

# NEPALI Times

#299

26 May - 1 June 2006

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KUNDA DIXIT

**W**hat will the restoration of democracy mean to Nepal's remote regions and marginalised people? Will the Karnali and mountain districts that are untouched by roads finally get a hearing in faraway Kathmandu?

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.

All it takes is some seed money or catalytic help to get these regions going. Jumla and Kalikot need the Karnali Highway, Humla urgently needs to finish the Hilsa road to the Chinese border to end its isolation and

Mugu could easily be connected once the Martadi road reaches

Bajura. "It is the lack of access that is keeping us backward," says Jivan Shahi, the former DDC chairman of Humla. "Once there is a road everything else will follow."

Like elsewhere in the country, the Maoists have come above ground in the far west as well. Along the trails in Humla, guerrillas in civvies walk to Simkot, not even concealing pistols wrapped in black plastic bags. Their mass meetings may be well-attended but it will be difficult to judge real support as long as they keep their weapons. □

**Times** nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 299

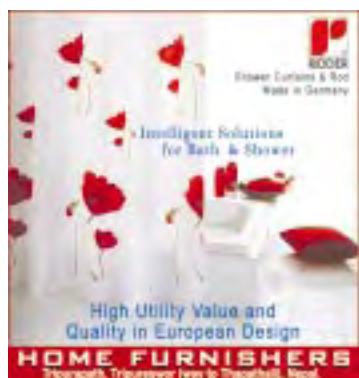
Q. Is it time now for the Maoists to renounce violence?

Total votes: 7,166



Weekly Internet Poll # 300. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Do you agree with parliament's decision to declare Nepal a secular state?



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## MOMENTOUS MONTH

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 be giving 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 transfer of power. Elsewhere 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 transformation 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 health, education and livelihoods to their constituents. Parliament can't afford to be so bogged down with reprisal and retribution to kickstart development. Unless people see a measurable improvement in their living standards 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 needs (see p 8-9). Mugu, Bajura, Bajhang and Doti are in the grip of a severe drought-induced food shortage. Across the tarai, farmers need help 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 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 be destroyed to begin with. 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 growth in demand, attracting investments to create the 500,000 new jobs that Nepalis need 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 be folding our hands and twiddling our 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.



KIRAN PANDAY

### JUSTICE

The violence on the streets of Kathmandu on Monday was completely uncalled for. But the blame-game of pinning it on the Maoists or the vigilantes of the *ancien régime* is no less regrettable. The political class must understand that it can't be business as usual for a parliament reinstated after a ceaseless struggle of four years and an unprecedented popular uprising. The parliament needs to work and show explicitly that it's engaged in executing the agenda of the April uprising. If it dithers, as it did in finalising the historic parliamentary proclamation early this week, street violence can erupt without warning. The Jana Andolan has proved that prohibitory orders are meaningless if the government doesn't have the confidence of the people.

*Chandan Mishra, email*

- So it is in a democracy that the people who expressed their free opinion in support of the king are being arrested. So much for freedom of speech...you have to always favour those in the power and never speak against them. Are you guys in the media watching?

*Rahul Shrestha, email*

- Since last several years I have been a frequent reader of *Nepali Times* and consider it as an example of objective journalism. However, I see a certain imbalance in your coverage. There are calls to punish those who put down last month's demonstrations. But how about all the murders and atrocities of the last 10 years of conflict? What do we say to the victims of those who lost their relatives? When will they get justice?

*Niraj Shrestha, email*

- Democratic processes are

# Lest we forget

## Plenty of democrats and peoples' warriors have the peoples' blood on their hands

**S**o the people are officially sovereign. Good. And that horrible parody of a national anthem is going. Excellent. Gyanendra Shah's wings are clipped and Paras could be tried for murder and other crimes. Couldn't be better.

**HERE AND THERE**  
Daniel Lak



But again, MPs and Maoists alike need to remember something. It's not just the royals and feudals who are resented by the Nepali people. They too are stained by dishonour and more than a little blood.

Before I reluctantly left Nepal in 2004, I used to venture forth from time to time to meet villagers and cadres in Maoist areas like Rolpa, Rukum, Dang and Salyan. Sometimes women carried the guns, most often it was men. But to a person, they

would tell tales of atrocities and how these had driven them to become peoples' warriors.

Much of the time, especially before 2002, they were not talking about the RNA, now NA. It was the police and the armed police that had killed, maimed, tortured raped and stolen. Yes, these days, you'd find a horrible litany of abuse on the lips of country folk. But for much of the Maoist war, the army refused to get involved.

In those early years from 1998 until 2002, the names that stood accused of ordering horrific abuses weren't yet Shah, Rana or Thapa. Those cursed for a disappearance or a brutal police action would be Deuba, or Koirala. Bam Deb Gautam wasn't particularly well thought of either, despite his leftist credentials.

These gentlemen, now so prominent in the nation's newly restored loktantra were in charge when the brutal operations known as Romeo, Kilo Sierra 1 and Kilo Sierra 2. Sher Bahadur Deuba and Comrade Gautam as ministers were believed to have ordered police actions. Girija Prasad Koirala was prime minister during some tough times.

Amnesty International and other groups rightly condemned elected Nepali governments for those operations. International media and local reporters spoke to victims and found horror stories galore. The Maoist war began and worsened under democracy. Democrats ordered murders, brutality and vengeful assaults on villagers in Kalikot, Salyan, Rukum and Rolpa.

Nor do the Maoists have anything to be sanctimonious about. Their violence arose

because they couldn't function peacefully in a democratic system, however flawed. They ruthlessly targeted politicians and political parties for much of their so-called 'Peoples' War'. From time to time, headline attacks on the security forces would give the illusion that an actual war was under way. But mostly, cadres and commissars systematically exterminated the infrastructure of political parties. The UML, for much of the 90's the most viable democratic force in rural Nepal, came in for particularly brutal attention.

Who could forget how Maoists deliberately savaged the few gains of 1990s democracy? Physical infrastructure was blown apart and so were the DDCs and VDCs—both of which were becoming successfully entrenched as forces for real change at local and regional levels. The Maoists saw this as a threat to their myth-driven ideology, so they blew up buildings, oppressed employees and kept political control firmly in their mailed fists.

Sure, Nepal needs to be modern, sovereign and probably some sort of republic. It's up to the people. And those who wreaked havoc and devastated the land need to answer for their crimes up to and including Gyanendra Shah, his cronies and sycophants, senior RNA officers and others. But as the weeks progress, let's be wary of attempts to claim that justice is done when the feudals are purged.

