but gets more personal. And, as usual, Hunt has to choose to accept his mission just when he is looking forward to good times. But the plot gets complicated when his professional and personal life cross paths, all thanks to his corrupt higher ups. MI III doesn’t leave you wanting for full-throttle action.

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May is the day people from 25 different countries celebrate their common reference as Europeans. The celebration of “Europe Day” takes place the same day as the former French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman delivered a famous speech back in 1950. Schuman proposed that Europeans committed themselves to democracy, increased their dialogue to better understand each other and started discussing how to solve important political and economic issues as a group and not as individual countries. For many Europeans this speech became a turning point in history as it provided the ideas leading to the extensive and successful European integration.

Schuman envisaged that economic interdependence between larger European countries would make war a phenomenon of the past. It took less than a year before Schuman’s idea was translated into a binding legal document – the political commitment to peace was thus already a reality. On 18 April 1951, six countries signed the Treaty of Paris establishing the European Coal and Steel Community. Soon thereafter, this commitment was sealed with the Treaty of Rome, which is still considered the founding document of the European Union (EU) of today.

Continuous enlargements
Since the first agreement was signed in 1951, several enlargements have taken place and the EU now counts 25 member states. Next year, in 2007, an additional two countries are scheduled to join - Romania and Bulgaria. While preparations for their accession are still underway, the EU in October 2005 also initiated negotiations with yet another two countries, Croatia and Turkey. These recent enlargements and membership negotiations are obvious commitments of EU intentions to expand prosperity and democratic values beyond current EU borders. The fact that political, economic and social coherence have been key driving forces in all membership preparations, allow new EU members to successfully participate in deciding European policies from the day they join. The EU, its member, and institutions have a common flag that is used as a symbol of the European unity – the flag is dark blue with a circle of 12 yellow stars. No matter how many member states join the EU, this flag remains the same.

Current EU priorities
Today, 56 years after the first initiative, the EU brings together more than 450 million people and the constant dialogue on almost every imaginable social, political, trade and environmental issue has contributed to Europe’s high levels of living standards. As a further integrating factor, 12 member states have already introduced the Euro as their official currency. The EU also speaks with an increasingly stronger and coherent voice in international affairs to effectively address the challenges of today and enjoy the benefits of an increasingly globalized world. Europe is a continent with many different traditions and languages; however, Europeans have come to share common values such as democracy, freedom and social justice. In fact, one of the most used mottos to describe the EU is “United in Diversity”.

The EU institutions
The three most important EU institutions are the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission.

The Council consist of ministers from the national governments of all 25 EU member states. The Council shares with the European Parliament the responsibility for passing laws and taking policy decisions. The Presidency of the European Union rotates among the member states on a 6-monthly basis. In 2006, Austria holds the EU Presidency from January-June, to be taken over by Finland from July-December. As Austria does not have an Embassy in Nepal, Finland has been nominated the local EU presidency in Nepal for 2006. To safeguard continuity in EU’s policies, a Troika format is used, consisting of the country currently holding the EU Presidency, the incoming EU Presidency, and a representative from the European Commission.

The European people directly elect the European Parliament (EP) every five years. The present Parliament was elected in June 2004.
and has 732 members from all EU member states grouped in Europe-wide alliances. Nearly one-third (222) are women. The main job of the Parliament is to pass European laws – a responsibility shared with the Council.

The European Commission (EC) represents the interests of Europe as a whole and it works independently from national governments. The current Commission President Mr. José Manuel Barroso and his 24 Commissioners were appointed in November 2004. The Commission headquarters in Brussels prepares European laws and policies. Within EU borders, the Commission takes responsibility for the implementation of laws, policies and programmes. Beyond the borders of the EU, the Commission is often an active contributor to human and social development and acts as a trade facilitator.

The EU in the world

It is not only Europeans that benefit from the European Union. Given the success of European integration, the EU is committed to spread peace, stability and prosperity beyond its borders. The best way to prevent conflicts arising is to create prosperity and opportunities worldwide. As the world’s largest trading power, the EU uses its influence to establish fair rules for world trade so that poorer countries benefit from globalisation.

The European Union provides development programmes and humanitarian assistance that benefit millions of people every day. A good example of this is the December 2005 European Consensus on Development, which confirms the EU commitment to remain the world’s largest donor. The EU has also taken a lead in fighting pollution and promoting sustainable development worldwide. In Nepal, as in many other countries, the EU has repeatedly stressed the importance of promotion and protection of democratic values. The EU will continue to push for multilateral responses and to promote the values that have proved successful in maintaining peace and fostering economic growth and human development in Europe: democracy, human rights, good governance and the Rule of Law.

The EU in Nepal

Alongside the European Commission (EC) represented by the Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal, several EU member states are long-standing development partners with Nepal. Currently five member states have their individual diplomatic missions in Kathmandu. As an institution, EU established diplomatic relations with Nepal in 1975 and an EU-Kingdom of Nepal Co-operation Agreement was signed in June 1998. Within this co-operation framework high-level consultations – the so-called ‘Joint Commission’ take place on a biannual basis. The current European Commission Strategy for Nepal 2002-2006 identifies Rural Development, Rule of Law, Conflict Mitigation and economic cooperation as priority sectors. In addition, the EC implements a significant human rights and democracy portfolio as well as humanitarian and Asia-wide assistance programs in Nepal.

The EC will stand ready to support the country and its people in reshaping the economy, improving living standards, and create institutions and capacities that are able to effectively respond to challenges and bring benefits to every single person living within the borders of Nepal. Some of our current efforts include improving access to justice countrywide, assisting vulnerable communities affected by the conflict and monitoring human rights as well as installing renewable energy systems in remote communities.

