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The Mahakali Primary School in Langduk in Humla (above) has 100 percent enrollment—all the boys and girls of the village go to school. Living standards in Langduk are higher than even the district capital of Simkot because farmers here sell vegetables that they grow in their own greenhouses. Langduk has a lesson for the rest of Nepal: don’t wait for the state to bring development, do it yourself.

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...Is it about time now for the Maoists to renounce violence?
It has been a month, yet the implications of these past weeks are just beginning to sink in. Who would have said in early April that a restored parliament would give itself the power to decide who can be the future king of Nepal?

Who could have imagined that the cabinet could with the stroke of a pen erase ‘His Majesty’ from the official name of the government and take out ‘Royal’ from the army? And these are not just cosmetic changes, they represent a fundamental shift in the status quo with symbolic and actual powers eroding. In the world, a similar changing of the guard in the national army would be accompanied by wholesale slaughter or state collapse.

Even in Nepal, these changes could have happened through a bloody revolution, as the Maoists have always wanted. That this transition took place through a relatively non-violent uprising is further proof of the maturity and dignity with which the Nepali people and their political leaders have carried themselves. The past month has proved that a non-violent political process has greater legitimacy and is always more cost-effective.

The challenge now is to convert this accomplishment into socio-economic progress. We have to take the country back to 1996 when grassroots democracy was empowering local people to bring about change. Is it too much to tell the interim parliament that it can’t afford to be so bogged down with reparation and retribution to kickstart development. Unless people see a meaningful improvement in their standards of living soon, the joy of freedom will once more turn to despair.

In remote Humla, people have been waiting for decades for Kathmandu to listen to their demands (see p.49). Maip, Bajar, Bajhang and Doti are in the grip of a severe drought-induced food shortage. These new development challenges will add to the pressure with irrigation and agriculture inputs. These things can’t wait and the quickest way to address them is to urgently fill the vacuum at the VDC and DDC level. Let’s see a government that behaves more like a government and exert its presence in areas from which it has pulled back in the past ten years.

Reconstruction has become a buzzword but we didn’t have that much infrastructure to destroy with that much frequency. The telecom towers, VDC buildings and bridges blown up by the Maoists are already being rebuilt. Instead of reconstruction we have to lay new foundations for far-reaching progress. Start with linking the 15 districts that still don’t have roads with 700 km of new highways, increasing power generation by 700 megawatts to meet growing energy demand by attracting investments to create the 500,000 new jobs that Nepal needs so they don’t have to migrate to work.

There is a lot that needs to be done: Nepal is the most deprived country in the world’s most deprived region. Even while the political issues are being resolved, there is no reason to allow our hands and dwindling thumbs. The political process is just a tool to raise the people’s living standards. We won’t get an opportunity like this to set things right.

By Daniel Lak

WHOSE DEMOCRACY?

For the past 10 years, the Maoists and the UML have been the two most viable democratic forces in the country. The UML, for much of the 90’s, was the most respectable of the two. It was, however, a democratic party that had to prove itself to the people. The Maoists had a different agenda. They were not just beginning to sink in. Who would have said in early April that a restored parliament would give itself the power to decide who can be the future king of Nepal?

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A republican monarchy

The future of the serpent throne five years after

Five years after the royal massacre, it took a people’s uprising to finally force the monarchy to lose its power, position and privileges. Even if this historic institution survives the constituent assembly, the king will no longer reign or rule. To remain is the only option he is likely to be left with. Unwary lies the head that wears the bird of paradise crown.

The concept of republican monarchy seems to be taking shape in what was once the world’s only Hindu kingdom. All it took for King Gyanendra to discredit and dismantle this hallowed institution. His brother had carefully crafted the throne to keep its line intact but his murder most foul transformed a large section of Nepali population overnight into republicans.

In one of those twists of destiny, the perception about Narayanhiti Massacre became an accepted reality when a desolate population rejected the report of the royal investigation committee. At the direct beneficiary of the 1 June, 2001 Friday evening slaughter of royals in the palace King Gyanendra could never explain convincingly the escape of his immediate family from a massacre that claimed the life of at least nine of his relatives. From then on, it was a losing battle for the king. It didn’t do his image a whole lot of good when he went on an autocratic spree.

Within a month of King Gyanendra’s ascension, prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala had to resign under duress; the army had refused to obey his order to deploy in Helen. Five years later, the generals are now taking orders from parliament and the army has been dismantled as a state of emergency was declared and then allowed to lapse, defence expenditure was unlimited, the local government units was allowed to keep his line intact but his murder most foul transformed a large section of Nepali population overnight into republicans.

The king continued to act as if time had stood still. His 4 October, 2002 takeover and 1 February, 2005 royal-military coup will go down in Nepali history as the twin blows that undermined the pedestals of the monarchy. The socio-cultural roots of kingship were cut in the pedestals of the monarchy. The socio-cultural roots of kingship were cut in

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The national discourse on various aspects of ‘nation-building’ had long been diverted by the absence of peace and democracy. The deferred demand for sincere discussion and debate is now being suddenly released following the People’s Movement. The national confidence that it represented will generate country-wide debate in the days to come. The decibel level will be high but instead of the sound of gunfire we will be hearing din of discussion.

Nepal’s society and economy must leapfrog to make up for lost time. For this the first requirement has always been political stability. Fortunately, the road is now clear with the return of citizens’ rule, the bilateral ceasefire and plans for dialogue between the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist). The time is right to nationally address the recovery process and to set the course of overall national development.

There will be many parallel and cross-cutting forums that will help us plan for tomorrow and one such forum will be the National Conference on Peace, Reconstruction and Development, scheduled for 9-11 July 2006. The Government of Nepal is not only going to be a full participant in the event, it is providing financial support as well.

Peace: The conference will address the issue of ‘immediate peace’ vis-à-vis the Maoist rebellion as well as the requirements of ‘long-term peace’ such as inclusive democracy and restructuring of state. The ‘peace’ heading will also include transitional justice, discussing the ways and means of ensuring accountability for past crimes and promoting the process of national healing. In addressing the excesses committed by state actors to suppress the People’s Movement, we must not forget the crimes of the decade of internal conflict.