There are plenty of democrats and peoples' warriors with the peoples' blood on their hands. At very least, they need to own up to their sins and apologise to those who suffered from them. At very least. ●

## LETTERS

by definition slow as you say in your editorial ('Guns and slogans', #297). Issues need to be examined from every angle. All sides need to be given a voice. But that's precisely the reason parliamentary deliberations have to open to the public, so that people know where their leaders

**DEFANGING**  
After reading Kunda Dixit's 'Touching a raw nerve' (Under My Hat, #298) about tooth extractions I realised that there is rather a lot of defanging going on in the kingdom lately.

*Dubby Bhagat, Lalitpur*

- As always Kunda Dixit really knows how to see the absurdities in Nepal's reality in his Under My Hat ('Living in a supernatural state', #296). But I don't think Nepali leaders see the irony in it and will change their behaviour, whether they are left, right, royal or loyal.

*B Raj Giri, email*

**TIME TO TALK**  
The outcome of the people's movement has generated much hope after the confusing political turmoil that was engulfing the nation. The Maoist issue must not be brushed aside and should be addressed through sensible dialogue at the earliest.



stand on any issue. The seven party alliance committed a collective mistake by debating the declaration in private rather than on the floor of the house. All this led to an avoidable orgy of arson Monday afternoon.

*Binod Das, Teku*

Otherwise the danger of re-igniting the chaos will be imminent. Failure on the part of the interim parliament would only signal a comeback of the forces adamant on achieving their goal of a communist republic.

*Yagya Khaling Rai, Farnborough, UK, email*

**WHOSE DEMOCRACY?**  
The Maoist leadership has repeatedly said that absolutism too would be acceptable if it was created by a constituent assembly. It has also clarified that its concept of a multiparty system is not the same as that found in western democracies but would consist of multiple parties within a socialist republic that followed the Prachanda line. I do not know if the seven-party alliance has the same understanding of a multiparty system. If the Maoists and the SPA have a different understanding of such a system, it could hinder delivery of their 12-point agreement. I don't

# A republican monarchy

## The future of the serpent throne five years after

**F**ive 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. Uneasy 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

### STATE OF THE STATE

C K Lal

took  
was  
five  
years

for King Gyanendra to discredit and dismantle this hallowed institution. His brother had carefully crafted the throne to keep his 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 Narayanhit Massacre became an accepted reality when a desolate population rejected the report of the royal investigation committee. As 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 Holeri. Five years later, the generals are now taking orders from parliament and the army has been stripped of its 'royal' prefix.

But Koirala's successor in Singh Darbar began to act as if the wishes of the king were his sole command. The term of the local government units was allowed to lapse, defence expenditure was unlimited, a state of emergency was declared and then extended.

Sher Bahadur Deuba's ambitions led



MIN BAJRACHARYA

to the vertical division of the NC, the only party in the country that had stood by the idea of constitutional monarchy throughout its history. And to cap it all, King Gyanendra dissolved parliament in the dead of the night on 22 May 2002 upon the recommendation of a prime minister who had lost the confidence of his own party.

If a date were to be put upon the demise of the 1990 constitution that enshrined the king as a part of the legislative as well as the executive, it has to be the day when the lower house of the parliament was dissolved in full knowledge that it could never be reconstituted through elections within the

stipulated six months. The king ruled as an absolute monarch until the day his authority was brought down last month.

Five years after 4 June, 2001, the day comatose King Dipendra was declared dead and the Shah crown shifted from the head of a crown prince to that of a royal regent, it's tempting to envision whether the king could have acted differently and saved the monarchy and from the tremendous personal humiliation to himself. In hindsight, it can be argued that had he stuck strictly to the law perhaps the public resentment would have cooled off. But he never gave himself that chance.

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 Narayanhit Massacre. February First completed the process of its political isolation.

Since the myth of Nepali nationalism centred around the 'one language, one people, and one nation under one king' is still quite strong, a symbolic monarchy may yet survive the forces of democratisation unleashed by the April Uprising. But in spirit and substance, Nepal is already a republic. ●

understand why the common people of Nepal are required to risk the absolutism that could result from a constituent assembly elected by themselves. I would still think it possible to draft a fully democratic constitution acceptable to the Maoists and SPA and then hold a national referendum to ratify it.

Ravi Manandhar

### LETTERS

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

Email: letters@nepalitimes.com  
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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

**COMMENT**  
Kanak Mani Dixit



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

## Imagining a New Nepal

A national conference in July seeks to chart the road towards peace, reconstruction and development

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 *bikas* 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 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). ●

[www.naya-nepal.org](http://www.naya-nepal.org)  
Kanak Mani Dixit is convener of the National Conference on Peace, Reconstruction and Development



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## Great guide

Shes Kanta Sharma (aka KC Bhawan), a guide for Mountain Travel, has been nominated for The Paul Morrison Guide Award 2006 as the world's top trekking guide. KC is one of 11 guides nominated by readers of *Wanderlust* magazine who are in the running for the inaugural award. Working the Annapurna circuit and booked through Escape2Nepal, Tiger Mountain and Himalayan Kingdoms, KC started work as a porter when he was 16, and worked his way up as 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 (<http://www.wanderlust.co.uk/magazine/guides.html>).

## NEW PRODUCTS

**SANITARY PADS:** Safety Sanitary Pads are now available in Nepal. Produced by Jasmine Hygiene Products, a sister company of Sarada Group, the pads come in two types: regular and ultra. Both include five-way anti-leakage design and an adhesive system that prevents the pads from twisting or turning. Retail price is Rs 40 (regular) and Rs 85 (ultra).



**CREDIT CARD SCHEME:** Standard Chartered Bank has introduced a new scheme for its Visa and MasterCard cardholders, allowing them to earn reward points on purchases made using the bank's credit cards. Cardholders will get one reward point for every Rs 100 of retail spending. These reward points must be redeemed within one year. The customer can choose to receive gift vouchers or a waiver on annual fees.

**ATTA NOODLES:** The makers of Wai Wai have introduced Bingo Instant Atta Noodles. Priced at just Rs 10, Atta Noodles are pre-cooked, flavoured, fried and come with seasonings. Bingo consumers can win attractive prize coupons.

**KYRON SUV:** Hansraj Hulaschand, the authorized distributor of SsangYong Motor, has launched the Kyron Sports Utility Vehicle. It features five speeds and is the only vehicle in its class fitted with a heavy-duty steel chassis. The 650-litre cargo space provides room for the family's entire luggage. Prices start from Rs 3,500,000.

