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Loving to hate the NA

Nepali soldiers are from Nepal, and (surprise) they are human

I am not a military historian or analyst. But since we have hysterical economists, poorly read civil society leaders, uneducated and educated journalists who pontificate freely on military matters, I feel on safe ground writing on topics ranging from the military to Marx.

GUEST COLUMN
Pravin Rana



The intellectuals, activists and media's favorite anti-Nepali Army cri de couer is that it is a militarised, unprofessional force with an innate propensity for crimes against humanity and despotism. No one, of course, explains 'militarisation' or 'unprofessional', because together these words evoke images of the Third Reich rather than a reasonable reaction to an insurgency whose goals are to establish a communist totalitarian regime.

When a columnist in this paper recently compared the size of the Nepali Army to the Bangladesh military and inflated the Nepali military forces count

(by adding police, necessary even in peace time) and concluded that Nepal has the biggest security apparatus in proportion to its area and population, he was not comparing apples to apples.

Unlike Bangladesh, Nepal has fought an insurgency since 1996 and has improved from a largely ceremonial force of 40,000 to its current strength of 90,000 troops, many of whom have known combat. An entire Ranger battalion, praised by international observers, came of age during this period. The NA continues to be respected in its UN peacekeeping role, showed restraint (for the most part) during Janaandolan II and is a force that Nepal needs for disaster relief.

The military participation ratio (MPR) is a measure of militarisation and is the ratio of the number of military to a nation's population.

Nepal's MPR is about 0.3 percent. Even adding in the APF (and leaving out the police) the ratio is only 0.5 percent. The United States in World War II had an MPR of 12 percent.

Countries currently fighting insurgencies show similar or greater MPRs to Nepal: Sri Lanka (0.7 percent) and Colombia (0.4 percent). Nepal's military budget is \$200 million while Sri Lanka's is \$500 million and Colombia spends \$6.9 billion on its military a year. Both Sri Lanka and Colombia have weapons that make the NA look like it stepped out of World War II movie set.

Terrain has been cited by many as the reason why there is 'no military solution', another term that has not been explained clearly but used freely to prove a spurious point: that there is no role for the military. When even a

peacetime trek for a group of four in the hills requires a team of porters, mounting even a modest company-level offensive creates daunting logistical challenges. So a force of 90,000 may actually be inadequate.

Security experts have argued for force multiplication through the use of auxiliaries at the VDC-level linked to a rapid reaction force-suggesting a larger force for Nepal.

Yes, Nepal has no business fighting a war: we have many other pressing needs. Yet when confronted with the Maoists whose intent is on destroying everything-an army or nation has little choice but to fight. NA soldiers have made substantial sacrifices during this insurgency.

Without their work, the Maoist vision might well have already come to pass. But what has been the image of the NA in the media? Its soldiers don't bleed when shot, their families don't cry when they are injured or die, they don't suffer the trauma of losing body parts, they don't feel lonely when separated from home villages for years and they feel no financial pain when their wives and children are extorted and harassed.

Our soldiers are not drawn from a recruitment pool with no connection to the land, a nation's army is a reflection of its own culture. The NA has provided a living opportunity and professionalism for the same stratum of young people recruited by the Maoists. If the current talks fail, it will once more be the Nepal Army that will have to back up parliamentary democracy. Think about that when you hear glib references to 'militarisation' and 'unprofessional army'. ●

THEOCRACY TO DEMOCRACY

Some have always been more equal than others in this kingdom of the gods. This inequality was nurtured in the name of religion—the treatment of women as lesser citizens, the marginalisation of 'low' castes, the neglect of those who aren't of the mainstream faith. An unpopular king tried to gain legitimacy by promoting a kind of theocracy. By allowing sycophants to call him not just Nepal's Hindu king but the emperor of the world's Hindus it was clear there was a certain delusion at work here. His fundamentalist advisers have used the Hindu Card to exploit politico-religious schisms in India and import that country's religious insecurity.

Now that parliament has confined the monarchy to symbolism at par with the Living Goddess, there are those in the palace who are trying to turn humiliation into fundamentalism. This is a colossal blunder: they are playing with fire and the ensuing conflagration will first consume those who stoke it.

Religious freedom is an integral part of the charter of liberties already enshrined in the 1990 constitution. Even though the kingdom was not designated a secular state, Nepal has never been as Hindu as it was made out to be by the ancien regime. Despite being a Hindu monarchy, the legislative, the executive and the judicial wings of the state are run strictly according to the constitution with no reference to any religious scriptures. At least in intent, Nepal was a secular kingdom long before it was formally declared to be one two weeks ago.