Reconstruction: The situation demands an immediate program for restoration of the human spirit and rehabilitation of the physical and development infrastructure. There are many victims of violence amongst us today: unprecedented numbers of orphans and young widows, the internally and externally displaced, traumatised schoolchildren, victims of torture, and rebel fighters in their teens. Their physical, social and mental needs must be addressed, in particular those who exist outside the circle of development delivery.

Rehabilitation of infrastructure includes the rebuilding of suspension bridges, health and police posts, school buildings, and VDC offices. Reconstruction would also include revival of the economy and development programs, as well as revitalisation of the government bureaucracy.

Development: The impetus generated by a successful reconstruction phase must lead to a stable and sustained development process. We must have a paradigm shift from fakas as understood in the past, to an indigenously generated process of social and economic transformation. Since a large inflow of support is expected from a supportive international community, the national conference will be a useful forum to discuss financial requirements, priorities, goal setting, monitoring and evaluation.

Some 200 people will attend the conference by invitation, representing four streams: political parties, civil society (including academia), development professionals (national and international) and the bureaucracy.

The conference is being organised under the aegis of a Steering Committee made up of six members of the Seven Party People’s Movement Coordination Committee who will be organising the conference. The committee has been chaired by Subhas Nembang since before he was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. Social Science Baha, with scholar Rajendra Pradhan as its chairman, has been named the secretariat of the conference with the task of ensuring that the gathering develops as a forum for reasoned debate.

The logo of the conference has a map of Nepal, and the slogan, Naya Nepalko Kalpana (Imagining a New Nepal).

Kanak Mani Dixit is convener of the National Conference on Peace, Reconstruction and Development.
Moral police needed

It’s time we all helped to enforce a civic sense

Close to this Benét’s house is a manhole that has long remained gaping. This is not because it looks like that way but because every time an iron cover is installed, it is quickly stolen. In many temples you’ll find children who are fast to pounce on offerings even before the priest or cook boy and sherpa to Sirdar. Winners will be decided by a panel of judges but the magazine is also asking for comments from readers.

We thought Thursday was a very special day. In many ways the proclamation closed a very difficult chapter for the fight for democracy but also opened another chapter for a new Nepal that would be based on a new system of parliamentary government and the process for negotiation of peace. It was a very exciting historic moment for the country but there is still a challenge for Nepal to take it forward. Nepali people have shown incredible determination and will to govern themselves and that is something we salute.

What can we expect in terms of future Canadian aid? We have always believed aid should be dictated by the people and government. In our case, because of the events of the last few years, aid has gone directly to community projects and not to the government. In the last couple of years another priority has been projects specifically for peace building in Nepal. For example we have provided funding for CHQHR and supported a number of grassroots efforts for community reconciliation. There will be a real need for community and social development in the next few years and we hope to be able to support that.

How come after 20 years of diplomatic relations you still don’t have a resident embassy here?

The model that we’ve used in much of the world has been to participate in the meeting the finance minister had with the Maoists in the last couple of years. In our case, because of the events of the last few years, aid has gone directly to community projects and not to the government.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

famly’s luggage. Prices start from Rs 3,500,000.

Shes Kanta Sharma (aka KC Bhuwan), a guide for Mountain Travel, was KIRAN PANDAY

Canadian Ambassador to Nepal, Lucie Edwards, spoke to Nepal Times last week just before she finished her term.

We salute the Nepali people...
Last Thursday a dozen big manufacturing units in Birganj shut down because of Maoist extortion and threats. The reaction to this from the Maoists, the government and the mainstream leadership gives us some interesting insights. The truth is that the Maoists want to join mainstream peaceful politics, but before that they need to amass as much resources as possible. It is convenient for them to go back to the people who they had extorted before and intimidate them into parting with more money.

The fact that many of these industries didn't have a unionised workforce makes it easier for the Maoists to penetrate these institutions saying they were just trying to fight for workers' rights. But things had changed, many of the industrialists refused to give in to the demands. Instead, they gave the Maoists an ultimatum and said that unless the extortion stopped they would close down all industries. This is an opportunity for a government installed by people power to show that it controls the security apparatus. And it is also a test of whether the Maoists are really serious about restoring peace.

As it turned out, the Maoists themselves suffered a major setback. They may be at military strategy, but in peacetime they have been a failure. They don't understand that peaceful competitive politics demands a different sort of behaviour than while being a part of an underground guerrilla movement. The contradictory statements issued by various Maoist leaders about the extortion campaign has harmed them even more and exposed the beginnings of a rift within the movement.

Hence, the government could strongly challenge the Maoists and Prachanda had to publicly repute that his organization was involved in extortion and call for peace talks to be expedited. It seems that the Maoists are now in a hurry to start negotiations.

The delay in the peace process may have been due to disarray within the NC-D, but the effect is that it has tamished the Maoist image and allowed the government to put forth conditions before talks begin.

It is estimated that the Maoists have between 10-12,000 fighters and another 20,000 supporters. It is reported that they get Rs 500 a month as pocket money which means they need less than Rs 140-150 million a month or Rs 2 billion a year to sustain their corps. So the demand by the Maoist leadership for half the national budget is absurd. If the government can buy this peace it is cheap. The Maoists will not be meaningful without the Maoists being confined to less than three percent of its annual budget, then it is cheap. The Maoists absurd. If the government can buy peace by paying the Maoists less the demand by the Maoist leadership for half the national budget is absurd.

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Interview with Comrade Prachanda in Jaanadesh, 16 May

Why do you think the government has been slow to form a talks team? They are probably discussing it among themselves to come to an agreement. Let's hope the seven parties rid themselves of their past weaknesses and that the talks begin soon.

Under what conditions will the summit talks under your leadership be public? Our party’s central committee convention recently decided to sit for talks with the seven-party government with the aim of ending feudalistic regression and seeing to it that the 12-point agreement between us and the parties is implemented. The party has already declared that two committees will be formed, one for preparations talks and the other for summit talks. Whether the chairman leads the summit talks depends on what happens in the preparation talks.