**ATTA NOODLES:** Asian Thai Food, makers of 2PM noodles have launched atta noodles. The seasonings contain real chicken cubes and vegetables, no monosodium glutamate and has added protein. It comes in metallic wrapper which keeps the noodles fresh for a longer period.



# "We salute the Nepali people..."



KIRAN PANDAY

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

**Nepali Times:** What is your assessment of the recent political changes in Nepal?

**Lucie Edwards:** 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 it will clearly be a challenge for Nepalis to take it forward. Nepali people have shown incredible determination and will to govern themselves and that is something we salute.

The new government has a lot in its plate. I was able to participate in the meeting the finance minister had with the foreign donors this week and there's a huge task of getting the economy back on its feet with the agenda of support for the actual process of peace building and creating a new democratic constitution. There is a very long-term social agenda in terms of women, dalits, poor people and so on.

**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 OHCHR 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 have a regional mission that support a number of smaller offices. We have offices specifically to do development and also to support other programs in Kathmandu. We can't have offices everywhere we would like to have but this seems to be a good compromise. The model has proved itself in Nepal.

# Moral police needed

## It's time we all helped to enforce a civic sense

**C**lose to this Beed's house is a manhole that has long remained gaping. This is not because locals like it that way but because every time an iron cover is installed, it is quickly stolen. In many temples you'll

**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
Artha Beed



find children who are fast to pounce on offerings even before devotees can find where to place them.

Where are our civic sense and moral policing? Ride the metros of Delhi or Bangkok and you will note the absence of security personnel to warn you not to throw your trash inside the train cars. Instead, you are 'policed' by the stares and whispers of your fellow passengers if you dare to engage in such behaviour. Here in the United States, parents don't dare to leave their children alone in a car or even take a stroller on an escalator, so scared are they that people will complain to authorities. In Dallas you can see plain-clothes security officers who call the police if you have more than your quota at the bar, whether you are driving or not.

Why are we scared to

throw trash in the streets of the US or Europe but do it thoughtlessly back home? Why is it that Nepali drivers never jump a red light outside the streets of their own country? Why do we diligently queue at the immigration counter in Delhi but as soon as we land at Kathmandu airport, we fling our departure cards at the officials and ignore the queue?



KIRAN PANDAY

As fellow columnist CK Lal pointed out in his last article, the amount that Nepal spends on security is mind-boggling. If we did more moral policing there would be less need for security forces and we could divert some of this cash. We need a cracking security force to defend our sovereignty and to manage disasters but a lot of its mundane functions could be undertaken by citizens instilled with a civic sense.

While the parties are negotiating the country's political stability, it is also important to explore how we can inculcate a better civic sense. Technology could be leveraged to encourage moral policing. For example, people with camera-equipped cell phones could take photos of traffic violators and send the pictures to a control room. Such whistle-blowing citizens could be protected from possible retaliation.

As we redefine our security concerns, it becomes equally important for the nation state to push the agenda of building civic sense and moral policing. The best place to start would be in our schools. Any takers? ●

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**Is Canada looking at continuing its support for hydropower development in Nepal?**

Canadian companies have been involved in Nepal for a long time in the construction of hydroelectric projects. I know there are many plans that have been in government filing cabinets about additional projects that can be built but the problem has been security. If people can work safely and effectively in those valleys, I think there will be terrific interest in hydropower. Canadian companies will certainly be interested in working in Nepal again. You'll have a very good market for your electricity and this is a tremendous opportunity for Nepal.

**Your advice to the Maoists?**

I pray that the Maoists see their future as a democratic activist political party that is working through democratic means to speak out for the poor and for the people who have found themselves voiceless in Nepal before. It would be good for Nepal if they become a strong leftist political party. We need that voice, we don't need an insurgency, we don't need violence.

**More and more Nepalis are going to Canada for higher studies, how can you help streamline this process?**

There's been a major effort put by the Canadian universities, which in Canada are heavily independent from the government, to encourage more international students from South Asia. It's now possible for students to work part time and during the summers and in most cities to continue after they graduate and to work for up to two years in Canada to pay up their debts and gather practical experience. So they are now pretty much on the same basis as Canadian students. We're terribly worried about the proliferation of organisations that call themselves agents. What the people of Nepal need to understand is that they do not need to apply through an agent to study in Canada or to apply for student visa once you have received approval from the university or college. Everything on Canada is very easily available on the internet. People can do their research and find out all the information necessary on the internet completely free of charge.

# Industry shut

Editorial in *Abhiyan*, 22-28 May

अभियान

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 Maoist 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 work force made 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 also is 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 good 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 refute that his organization was involved in extortion and call for peace talks to be expedited. It seems the Maoists now are in more of 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 tarnished 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 peace by paying the Maoists less than three percent of its annual budget, then it is cheap. The Maoists must also regard this as a great achievement since this means the rank and file will be taken care of, they may not have to answer for all the terrorist activities and for ruining the country's economy and they can be seen as a political force that stands for peace.

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The lesson from this latest episode is that the peace negotiations will not be meaningful without the Maoists being confined to barracks.

## Be patient

Editorial in *Deshantar*, 21 May

देशान्तरसंपादक

After the 18 May historic proclamation, a country that was ruled by kings for the last 237 years is now finally being run by the people. The proclamation has killed all aspirations of those who want to make government bodies their own personal services. The army finally belongs to the people and our diplomatic missions abroad will be known as Nepali missions. With the start of this new era, Nepalis will also face new challenges, the most important being to safeguard the proclamation that Jana Andolan II brought about. The Nepali people are gradually reaching a point where they are ready to forgive and join hands with Maoists but are cautious about trusting some leaders. The rebels haven't stopped extortion and committing atrocities. These activities only fuel the forces that are looking for reasons to brand the new system as flawed. The government is systematically addressing the challenges but any delay from its side will only boost the regressive forces. It was because such forces bounced back so strong after 1990's people movement that the 1991 constitution was flawed. The road ahead is long so all parties, especially the Maoists, have to remain strong and be patient.