Given the mandate it holds on trade issues, the EC is ready to support efforts to create a conducive environment for foreign investments in Nepal and proper integration of Nepal in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Guiding principles for economic co-operation partnership often includes commitment to corporate governance, transparency and efficiency. Through some of its Asia-wide programmes, the EC has established business-to-business contacts between European and Nepalese companies that hopefully will have long-lasting value. In addition, the EC through its mandate to open negotiations with third countries, including Nepal, in order to revise and update the existing bilateral air service agreements. Finally, this month we expect several Nepalese students to be notified that they have received an Erasmus Mundus scholarship allowing them to obtain a Master degree from European universities.

For more information, visit www.delpl.europa.eu

EU members and when they joined

1952 : Belgium, France, Germany, Italy.
1953 : Luxembourg, Netherlands.
1961 : Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom.
1962 : Greece.
1963 : Portugal, Spain.
1965 : Austria, Finland and Sweden.
1973 : Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia.

The EURO zone: Belgium, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal and Finland.
MARRIED AT 13, Indira Sapkota was happy staying at home taking care of her family. Some 11 years and three children later, she decided to use the skills she learnt as a wife and mother to venture into the world of business. Her success changed her life—and the lives of thousands of other Nepalis.

Sapkota, now 68, remembers how empowered and independent she felt by simply having some money for herself. “It was when I started making profits that I understood how women can help their families,” she remembers. She started bringing together small groups of women, training them to sew, make pickles and jam and to knit.

Not satisfied with just training a small circle of neighbours, she decided to scale up. Eight years ago she set up Bhu-Indra Social Welfare Organisation (BISWO) which teaches women skills and other ways to make money. “The most encouraging part of my job is when people come to us for training from remote parts of Nepal and then go back and find their feet,” she says.

Nepal Grihini Udyog is a spin-off of BISWO that makes handmade clothing. In its office, bhotos made from dammar kumari fabric, trousers, caps, maternity clothes, sweaters, aprons and tablecloths are neatly arranged in piles. It once employed more than 250 people and even exported to Japan, the US and France. Today, just over 25 people work here, another casualty of the political turmoil in the country. Strikes and bandas mean raw materials are not available and workers have a hard time getting to work. Recently, BISWO opened a day centre in Dilli Bajar for senior citizens. “Older people can come, relax and listen to bhajans. It helps pass their time easily and stay happy,” says Sapkota as she prepares to leave for another meeting. On a recent visit to Gokarna she saw an empty building and decided to use it to open a primary school for children from low-income households.

Today it is Shree Gram Sudhar Primary School in Baluwa village which is expanding with help from the Indian Embassy so it can accommodate more children. She also dreams of turning the senior’s day centre into a full-fledged senior’s home one day. Says Indira: “I want to be working and helping people until my body allows me, to me that is real happiness.”

Mallika Aryal

Nepal Grihini Udyog clothes are sold under the AAD logo in department stores in Kathmandu.
Now that we find ourselves in the cusp of a new Nepal, it has been ordained that all relics of our royal past be replaced with even older revolutionary relics.

Luckily the national anthem doesn’t have to be changed because its lyricist had the foresight 75 years ago to already incorporate in it a reference to Comrade Awesome’s nom de guerre—That’s a relief, imagine having to memorise a new national anathema every time there is regime change.

Which is why we should go about this monumental task of renaming names with a measured pragmatism and with the minimum disruption. For example, we must strike while the iron is hot to show that we mean business by taking out all references to His Majesty’s Government and replacing it with His Moribund Government. The other glaring reminder of the ancien regime is our very own flag carrier. But imagine the expense of painting over Royal in Royal Nepal Airlines entire fleet. So, for a fraction of the cost, we will just replace the ‘R’ and call it Loyal Nepal Airlines.

In order to spur the new interim government to get down to business and take some concrete steps, here are some suggestions of name changes that should be undertaken on a war footing:

### Right royal mess

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What’s out</th>
<th>What’s in</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lok Man Singh Karki</td>
<td>Loktantra Man Singh Karki</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aishwarya Shield Spelling Bee</td>
<td>Sujata Shield Spelling Bee</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tribhuvan International Airport</td>
<td>Tribhuvan Interminnable Airport</td>
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<td>Maharajanj</td>
<td>Chaimarajanj</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patan Darbar Square</td>
<td>Patan Demo Square</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Stag</td>
<td>Plebian Stag</td>
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<td>Birendranagar</td>
<td>Surkhel</td>
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<td>Mahendra Nagar</td>
<td>Phuket</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Chitwan National Park</td>
<td>Some Animals Are More Equal Than Others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crowne Plaza</td>
<td>Crownless Plaza</td>
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<td>Royal Bengal Tiger</td>
<td>Tarai Tiger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingfisher Lager</td>
<td>Presidentfisher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birendra International Convention Centre</td>
<td>Baneswar National Convention Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Royal Challenge Beer</td>
<td>Royally-challenged Beer</td>
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<td>Ramata Park</td>
<td>Car Park</td>
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<td>Sati Sainik Manch</td>
<td>Pay-ops Munch</td>
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<td>Ranipokhari</td>
<td>Khali Pokhari</td>
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<td>Darbar Marg</td>
<td>Parbar Marg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raj Parishad</td>
<td>Raj Perished</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalinchi Chowk</td>
<td>Bumper-to-Bumper Choke Point</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mahendra Highway</td>
<td>Mahendra &amp; Mahendra Highway</td>
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