The government doesn’t seem to be accepting your code of conduct. Is there any debate about it? Will it be implemented honestly? The seven parties are discussing the code of conduct amongst themselves and we do not see the possibility of a serious disagreement about it. As the 12-point agreement gave directions for the preparation of the code and its implementation, we assume that there will be no problems regarding this. Those who try to work against the understanding will be easily exposed for the people to see.

How do you view the fact that action was taken against three security chiefs but not the army chief? We were pressing for action against the security chiefs, not as a pre-condition for talks but to meet the expectations of the people’s movement. It was a positive sign when the government moved against the police chiefs. But by not acting against the army commanders, who were the main supporters of the palaces and other repressive forces, the government has shown that it is afraid to work according to the people’s sentiments. If the leaders of the army remain, it will look as if the government is willing only to sacrifice the weak.

Have you had talks within the central committee about who will lead the interim government that will lead us to a constituent assembly? The committee’s recent meeting produced a 10-point roadmap for talks, peace and further development. It clearly states that the understanding, constitution and government should be scrapped, an interim constitution be written and a government formed through roundtable talks to hold elections to a constituent assembly. It will also restore the army and state based on the results of the assembly. The leadership of the interim government that will hold the constituent assembly will be decided through talks.

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**VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT**

**SNV/Nepal**

SNV/Nepal, a Dutch non-government development organisation, has been working in Nepal since 1960. SNV/Nepal focuses on capacitating key institutions at the district, regional and national level with the ability to serve the interests of marginal areas. SNV’s sectoral niches are in governance, private sector development and natural resource management.

SNV/Nepal invites qualified Nepali citizens to apply for the position of **ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHENING/ INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT ADVISOR**

The Organisation Strengthening Institutional Development (OSID Advisor) will be stationed in Kathmandu with the requirement to make frequent field trips and missions to SNV working districts and regional offices. The OSID Advisor will have an overall responsibility for providing advisory services in aspects related to organisational strengthening or institutional development of partners and institutions for effective implementation of programmes relating to Biogas and Renewable Energy (BRE) practice.

Specific responsibilities include:

- Actively contributing to the institutional development of the biogas and renewable energy (BRE) practice;
- Organisation strengthening of the BRE meso level organisations especially at the grass root level e.g. biogas construction companies and its membership organisation, Nepal Biogas Promotion Group (NBP);
- Contribution to the organisational learning of SNV Nepal as an advisory organisation;
- Establishing linkages with other advisors to ensure multidisciplinary approach to programme planning and implementation.

Required Qualification: University Degree (MBA or master’s degree in development management or a bachelor’s degree in Engineering) and at least 7 years experience in Organisation Development related activities; extensive experience in supporting development of Business Membership Organisations (BMO) as a change agent at central, regional and local levels; proven track record in capacity strengthening of Nepal partner organisations through advisory services and steering multi-disciplinary approach; experience in private sector development and working with enterprises; experience in exposure to OD/OS tools, procedures with training from a recognised institution; experience working with government, private sector and civil society organisations; experience working in a complex institutional environment, issues related to social inclusion, conflict and gender in rural development.

Job Specific Knowledge/Skills: Fluency in Nepali and English languages, Nepali typing, excellent reporting and communication skills, proven knowledge in organisation management, strategy development, change management, consultations/advisory input and networking, strong facilitation and training skills, knowledge in participatory technology and coaching; team building, knowledge in micro credit practices and establishing market linkages.

Applications are to be sent to the below address along with a cover letter with the latest curriculum vitae, daytime contact number, a recent photograph and the names of two referees along with their contact address/telephone numbers. Only shortlisted candidates will be notified. Written assessment and final interview will take place in the week of June 26, 2006.

**Deadline for submitting applications:** 5:00 pm Monday, June 5, 2006

**Job description is available for pick up from Organisation Development Centre (ODC) or it could be accessed through our website www.odcincorp.com under the category “Recruitment”. Candidates unable to pick up the above or access the website may request for it through e-mail.**

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**SNV/Nepal gives special consideration to female candidates and candidates from marginalized and disadvantaged groups.**
A right, when the district capital of Simkot is in darkness, across the valley the village of Langduk is all lit up. Children do their homework under fluorescent lamps and their parents watch television on a cable network. The contrast between Langduk and Simkot is emblematic of the hope and despair in this remote district on the northwestern tip of Nepal.

Simkot is still dark because a $900,000 hydroelectric plant on the Hildung River lies half completed and abandoned. Despite having a minister in the last royal regime, Humla’s voice is too feeble to be heard in faraway Kathmandu.

Langduk’s residents, on the other hand, never expected much from the government and prospered through sheer hard work. Ten years ago a Canadian charity helped farmers here set up greenhouses and today each of its 14 households earns up to Rs 75,000 a year selling vegetables through a cooperative. “Others try to do big things,” explains Gobinda Lama, the soft-spoken secretary of the cooperative, “but we started small and learnt as we went along.” In ten years a village that depended on selling firewood is conserving forests and prospered by switching to selling vegetables.

Sita Lama helped Langduk ten years ago with vegetable farming when she was with USC-Canada. “We worked as hard in other villages too but here people were very conscientious and there was a tremendous willingness to learn and work hard,” she recalls.

There was similar enthusiasm across Nepal in the mid-1990s with the Local Self-Governance Act and the election of VDC and DDC councilors. Elected grassroots leaders had to be accountable and were judged on performance. Jivan Shahi was Humla’s elected DDC chair till Sher Bahadur Deuba dissolved all local bodies in 2002, and says: “We were convinced Humla’s development was linked to road access but we didn’t just sit around talking about it, we started digging.” Shahi’s priority was to build the 80 km highway linking Simkot to the Chinese border so the cost of food and basic needs could be reduced and provide access to markets for Humla’s fruits and herbs.

Under a WFP food-for-work program, 35 km from Hilsa to Yari was completed but work is now stuck because there is no money for bridges and to cut through rock faces.