## Secular strife

Purnajagaran, 25 May

पुनर्जगरण

Nepal's first identity was that of a Hindu kingdom but this is no longer the case following the declaration of a secular state, a move that has caused concern among some Hindus. Intellectuals say that there is now danger of a religious war due to the attempts

to undermine Hinduism and promote other religions in the name of democracy. The house declaration, made under pressure from NGOs funded by Christian, Islamic and Buddhist countries, has shocked 300 million Hindus worldwide. Now there is a danger that Hindu activists will organise mass protests before the constituent assembly takes place. At a time when the Maoists have still not disarmed, comes the risk that Hindus will also take up arms in the name of religion, jeopardising the newfound peace. It would be natural for Hindus to be provoked if a secular government allowed cows to be slaughtered legally. For now, the government has to justify clearly why the country had to lose its identity as a Hindu state, one which was a source of national pride. It cannot deny sovereign citizens their birthright to recognise their country as a Hindu Kingdom. Shiba Sena has organised huge protest rallies in Birganj and Rajbiraj on Sunday to condemn the declaration of a secular state. India's opposition Bharatiya Janta Party has also criticised the move and reportedly the Nepal chapter of the World Hindu Federation sent letters to MPs urging them to not support the move.

## Maoists push IDPs

Nepal, 28 May

नेपाल

Internally displaced families taking refuge at Rajena camp in Nepalganj are showing no signs of returning to their villages despite an 'order' given by local Maoist workers one month ago. Media coverage of the refugees' plight has given the rebels a bad name internationally and they have been pushing hard for the 100 or so remaining families to return to their villages. Around 216 families from Mugu, Jumla, Bajura and Dailekh took shelter in the camp but many left due to a shortage of food and shelter. Some went to India to try to make a living. The rebels are spreading the word in the camp that their party is willing to forgive the IDPs, as if they were criminals. They have also promised to return their property and ensure their security but at the same time are warning that they will destroy the camps if the IDPs refuse to leave. The Maoist leader of Banke-Bardia, Athak, even met CDO Binod Kumar Adhikari a week ago and asked for his help in removing the camps. Rights group INSEC mediated three round of talks between the rebels and IDPs and say an agreement was reached after the former promised to make provisions for travel expenses and food for the IDPs for three months. Despite that reported deal and the threats, the families are not willing to give up the camp unless the Maoists make visible provisions for their livelihood and security. "The Maoists killed all our cows and buffaloes, tore down our houses and our farms are all barren," says Ratna Lal from Mugu, a UML worker had fled home due to Maoist intimidation. The government has not uttered a word on the welfare of the IDPs.



Board: Donor

Man: Nepal Government "It might be possible to pay off our loans to you after we collect the taxes we've been paying for the last 237 years."

नेपाल Nepal, 28 May



A security man carries a baby to its nursing mother who was sitting for exams at Tribhuvan High School in Dailekh on Wednesday.

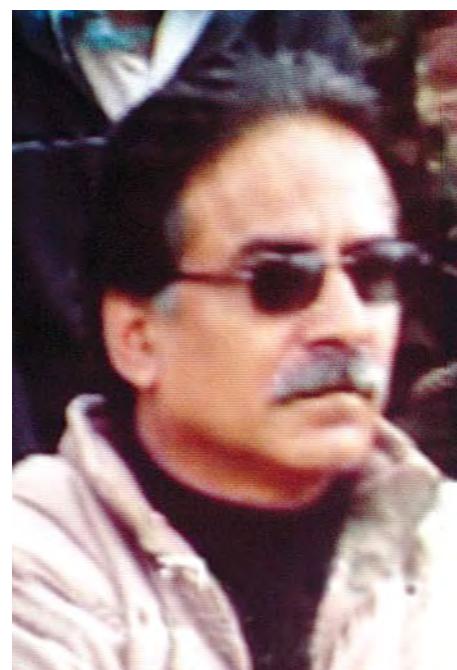
## QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"If political parties are convinced that the state should be declared secular, they should have the courage to go for a referendum and get people's mandate rather than making a proclamation."

Bharat Keshari Simha in *Nepalnews.com* 24 May

# Talks soon



Interview with Comrade Prachanda in Jaanadesh, 16 May

जनादेश

## Why do you think the government has been slow to form a talks team?

They are probably discussing it amongst 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 palace and other regressive 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 take 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 current parliament, 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 restructure 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, a Dutch non-government development organisation, has been working in Nepal since 1980. 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.



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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 (NBPG), Ghatta Owners and its membership organisation (GOA), Manufacturers and Service Centre, Biogas Sector Partnership – Nepal (BSP-N), Centre for Rural Technology Nepal (CRT/N), Micro Finance Institutes (MFIs), new partners in SNV's portfolio, etc.;
- Contributing to the organisational learning of SNV Nepal as an advisory organisation;
- Establishing linkage 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 Organisational Development related activities; extensive experience in supporting development of Business Membership Organisations (BMO) as a change agent (at central, regional and local level); proven track record in capacity strengthening of Nepali partner organisations through advisory services and steering multi-disciplinary approach; experience in private sector development and working with enterprises; experience in / exposure to ID/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 inclusiveness, conflict and gender in rural development.

**Job Specific Knowledge/Skills:** Fluency in spoken and written 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 techniques, coaching and 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 interviews 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](http://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.



**Organisation Development Centre (ODC)**

Harihar Bhawan, Pulchowk, Lalitpur,  
GPO 8975 EPC 443, Kathmandu, Nepal

**Phone:** (977-01) - 5551979, 5524540

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SNV/Nepal gives special consideration to female candidates and candidates from marginalised and disadvantaged groups



KUNDA DIXIT IN HUMLA

**A**t night, 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 TV from 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 500 kilowatt powerplant on the Hildung River lies half complete and abandoned. Despite having a minister in the last royal regime, Humla's voice is too feeble to be heeded 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 in Simkot. Langduk set aside its own community forest and is now putting up a herbal farm. At the Mahakali Primary School, enrollment is 100 percent and eight of the 17 students are girls (*picture, above*). Teacher Binod Shah is worried about having fewer students but it's a sign that rising living standards and literacy have brought down the birth rate.

The villagers recently installed their own hydropower plant and an improved watermill. Langduk's cooperative charges Rs 5 per light bulb per month, Rs 10 for a colour TV and now has enough saved up to increase generation capacity.

If the rest of Nepal was as committed as Langduk, this country would already have met the UN's Millennium Development Goal of halving poverty and improving nutrition and

literacy by 2015. How did they do it?

"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 councils. Elected grassroots leaders had to be accountable and were judged on performance. Jivan Shahi was Humla's elected DDC chairman 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.

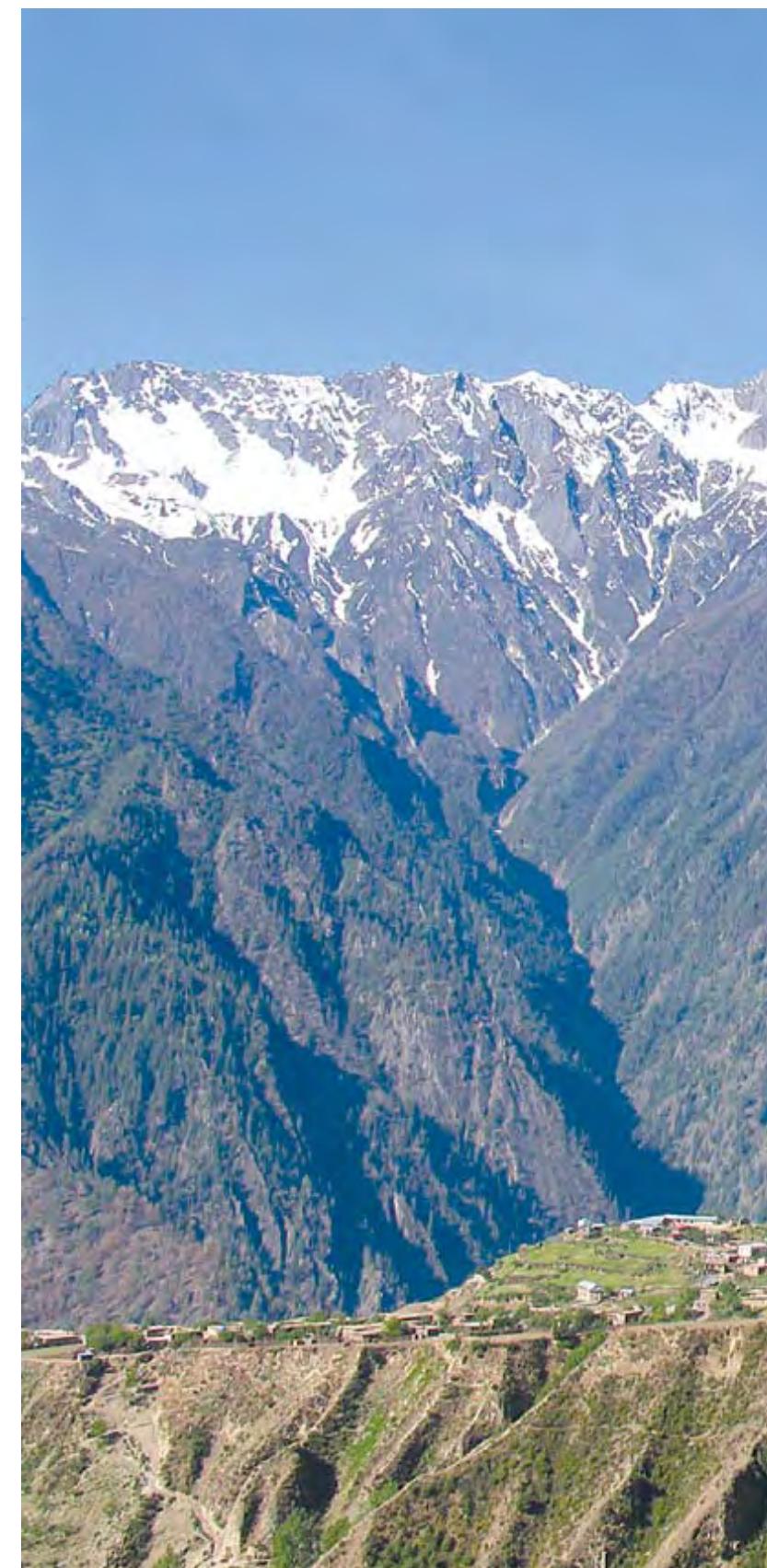
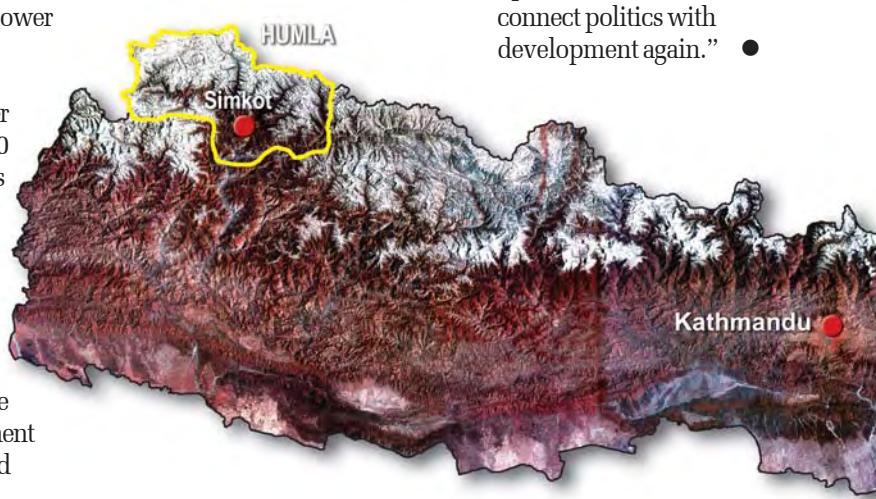
"If we have the money we can finish this road in two years and that will transform Humla," says local politician Tsiring Utup Lama, "it will be our spinal chord."

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 Chaitanya Mishra summed it all up amidst applause: "It is now up to elected local leaders to connect politics with development again." •



## Restoration of democracy

# Humla



# 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



# Normalcy revives hopes for development in Nepal's remotest region 's road to progress

electricity to give electricity to a Nepali family without it is bringing a neon glow into the interior of homes in Humla. Nearly 400 Nepalis have donated Rs 4,000 for the scheme which aims to install solar-powered battery systems in 500 homes here. Dalit and poor families have been the first to get the lights and are ecstatic.

"Our eyes don't itch, the children don't cough anymore and can do their homework at night, our clothes aren't black, and I can work on my stitching machine at night," says Kanna Damai.

For another Dalit, Gore Sunwar, it was an emotional moment to finally meet the man who made all this possible: journalist Bhairab Risal. "You are the only one who thought of us poor people, no one else has," Sunuwar told Risal, "my children are in school and they aren't sick anymore."

At 77, Risal is still tirelessly pursuing his project and is already looking at replicating Humla's success in Mugu and Jumla. Moscow-based Nepali Jugal Bhurtel has donated Rs 200,000 for 50 lights and the diaspora group, Help Nepal is funding 100. "Raising money is the easy part," says Risal, "the hard part is the logistics and making sure there is training and backup."