“If we have the money we can finish this road in two years and that will transform Humla,” says local politician Tejendra Upal Lama, “it will be our spinal chord.”

The DDC’s other priority areas were health, sanitation, education and food sufficiency. Lack of arable land in this rugged and arid region means that Humla’s 45,000 people only grow enough food to feed themselves for three months a year. For the rest, they migrate to work or depend on 100 tons of rice a year that has to be flown in from Nepalganj at a cost of Rs 60 million.

If only a part of that amount could be invested in irrigating some 1,500 hectares of rainfed farms along the Karnali in southern Humla it would boost food production permanently. This year’s winter drought has made things much worse right across western Nepal. Says Shahi: “We have to phase out food subsidies and phase in irrigation so we don’t have to forever depend on expensive airlifted drops.”

No matter who the rulers are in Kathmandu, Humla has always been passed over. Now that democracy has been restored there is a chance that the good start made in the mid 1990s with decentralised political power can resume.

At a meeting of political parties, NGOs and others in Simkot last week, economist Chhatranar Chhetra summed it all up amidst applause: “It is now up to elected local leaders to connect politics with development again.”

**Humla’s Restoration of democracy**

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**Humla lite**

Most of us take the electric light for granted but one has to be a Humli to really value it. The people of this trans-Himalayan region can’t afford kerosene and have traditionally burnt sooty pine pulp for domestic lighting.

But smoke from these lights and kitchen fires means Humla and adjoining districts have the highest infant mortality rate in Nepal because of acute respiratory infections.

Now, a unique project that aims to get a Nepali family with
Bad blood

An interaction program between local representatives of the political parties and the Maoists recently in Simkot showed just how difficult it will be, despite the ceasefire, for things to get back to normal.

Humla’s internally displaced families demanded a return of confiscated property and guarantees that they can return safely to their homes and farms. When the Maoists said the returning families would have to abide by their rules, the IDPs heckled them. “I don’t know why I was displaced, and I don’t know why I can’t go back,” said 77-year-old Kanna Shahi (pictured) whose property was confiscated and then severely beaten up by Maoists last year.

A Simkot resident’s daughter and son joined the Maoists, but this didn’t protect his house from being destroyed by Maoists for having joined the DDC. Indeed, local rebels haven’t done much to instill confidence. They are extorting ‘tax’ from every shop in the bajar and are demanding a month’s pay from all civil servants here. Last week a Maoist got inside Simkot airport and forced Indian pilgrims returning from Mansarobar to cough up Rs 35,000. There are signs of normalcy: Maoists have opened an office in the town and district chief Comrade Askar met with the CDO and chief of police and army last week and assured them of his party’s intention to follow the 12-point agreement. When asked about IDPs, he replied: “If they want to go back, we can return them their property.” On Tuesday they held a mass meeting on the only piece of flat ground in Simkot—the airfield.

There were revolutionary speeches, songs and dances and following the practice elsewhere, hundreds of people were marched in from surrounding villages. But given the bad blood, it is doubtful if in Humla the Maoists can win back the hearts and minds of people with just slogans and music. Many are too scared to go back to their villages and others have nothing to go back to because their houses have been burnt down, their farms confiscated and their livestock and possessions looted.

People here still remember the brutal slaying of Tsiring Jangbu, a 65-year-old woman from Bargau two years ago who was beaten to death when she tried to obtain the release of her daughter who had been forcibly recruited by the Maoists. Or Ram Prasad Bhusal, a popular teacher in Buruse who was abducted, forced to dig his own grave and killed two days later for being a Nepali Congress supporter.
Nepali workers in Qatar toil to keep their families and country afloat

Blood, sweat

Food for the

Besides the drought, serious long-term neglect keeps people hungry

A

other plane-load of Nepalis arrives in the Qatari capital and the migrant workers walk across the tarmac in 42-degree heat.

For many of them it is their first time on a plane and first trip abroad. But even before the culture shock hits them it is the shock of the heat and the blinding white light of the desert.

Such is the desperation of Nepalis that despite being ruthlessly cheated by loan sharks and second-class citizens by a state that doesn’t care about certification of manpower agencies. “The ministry is not careful about certification and our embassy doesn’t do enough to monitor non-compliance,” Panja told us.

It is an indication of the fortitude and adaptability of Nepalis that despite the rampant exploitation, they have earned a good reputation in Qatar for being honest and hardworking. They work in an oil-rich desert climate and temperature that soars to 50 degrees inside their 42-degree heat

B

neighbours are at the bottom of the salary ladder—even among workers from other countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Those countries enforce a minimum wage of 800 riyal ($215-3.6 riyal) and also insist on overtime pay, insurance and other benefits.

Nepal has stipulated a minimum wage of $125 but doesn’t enforce it. In fact, industry sources say civil servants at the Ministry of Labour are in cahoots with recruiters and middlemen in Qatar to send workers to Qatar at below-minimum wage.

Four-eight Nepalis died in 2005 and so far this year 21 have already died.

Nepal’s ambassador to Qatar
Shyam Nanda Stanton says the government should not allow anyone earning less than 6000 rupees a month to migrate for work here. “The Labour Ministry must make sure that the recruiters are not lying in the papers,” he says.

Shafique Khan, a Nepali employment agent in Qatar who has found jobs for 10,000 Nepalis here in the past five years says workers must educate themselves about their rights and procedures and should get basic skills training before they come here.

“The government and the ministry are only interested in shipping the workers out, they are not paying enough attention to give skills training to the workers so they can earn more,” he says.

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**Karnali**

**ACF also discovered that children less than 30 months are 5.5 times more likely to be malnourished than children aged from 30 to 59 months. And 20.8 percent of women suffered from blindness during their last pregnancy, a result of Vitamin A deficiency.

**ACF recommends:**
- Improving water and sanitation by increasing access to potable water, implementing irrigation systems and improving hygiene practices
- Increasing the quantity of food available and helping people to diversify their diets
- Promoting and supporting iron/folic acid and de-worming distributions to decrease anaemia
- Promoting the use of adequately iodised salt
- Improving communities’ knowledge about nutrition and hygiene
- Treating moderate acute nutrition by implementing supplementary feeding centres for preschool children and women
- Introducing improved cooking stoves in households
- Studying the nutritional and medicinal values of local products

The drought and extended hunger gap might have affected these results, concludes the report. “But the causes of malnutrition are multi-factorial and the nutrition situation is also linked with a lack of diversified foods, with poor hygiene practices, with lack of women education and very poor availability of public health services.”

Seventy VDCs within the 10 districts are “severely affected” with crop failures of 75-100 percent, according to the WFP’s de Margerie, based on three on-the-ground assessments.

“People are starting to resort to damaging coping mechanisms,” he said, “they’re starting to cut the number of meals or the size of meals, selling livestock and tools and even migrating.”

“The WFP emergency operations will include fortified wheat flour for families with children under two and pregnant or nursing mothers, along with the rice allotment they will get at the start and end of a 20-day food for work programme, he added. “Hopefully, it will be the first and last time we’ll have to do this.”

-Mary Logan

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**Mukesh’s Movement**

**How to name a revolution**

Episcopal moments, never to be forgotten. Thousands of people marching around the capital, waving green leaves, defying tanks and machineguns. Won out, yet their spirits soaring. We might never know exactly how many people left the safety of their homes, braved injuries, hunger, thirst and possibly death, in order to establish a truer, safer and more inclusive society. But those who did and those who witnessed, will never be the same again.

The 2006 uprising, if peace is obtained, can be compared to the greatest of them all. We foreign journalists are however left with one major confusion: how to call this revolution? Jana Andolan II is something folks out there simply can’t pronounce. “People’s Movement II sounds like a 60s Cuban soap series. The Chinese got their Cultural Revolution; the Thai the Silk, the Ukrainians the Change. The Nepali deserve no comparison.”

Less. This uprising urgently needs a final name — a word, a cry, and moments of glory.

“Spring Revolution”, some papers suggest. Not bad, especially because uprisings in Nepal traditionally take place in Spring, during the full in the agricultural season, in between harvesting and planting. An uprising in July or December? Not in our lifetime. Still, Spring Revolution is perhaps a little too obvious.

“Loktantra Movement,” suggests a friend. Spot on. Because you might think there is no limit to the tantric martyrs of Nepal’s political scene; this one is a safe winner. Forget pragatista, janatantra, janaandolan. Loktantra is the latest incarnation and it could very well be the final one (at least for this month). Lok, I’ve been told, means both the dwelling place of the gods, as well as ‘the people’. So it doesn’t take much imagination to experience the meaning ‘loktantra’ – it’s the ultimate democracy, it’s a government without gods (or their incarnations), heaven on earth.

Still, there is the folk-at-home issue to be looked at. One catchy alternative could be ‘The Noodle Uprising’. Revolutions don’t happen on empty stomachs. And so political leaders, police inspectors and army generals alike discovered the virtues of instant noodles. True, all of us are unladen at hotspots such as Kalkari, Gongabu and Chabhil. Policemen were caught drooling when the little goodie bags were distributed in the late afternoon. Demonstrators too feasted on crunchy uncooked noodles and fruit juice tetrapacks.

But perhaps we should think of the smells and sounds of the uprising. Deadly silence in one part of the city, deafening sounds of shrill whistling, sloganeering and ambulance sirens in another. One word that reverberates in my ears is “Haan Haan!” You heard it from students on the Ring Road using slingshots on riot police on Ring Road. It was yelled by police inspectors and army majors, ordering their men to open fire on unarmed civilians. “Haan!” was also the word that marked the deaths of almost 13,000 people in the last ten years. It’s a word we hope the next generation will never have to use again. Its Andolan is another option. What would this uprising have been without bricks? Good old multi-purpose bricks from polluting kilns, exploiting the poorest of them all. For 19 days, it was David against Goliath, bricks against APCs.

‘Rhododendron Revolution’? The beautiful, resilient national flower, representing the Nepali spirit, flowering in rainbow colours. Mukesh’s Movement’. After the smoke and sloganeering ebbed it was the resonance of people power. People like Mukesh Kaysath, 15, who joined a rally in Banepa and was shot in the head. He hasn’t yet regained consciousness. At Bir Hospital ICU he breathes quietly in a coma. Mukesh now struggles not for loktantra but for his life. It’s his own andolan now. Individuals like Mukesh yearned for change, for a life worth living. And perhaps, when we whisper the same often enough, our voices filled with hope and conviction, Mukesh will wake up in a country he felt was worth fighting for.

-Marty Logan

**NEPALI PAN**

Lucia de Vries

**Nepali Pan**

Lucia de Vries

**Mukesh’s Movement**

Lucia de Vries

**Times**

26 MAY - 1 JUNE 2006 #299

World Class Sports Bar
now open in
Kamaladi Chowk,
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Phone No 4439017

Sports bar
and cafe
All the games, all the years

NATION

and tears

Karnali

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It is the atmosphere of distrust created over the decades, encompassing three-and-a-half wars and fuelled by the anger of the Partition refugees on both sides, stoked by the Islamist and Hinduva forces, the militarist takeover of Pakistani society, the imperiousness of the Indian state machinery, and the Kashmir issue which holds all Southasia hostage in its intractability.

From up here on AI 112, the frontier runs north-south like a pretty necklace but it is an obnoxious presence nonetheless. The Nepal-India border, let it be repeated, stands us as the ideal frontier of Southasia. It is open, porous, respectful of identical demography and sensibilities on the two sides, allows unimpeded commerce – and yet keeps national identities and respects sovereignties.

Transferred to the India-Pakistan sphere, the consequences for the economies are mind-boggling. The advantage of an open border would naturally accrue first to the people of the neighbouring regions of Punjab-Punjab and Sindh-Rajasthan-Gujarat. Each state or province is a powerful part of its respective national union or federation, so the reason they have not been able to force Delhi and Islamabad to ensure a thaw at the border is hard to fathom. With the receding memories of Partition, with India-Pakistan rapprochement despite the vicissitudes, it is time for the chief ministers in Amritsar, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Karachi and Lahore to respectfully inform Islamabad and New Delhi of their intention to meet and discuss lessening the bilateral frontier.