Donations pay for the cost of the panel, two 6 watt lamps and a battery while a government subsidy takes care of transportation. Households have to pay Rs 1,500 for the installation.

For Kanna Damai it's all worth it: "Inside the house it is now brighter at night than during the daytime."

Humla Ma Ujyalo: 977-1-4232052

## 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 bazaar 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 Mansarovar 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.





ALL PICS: DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

JOURNEY INTO THE UNKNOWN: Fresh from Nepal, workers step off the plane in Doha last week (left). A pile of passports for renewal at the Nepali embassy in Doha. Nepali workers on a construction site working in 42-degree heat (right)

## Nepali workers in Qatar toil to keep their families and country afloat

# Blood, sweat

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA  
in DOHA

**A**nother plane-load of Nepalis arrives in the Qatar 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 back home, exploited by recruiters and then paid less than promised by Qatari employers they stay on to send their meager earnings

home. But they are treated like second-class citizens by a state that they keep afloat with their remittances.

With the restoration of democracy there is hope that the Labour Ministry in Kathmandu will be stricter in ensuring that workers are not cheated, that they are paid a minimum wage and have insurance.

There used to be only 400 Nepali workers in Qatar in 1994, this jumped to 25,000 in 2000 and today it stands at more than 150,000. Although more and more managerial level and skilled workers are migrating, 85 percent of Nepalis here are manual labourers.

That is why they 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 salary of 800 riyal (\$1=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.

Journalist and Lalitpur MP Raghuji Panta was Minister of Labour last year when he ran into a dozen Nepali workers at Doha airport because they were cheated

by recruiters. When he got back to Kathmandu he immediately revoked the licenses of two manpower agencies. "The ministry is not careful about certification and our embassy doesn't do enough to monitor non-compliance," Panta 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 sheikhdom that is 15 times smaller than Nepal and has 30 times fewer people, yet Nepali construction workers are much sought after. Part of the reason is that Nepalis are willing to work for less money.

But the hardship, homesickness and low pay saps the Nepalis and that has taken its toll. In 2005, four Nepali workers committed suicide. In 2005 there were 10 suicides and so far in 2006 12 Nepalis couldn't bear it any longer and have already killed themselves.

Many Nepalis also die in traffic accidents. The toll was 30 last year and eight Nepalis have been killed on roads in the past four months alone. The dry desert climate and temperature that soars to 50 degrees inside their quarters means many fall sick. Forty-eight Nepalis died in 2005 and so far this year 21 have already died.

Nepal's ambassador to Qatar



KUNDA DIXIT

# Food for the

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

**T**he UN's World Food Programme expects to get approval Monday for its first-ever emergency food operation in Nepal to counter a severe drought in the Karnali and surrounding districts. That would give the green light to a three-month plan to deliver 3,800 tonnes of rice and flour to the area by trucks, mules and porters, the WFP's Jean-Pierre de Margerie told us Thursday.

But while a six-month drought decimated the wheat crop, dangerously stretching the annual 'hunger gap' between harvests, long-term neglect by successive central governments has left the people perhaps more malnourished than anywhere else in the country, according to a recent assessment.

In February and March, French NGO Action Contre la Faim visited Mugu and neighbouring district Humla to assess the health situation, particularly of children.

"It can be concluded that the acute malnutrition in the 10 surveyed VDCs is more alarming than expected and is an issue that needs to be addressed in terms of treatment and also in terms of prevention," says the report of that mission.

"Results obtained by the exploratory mission...are in contradiction with the (belief) that acute malnutrition affects most the tarai than the mountain areas of Nepal. Higher acute malnutrition prevalence has been found in Humla and Mugu compared to the national rate."



# and tears

Shyam Nanda Suman says the government should not allow anyone earning less than 600 riyal to migrate for work here. "The Labour Ministry must make sure that the recruiters are not lying in the papers," he says.

Shafiz Khan, a Nepali employment agent in Qatar who has found jobs for 1,500 Nepalis here in the past five years say workers must educate themselves about their rights and procedures and they 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. ●

## HORROR STORIES

Walk down the streets of Doha where Nepalis hang out in evenings on their day off, and you hear them exchanging horror stories. While some dance and sing folk songs from back home, others share their woes with anyone who is willing to listen. The Nepali embassy here receives up to seven Nepalis cheated by employers or recruiters everyday. Some haven't been paid, others have been abandoned by employers. There are now about 361 Nepalis in jail accused of having fake documents, in most cases they were cheated by fellow-Nepalis back in Kathmandu.

- Kamal KC from Dang paid Rs 80,000 to a recruiter to find him a job as a computer operator in Qatar. When he got here a month ago, he found that the employer who is supposed to have hired him doesn't exist.
- Bir Bahadur Ghorsane from Morang has been in jail for four months after immigration accused him of having a fake passport that was arranged by his recruiter in Nepal.
- Parsuram Dotel, Sushil Shakya and Bipin Karki paid Rs 60,000 each to their recruiter, Ganga Bahadur Basnet of Subham Overseas. But once they got here, they found there was no job for them. For the past four months, the three have been living on charity from fellow-Nepalis on the streets. Shakya can barely control his anger: "I can't wait to return to Nepal and get my hands on this Ganga Basnet."

# 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 night 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



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 operation 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." ●

Marty Logan

## Mukesh's Movement

### How to name a revolution

**E**pic moments, never to be forgotten. Thousands of people marching around the capital, waving green leaves, defying tanks and machineguns. Worn 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

**NEPALI PAN**  
Lucia de Vries



Movement II' sounds like a 60s Cuban soap series. The Chinese got their Cultural Revolution, the Thai the Silk, the Ukrainians the Orange. The Nepalis deserve no less. This uprising urgently needs a fitting name, capturing its mood and moments of glory.

'Spring Revolution', some papers suggest. Not bad, especially because uprisings in Nepal traditionally take place in Spring, during the lull 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 tantra mantra of Nepal's political scene, this one is a sure winner. Forget prajatantra, ganatantra, janatantra. 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 'lokutantra'- it's the ultimate democracy, it's a government without gods (or their incarnations), heaven on earth.

Still, there is the folks-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. Trucks full of snacks were unloaded at hotspots such as Kalanki, Gongabu and Chabhal. 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, sloganising 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.

'Ita 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 sloganising ebbed it was the resonance of people power. People like Mukesh Kayastha, 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 name often enough, our voices filled with hope and conviction, Mukesh will wake up in a country he felt was worth fighting for. ●

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# Lights are the border

The biggest barrier is the closed minds of our decision-makers

**F**lying back into Southasia in the middle of the night, it becomes a ritual to look down at the India-Pakistan border slip by nearly 40,000 ft below. And before long, the lights of Lahore become visible in the north, even as the pilot of Air India flight 112 comes on the intercom to announce the arrival of the frontier.

South of Lahore and southwest of Amritsar, the border is a lit-up fine line in the darkness of the desert and one can imagine the concertina wire, the service road, the watchtowers and gun-toting border guards.

## SOUTHASIA BEAT

Kanak Mani Dixit



The calamity that this border represents is so heart-rending that this columnist cannot but repeat the refrain every time he overflies it.

It should not be the task of romantic peaceniks alone to bemoan the rigidity of this border, but that is how it is for now. The economists, political analysts, professors and editors, not only of India and Pakistan but of the larger Southasia, should be continuously agitated by the 'hardness' of this frontier. Why? Because it is a symbol and also a very physical presence highlighting the lost possibilities through the decades.

The opinion makers of Southasia should be working overtime to convert the closed India-Pakistan border into a porous frontier but the reality of realpolitik keeps our imagination at bay. We are at business-as-usual when we should be helping build a groundswell demand for the opening. If Jawaharlal Nehru and the Quaid did not foresee a distancing between the



populations of India and Pakistan, why should succeeding generations follow the dictates of geopolitics this mindlessly?

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 from civil society. We do have, therefore, the Muzaffarabad-Srinagar bus route and 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 excitedly 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 '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 elite commentators not speaking along these lines, why are the mullahs and the pundits quiet about rapprochement, and why are the leaders of industry so subdued on the matter?

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 Hindutva 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 Al 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 up 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 to discuss loosening 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-Attari border point, where army men on each side stomp their boots and provide crass example of what is said to be the national attitude, which we know is not. It is time that those lights at the border are switched off. □

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# Mountain marathon man

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

MARTY LOGAN

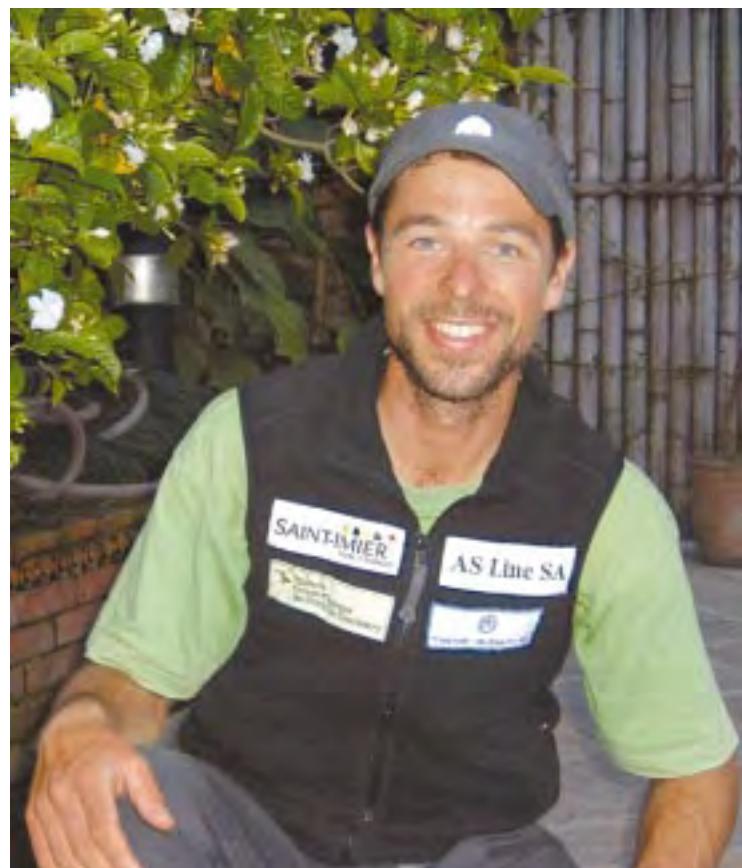
**W**hen you've run from the Adriatic Sea to the Mediterranean, striding through eight Alpine nations, climbing and descending a total of 77,600 m in 36 days, an ultra-marathon from Lhasa to Kathmandu sounds rather tame.

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 herders, 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." □□

Bartaman is a Hindu ceremony which celebrates the coming of age for boys.

**Perfect Fit**

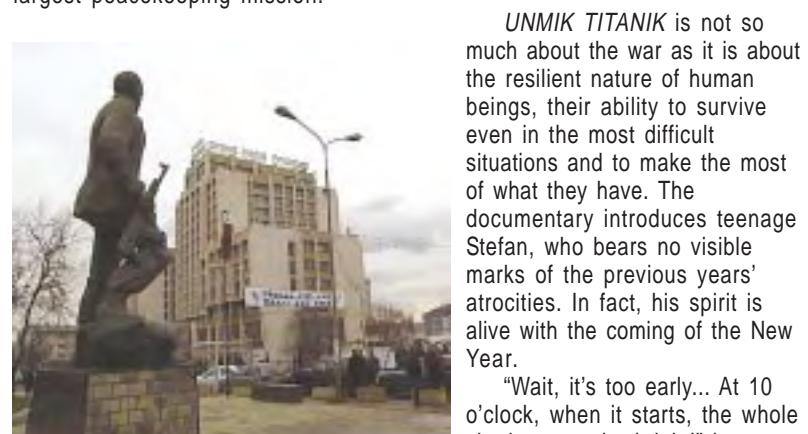
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# Against all odds

Pristina, 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.

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, ever, 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.



"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  
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*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.

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# Party time

Nepal's top bands set to play hottest clubs

**K**athmandu'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, Upstairs, 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 Upstairs, 2 June  
8PM onwards, by invitation only

STUPA-FYING: Band members (left to right) Bimal Gurung, Yubaraj Chettri, Sanjay Shrestha and Nirakar Yakthumba.



KIRAN PANDAY



# Classic Encounters



LIQUID LOUNGE LAZIMPAT 30<sup>TH</sup> MAY 8PM ONWARDS WITH LOOZA

MOKSH PULCHOWK 30<sup>TH</sup> MAY 8PM ONWARDS WITH STUPA

BY INVITATION ONLY.