Let the chief ministers do what is good for their people. Only then will we see the end of the caricature that is the lowering-the-flag ceremony at the Wagah-Atari border point, where army men on each side stomp their boots and provide crass examples of what is said to be the national identity and manoeuvrability if the border were to be opened up and visas freely given out to feed the demand on both sides? Of course not. Would crossborder terrorism increase or decrease with such an opening? For sure, it would not increase? Would a border opening and the revival of economic and cultural linkages after five decades of cruel closure promote the cause of peace even more? Without a doubt, because many layers would thus be added to the peace constituency. Then why are the mullahs and the elite commentators not speaking along these lines, why are the nullahs and the punaths quiet about rapprochement, and why are the leaders of industry so subdued on the matter?

As things stand, foreign ministry bureaucrats in Islamabad and New Delhi are on the job, working gingerly on India-Pakistan rapprochement, doing what little they can in the absence of the groundswell of civil society. We do have, therefore, the Muzaffarabad-Enighar bus route and the Khokrapar-Munabao rail link restored, the Khokrapar-Munabao rail link restored, but these are modest achievements unable to generate momentum for the larger opening. Bigger initiatives have not been taken because the analysts and opinion makers are willingly locked into the unimaginative, self-preserving conservative agenda of their respective national elites. This sense of self-preservation keeps the gentlemen from going excidedly against what is considered the ‘national’ agenda, and so the demand from the citizenry fails to arise.

Would India and Pakistan as nation states be compromised in their national identity and manoeuvrability if the border were to be opened up and visas freely given out to feed the demand on both sides? Of course not. Would cross-border terrorism increase or decrease with such an opening? For sure, it would not increase? Would a border opening and the revival of economic and cultural linkages after five decades of cruel closure promote the cause of peace even more? Without a doubt, because many layers would thus be added to the peace constituency. Then why are the mullahs and the nullahs quiet about rapprochement, and why are the leaders of industry so subdued on the matter?

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When you’ve run from the Adriatic Sea to the Mediterranean, striding through eight Alpine nations, climbing and descending a total of 77,600 m in 36 days, an ultramarathon from Lhasa to Kathmandu sounds rather tame.

But Vincent Scheidegger didn’t account for the headwind that gathered force just after lunch day in and day out during his 24-day marathon of marathons between the capitals. “More than once I said to myself “this can’t be, this wind can’t blow in my face all the time. Sometimes I thought I would go crazy,” the Swiss man told us Wednesday, a day after he legged the last of his 1,114 km at Swoyambunath.

“I’m so tired today. Every day during the run I had to be motivated to get up in the morning and go but now the pressure’s off. Plus it’s so hot here. But overall, I feel good, I feel positive,” added the 33-year-old in the office of Base Camp Trekking & Expeditions, which provided the support vehicle to carry his supplies and smoothed the way for Chinese authorities to grant permission for the quest.

Scheidegger imagined the run during his honeymoon in 2000, when he and his wife travelled by vehicle between the cities. “I told myself ‘I’ll come again one day and take the time to see the sights close up and to be able to smell the smells’.” In 2002, he returned to Nepal to take part in the Himal Race, from Annapurna base camp to Everest base camp (1,100 km in 23 days). “It was good to have it organised but I knew that it would be better to do it alone,” says the smiling man with intense eyes.

Besides the wind, Scheidegger was also troubled by the high altitude (which averaged 4,000-4,200 m and included six passes above 5,000 m) fluctuating temperatures (-9C at Everest base camp and 35C at Dolalghat) and the discomfort of sleeping in a tent for 20 nights.

Each morning he would load the shelter into the supply vehicle, which would drive off and lead him alone to log an average of 46 km. “What I wanted to do was run one marathon a day, that was my athletic objective.” Another motivation was the chance “to live at the same rhythm as the local people”.

Sometimes that meant sharing his lunch with herdsmen, at other times Scheidegger strained to explain his quest to them. “They just couldn’t relate. They said ‘you can drive, why are you doing this?’”

How does the carpenter by trade and father of eight-month-old Mattia compare Lhasa-Kathmandu to his previous eight extra-long distance feats? “For me it was really the limit, for all those different reasons.”

But the run was far from a trial of pain, Scheidegger says. On his handwritten list of beautiful sights along the route, which basically followed the Friendship Highway, are Khompa La and Yamdrok Lake, Everest base camp (a detour) and Nyalam, where the vegetation seemed to sprout before his eyes as he descended from the dry Tibetan Plateau, “like the growth of a flower filmed with time lapse photography. And suddenly, after 24 days with wind blowing in my face, I could hear the birds.”

Mountain marathon man

The headwind from Lhasa to Kathmandu nearly blew away a Swiss runner

MARTY LOGAN

W
Four years after NATO bombed Kosovo continuously for 77 days to end the Balkans war, the UN has officially taken over and landed its largest ever mission of 45,000 peacekeepers in the capital. But the conflict is not over—by November 1999 many Albanians who fled the war have returned, causing panic among the remaining Serbs, who in turn flee Kosovo fearing reprisal attacks.

Of the 50,000 Serbs living here before the war, only 100 remain. Evicted from their homes in June 1999, they had no option but to squat in the Yu Program building, a downtown residential block formerly occupied by state officials. Five years pass and they never, even, leave their one-building ghetto, full of fear after hundreds of street attacks, beatings and kidnappings by Albanian extremists and despite the presence of UNMIK, the world’s largest peacekeeping mission.

UNMIK TITANIK is not so much about the war as it is about the resilient nature of human beings, their ability to survive even in the most difficult situations and to make the most of what they have. The documentary introduces teenage Stefan, who bears no visible marks of the previous years’ atrocities. In fact, his spirit is alive with the coming of the New Year.