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## ABOUT TOWN

## EXHIBITIONS

- **Jana Andolan II Through Poetry and Art** by Lincoln School Students, 28 May-4 June at Indigo Gallery.
- **Exhibition of paintings** inspired by Ibsen, at Park Gallery till 4 June. 4419353
- **Transcending Realities** by Durga Baral, till 4 June at Gallery Nine. 4428694,
- **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 Vajra. 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
- **World No-Tobacco Day** 31 May.
- **Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal** with Lynn Bennett at Malla Hotel, 2 June, 4.30 PM. 5548142
- **Civic Concerns** to assess youth concerns and share ideas, Rs 100, 3 June, 10.30 AM, PIC, Heritage Plaza. 4107599,
- **Communication and leadership program** with Toastmasters, meeting every Tuesday at IEDP building, Tripureswor. 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.himalassociation.org/kimff](http://www.himalassociation.org/kimff)

## MUSIC

- **Sun Dance** overnight open air music festival, 27 & 28 May at The Last Resort with 1974AD, Jerry & Xplosion 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
- **Pakeeza Night** dance authentic Mughlai cuisine every Friday 7.30 PM at Far Pavilion Restaurant, The Everest Hotel. 4780100
- **Reggae Night** with various artists at Moksh Live, 7.30 PM. 5526212
- **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 Juneli Bar, Hotel De L' Annapurna till 2 June. 4221711
- **Floats and Fantasies** mocktails at Juneli Bar till 24 June.
- **Return of the classics** outdoor barbecue at Juneli Bar. 4221711
- **Brunch from the east** weekend brunch at Juneli Bar till 29 July.
- **BBQ** every Friday at Jalan Jalan Restaurant. Kupondole Height. 5544872.
- **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
- **Trendy martinis** at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- **Momo & Sekuwa Revolution** every Saturday at Tea-House Inn. 668-0080,
- **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** at Godavari Village Resort, a special package of Swimming & Lunch. 5560675
- **Breakfast** at Singma Restaurant. 8.30 – 11AM daily. 5520004
- **Barbeque** at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- **Breakfast with Birds** Lunch with Butterfly at Farm House Cafe. 4375279

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- **Junglewalks** rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. [junglebasecamp@yahoo.com](mailto:junglebasecamp@yahoo.com)
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- **Conferences at Godavari** 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. 9851012245

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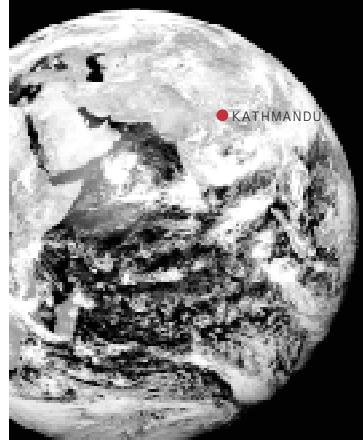
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## NEPALI WEATHER



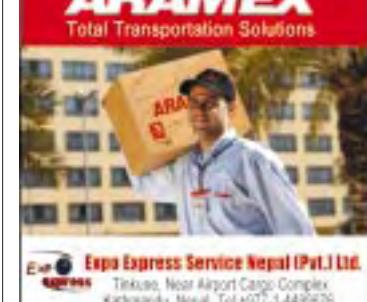
by MAUSAM BEED

Great news for those seeking rains. Unless dramatic changes take place, Nepal will receive this year's 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.

## KATHMANDU VALLEY



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**CHARRED REMAINS:** Works remove a police van that was torched by rioters in Boudha on Thursday morning during a protest by micro-bus drivers after one of them was allegedly beaten by traffic police.



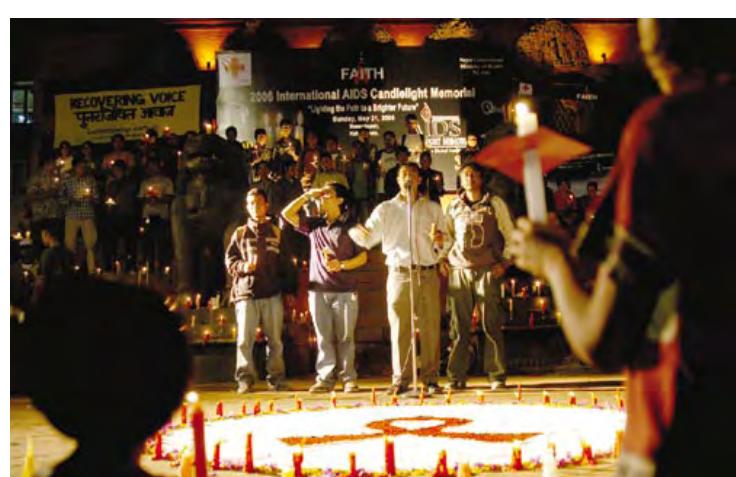
**SOLEMN PLEDGE:** Prime Minister Girija Koirala issuing the oath of office to the four new ministers in his cabinet at the National Planning Commission on Tuesday. He also named seven state ministers.



**MUMMIFIED:** The statue of King Tribhuvan in Banepa was cocooned this week by Maoist posters carrying the visage of Comrade Prachanda.



**OPERATION CLEANUP:** The Armed Police Force detachment in Simikot was mobilised to clean up the premises of the Humla District Hospital last Friday under the initiative of the CDO, police and Nepal Trust Austria.



**LIGHTING THE PATH:** Activists light candles at the 2006 International AIDS memorial held at Shiva Parbat Dabali in Kathmandu Darbar Square on Sunday.

# 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 Chitralekha Yadav. But to many people's surprise and the dismay of many, the new government decided otherwise. However, Chitralekha was smiling as she shook hands with incoming speaker Subash Nembang. "Politics is not just about winning seats. These opportunities just come and go," the soft-spoken Chitralekha told *Nepali 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 Chitralekha 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 big 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 Chitralekha 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



NARESH NEWAR

Resources was also a good one.)

Although Kathmandu may know Chitralekha 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.

As a young girl, Chitralekha took on responsibilities beyond her age. She was barely 16 when she married Sri Krishna but only on the condition that he and his family would let her pursue higher studies. Their daughter was born when Chitralekha was only 18 and

is now studying in college. But she was so adamant to complete her studies that neither married life nor the conservative society surrounding her could stop her.

Chitralekha'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 Chitralekha 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 Chitralekha 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 Chitralekha 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. □

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# From the fire into the frying pan

**A**fter the past month of turbulence and turmoil when many of us had to go without regular Friday nights out at the neighbourhood 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 those of you using your handsets for purposes other than mobile telephony can now stop doing so.

The other sign that things are limping 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

## UNDER MY HAT



Kunda Dixit

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 right 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've 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. ☐□



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