“Wait, it’s too early... At 10 o’clock, when it starts, the whole city is gonna be bright!” he declares giving the director an exuberant glimpse of the city from the building’s rooftop, even while gunshots ring all around.

The movie gives a bleak lesson on the consequences of ethnic division, one that we in Nepal might do well to learn before it’s too late. Communities that lived in harmony for centuries suddenly faced questions that eventually lead to a great divide that caused neighbours to turn on one another.

Filmed, edited, written, directed and produced by former journalist and self-taught filmmaker Boris Mitic, UNMIK TITANIK brims with political sarcasm and black humour but it’s all presented in a positive, liberating way.

UNMIK TITANIK
At Baggikhana, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka
Sunday 28 May, 5.30 PM
Rs 50

Against all odds

Proclava, Kosovo, 31 December 2003. Four years after NATO bombed Kosovo continuously for 77 days to end the Balkans war, the UN has officially taken over and landed its largest ever mission of 45,000 peacekeepers in the capital. But the conflict is not over—by November 1999 many Albanians who fled the war have returned, causing panic among the remaining Serbs, who in turn flee Kosovo fearing reprisal attacks.

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Kathmandu’s hottest party planner, Party Nepal, is organising Classic Encounters, a series of jazz, blues, and fusion music concerts by players including Looza, Stupa, Anil Shahi and the now world famous jazz ensemble Cadenza. The concerts will be held in some of the most premium party venues in town, such as Moksh, Liquid Lounge, Absolute Bar, Upstairs, J-Bar and Latin Quarters in Baber Mahal. “We want to concentrate on some of the top clubs to go together with the brand image,” says Ravi Aryal of sponsor Surya Classic.

First up will be Looza at Liquid Lounge on 30 May. Looza, which means the first rays of the sun in Newari, comprises Lochan Rijal, Sharad Rajkarnikar, Rijju Tuladhar, Prazol Kansakar and Sunit Kansakar. The band earned phenomenal success when it played with Robin Tamang as Robin and Looza. Its music is still rock based but it has begun experimenting with “a little bit of funk and classical blues with a touch of new-age rock,” says Rajkarnikar.

Stupa’s bassist Nirakar Yakthumba needs no introduction. As front man of Nepal’s greatest rock band, 1974 AD, Yakthumba has been in the music scene for over a decade. It was natural that the bassist in him be attracted to jazz and Yakthumba proved his talent for the genre when he played with Mc Twisters. In many ways, Stupa is another expression of his affection for jazz. Together with Yubaraj Chettri on rhythm and vocals, Sanjaya Shrestha on drums (also a brilliant percussionist with 1974 AD) and the soothingly talented saxophonist Mariano, and guitarist Bimal Gurung, Stupa will perform at Classic Encounters, also on 30 May at Moksh and on 7 June at J-Bar.

The second part of the series will feature classical fusion guitarist Anil Shahi and jazz virtuosos Cadenza. Shahi’s talent lies in his guitar skills but he is also known for his singing and composition. Those who like east-west classical fusion will definitely appreciate his performance on 2 June at Absolute Bar, the perfect setting for this style of music. Cadenza, well, they defined jazz for us long before anyone else did. An evening with Cadenza is a lesson in serious improvisational music. All you need to do is ‘go with the flow’, as drummer Nabin Chettri likes to say. The band will be playing on their home ground, U-pstairs, on 2 June. If you like jazz, you already know Cadenza. If you don’t know jazz, take that first step upstairs.

Classic Encounters
Looza, at Liquid Lounge, 30 May
Stupa, at Moksh 30 May and at J-Bar 7 June.
Cadenza, at U-pstairs, 2 June
8PM onwards, by invitation only.

STUPA-FYING: Band members (left to right) Bimal Gurung, Yubaraj Chettri, Sanjay Shrestha and Nirakar Yakthumba.
Fanaa, ‘destroyed in love’, is about Zooni, a visually challenged Kashmiri girl and Rehan, a local tour guide with a knack for poetry. To experience life on her own, Zooni leaves the protective confines of her home and meets Rehan, who is smitten with Zooni and they travel together. But there are other sides of Rehan which he has never shown to Zooni. He knows telling the truth will take her away from him. But he also fears that being a part of his life could destroy her.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal
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WEATHER

Great news for those seeking rain—Unless dramatic changes take place, Nepal will receive this years monsoon rains a week earlier than the usual 10 June. The stand-off between the westerly and pre-monsoon fronts from the Bay of Bengal ended last Tuesday. As a result, the Bay has become a source of moisture and the rains have not produced the same cooling effect as the westerlies did last weekend. The Valley has already received more rainfall than its monthly quota, the satellite pictures taken Thursday morning show fresh clouds on the way from the Bay, which will definitely produce more rains this weekend and early next week.

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EXHIBITIONS
- Jana Andolan II Through Poetry and Art by Lincoln School
- Exhibition of paintings inspired by Iben, at Park Gallery till 4 June. 4411593
- Transcending Realities by Durga Baral, till 4 June at Gallery Nine. 4428864.
- Khulla Dhoka open doors at NAFA Art Gallery, Naxal till 6 June. 4411729.
- Watercolours from Nepal annual exhibition of the watercolour society, till 18 June.

EVENTS
- The Drag. On a Studio 7 performance at Naga Theatre, Hotel Vijay. 26,27,28 May and 2,3,4 June at 7:15 PM, Rs 700 (discounts available). 4271545
- Life Skills Training Camp 26-28 May. 4107599
- No-To-Bacco Day 31 May.
- Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal with Lynn Bennett at Malla Hotel, 2 June, 4.30 PM. 5481442
- Civic Concerns to assess the concerns and share ideas, Rs 100, 3 June, 10.30 AM, PID, Heritage Plaza, 4107599.
- Communication and leadership program with Toastmasters, meeting every Tuesday at IEEP building, Tripureswar. 9841307447
- Bagmati River Festival 3 June – 20 August. 5011013
- Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival 2006. 7-10 December, calling for entries. Forms available at www.himalasociety.org/kimff

MUSIC
- Sun Dance overnight open air music festival, 27 & 28 May at The Last Resort with 194AD, Jerry & Xplodion and Stupa.
- Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant.
- Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM at Upstairs.
- Live Music at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- Paakeeza Night dance authentic Mughli cuisine every Friday 7.30 PM at Fair Pavilion Restaurant. The Everest Hotel. 4780100
- Reggan Night with various artists at Mohle Live, 7.30 PM. 5582612.
- Jatra Friday nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- Unplugged sessions with Strings. Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622.

DINING
- Sandwiches at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- Hi Spirit serving 350 ml liquor on the higher side at Jumel Bar, Hotel De L’Anapurna till 2 June. 4221711
- Floats and Fantasies mocktails at Jumel Bar till 24 June.
- Return of the classics outdoor barbecue at Jumel Bar. 4221711
- Branch from the east weekend brunch at Jumel Bar till 29 July.
- BBQ every Friday at Jalan Jalan Restaurant. Kupodole Height. 5544782
- Beat the heat with milkshakes and smoothies at Hyatt Regency.
- Junglewalks rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- Park Village. Budhanikhat, Full room Rs 1,600. 4375280
- Conferences at Godavi special packages available. 5560675
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- Star Cruises in April, take your companion at 50% discount. 2012345
- Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012246
Still speaking for women

When Taranath Ranabhat resigned as speaker of the House of Representatives, word got around that his replacement would be none other than acting speaker Chitrakale Yadav. But to many people’s surprise and the dismay of many, the new government decided otherwise. However, Chitrakale was smiling as she shook hands with incoming speaker Subash Nembang. “Politics is not just about winning seats. These opportunities just come and go,” said the soft-spoken Chitrakale to Nepal Times. “If I lost the confidence of the people, that would upset me the most,” she adds.

It was the support of the people in her tarai community that led Chitrakale to emerge as one of the top leaders of the Nepali Congress, and to date as the only female politician in the party to make it without being a Koirala relative. Many still say that the one big mistake she made was to back Sher Bahadur Deuba during the NC’s break up but Chitrakale believes it was as wise a decision as the one she made to enter politics in the footsteps of her role model and father Yamuna Prasad, who had by compulsion become an MP during the late King Mahendra’s rule. (Time will tell if her decision this week to reject the post of Minister of Water Resources was also a good one.)

Although Kathmandu may know Chitrakale as the deputy speaker or a member of Deuba’s party, she is a role model for most of the tarai populace, especially its girls, women and even young men. And they’re not surprised at her success.

Chitrakale’s classmates at Mahendra Adarsa Vidyasram in Kathmandu still remember her as an intelligent girl. “No one could beat her in her studies and she just excelled in everything, from songs to acting to speaking,” says one of her friends, who hopes that Chitrakale has not forgotten her. While she was studying education in Siraha during the Panchayat era, her reputation as a superb speaker got her noticed by student union leaders. They convinced her to join them in the Jana Andolan and by the time Chitrakale reached Kathmandu to study at Tribhuvan University, she had already been elected treasurer of the Nepal Student’s Union, which played a major role in steering the country’s youth against the absolute monarchy. Even though Chitrakale has proved herself as a woman in the male-dominated political world, she feels that male leaders should do more to ensure women’s participation. “As long as these male politicians are narrow minded and not pluralistic in their thinking, women’s participation will be a far dream,” she says, adding that only female politicians will change the male hegemony in Nepal’s politics.

Naresh Newar
After the past month of turbulence and turmoil when many of us had to go without regular Friday nights out at the neighborhood watering hole and being deprived of our periodic eyebrow plucking sessions, it is good to see things finally returning to a semblance of relative normality in this nation of ours.

The most vivid sign of the return to a vibrant democracy of course is the introduction to eagerly awaiting consumers for the first time in Nepal of the vibrating condom (Strapline: ‘No side effects’) which means that you are using your handsets for purposes other than mobile telephony can now stop doing so.

The other sign that things are returning back to normalcy is that road centerline painters are busy painting lanes and zebras in the middle of rush hour on the Jawalakhel–Lagankhel stretch. What a relief it is to see that despite the monumental transformation of the country’s political structure and handing power back to the streets there is still optimism in the Department of Roads that people will actually follow traffic rules and drive on the rights side of the road, which of course is the left side unless you are overtaking street fauna, which is most of the time.

It’s good to see that the wheels of democracy are turning again at their own exorable pace and that Sajha buses have been banned from Baglung because they had been providing a cheaper service than private bus operators. Bravo. The next thing we must do in the name of people power is to shut down the Sajha gas station in Pulchok because it refuses to adulterate petrol with kerosene like all the other private pumps.

It’s been a month and our skeletal cabinet is physically incapable of expanding itself. I have heard dark mutterings about this on the op-ed pages from some chronic whiners. But please understand that if six ministers can’t agree, you think 22 ministers can? Imagine the inefficiency with a three times bigger cabinet. Why break something that ain’t fixed yet?

Those nostalgic about the glory days of throbbing democracy of the 1990s when parliament used to be paralysed by pyromaniacs on the streets had a chance to relive the past with tyre burning in Thapathali last week. We are making progress, though, because this time the tyres were set on fire while still attached to their vehicles.

We were also glad to notice that democracy is back with a vengeance because we have gone back to our old habit of declaring a national holiday whenever we feel like staying home. Learning from our past mistakes, we have improved on procedures by announcing the holiday only after people have arrived at their schools and offices. Forthcoming national holidays, including a day off to celebrate Mao Zedong’s birthday, are a closely guarded state secret and information on these will be provided only on a need-to-know basis at the last possible moment to prevent workaholics from setting a bad example and actually slinking off to work.

Speaking of our Mao Buddies, it is good to see that they have hit the ground running with doublespeak by justifying extortion and then vehemently denying they ever demanded Rs 100 million from Dabur (“We only demanded Rs 85 million”). We owe the comrades a debt of gratitude for giving us a sneak preview of the future of our vibrating democracy.