But privileges once acquired, howsoever illegal, are hard to discard. Hardcore royalists benefited from the Hindu kingdom myth. And they are the ones behind the fundamentalist upsurge in Birganj. This is a clear effort to create mischief, sow instability and stir religious discord. Nepal has never had impulsive religious riots. The few instances of communal violence are now known to have been planned to take advantage of the anarchy for short-term political advantage.

The state must demonstrate zero tolerance towards these intolerant fanatics of the Hindu right who have again deliberately mixed up faith with state. The majority of Hindu Nepalis believe in the separation of religion and politics, and non-Hindu Nepalis whole-heartedly support it. Those who are against secularism are of course free to hold that belief but there is no place in the new Nepal for fundos advocating religious extremism. Nepal is secular and it must remain safe for Nepalis of every religion, or for that matter, of no particular religion.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

LETTERS

WITCHHUNTING

The only reason the general public supported the seven party alliance was in the hope that it would bring peace and prosperity. The parties seem to be doing their best to restore peace and prosperity. But their best is not nearly enough. Their negative approach that seems to be motivated by revenge against the old regime rather than reconciliation and inclusive economic development (Editorial, "Guns and slogans", #297). This vengeful approach may further alienate certain sectors to conspire against democracy. The idea is to include and positively motivate all, even those who supported royal regime, to back the changes. Playing to the mob on the street shows a lack of political maturity and statesmanship. Punishing civil servants, including

police and soldiers who were just following orders of the royal regime reeks of vendetta. The parties should refrain from using this time to settle political scores and not repeat the mistakes committed by the royal regime which lead to its downfall. The party leaders should lead by example and with positive thinking provocative and unwise statements may just incite more violence.

Rajeeb L Satyal, email

● Recent post-loktantra events surprised me. Doctors were beaten up in Butwal and Kathmandu. Then there is the Swayambhu incident. It is clear that with democracy people are asserting themselves but vandalism and gratuitous violence makes a mockery of the pro-democracy movement which was characterised by a lack of vandalism. It was

peaceful demonstrations that gave the movement the moral power and political legitimacy.

Siddhartha Yadav, email

ROPE TRICK

Kunda Dixit reports ('Humla's road to the future', #299) that work on the Hilsa Simkot road had to be stopped because there is no money for bridges and to cut through rock faces. I wonder if building ropeways could be the solution even though ultimately there will have to be roads. A cable car system to precede a highway could be the speedy way of developing our hilly regions and thereby of Nepal as a whole. Also, we must forget about exporting power. Nepal has one of the lowest energy consumption per capita in the world, we should be thinking about producing power for our own growth first by using it in energy-intensive job-creating zinc and fertilizer industries.

Ishwari Pradhan, email

BRAND-BUILDING

Ashutosh Tiwari's 'Focus on public relations' (#298) is interesting but his examples were more focused on categories of businesses which quite obviously use PR, word of mouth advertising and other similar activities to promote themselves. Likewise, advertising agencies, account firms, education institutes and consulting firms also fall in the same category. Hence, there is nothing unusual about advertising agencies not advertising themselves. Ad agencies and similar types of businesses primarily focus on public relation activities rather than media advertising. However, in a very competitive environment, strategic media advertising can play a supporting role in building brands. There are many successful examples of advertising agencies using advertising tools to promote their business and build brand using selected media vehicles.

Today, most savvy ad agencies understand this and focus on hand in hand dealings with clients as their strategic partners to build brand beyond media advertising. They recommend ideas and channels, help to decide on content and context and help create the exposure or engagement that's best. It is unfair to suggest that slick advertising doesn't work. Nobody can deny that the 'My Nepal, My Pride' campaign and 'Taste of Success' campaign successfully contributed to build brand for Surya Luxury Kings and Shikhar Filter. 'Where to focus' and 'which is the right' for your business is what CEO's need to decide smartly, and also 'which is the right ad agency for them'.

Navin Joshi, MaxPro Advertising and Communication

RIGHTS OVER DUTIES

Artha Beed's 'Moral police needed' (#299) reflects a sorry

Fear of the future

Channel the anger on the streets before the religious zealots do

- Mobs vandalised Butwal Hospital forcing medical doctors to go on strike for almost a week.
- When a not unheard of case of negligence transpired at a private nursing home in New Baneswor, youngsters broke windows and burned hospital furniture on the street.
- Even after the issue of the unfortunate death of a chronically ill patient was amicably resolved between the aggrieved family and the management, the restive crowd refused to budge. It had tasted blood and wanted more.
- Traffic along the Ring Road came to a complete halt for two consecutive days over a minor fracas between the driver of a microbus and a traffic cop.
- Birganj is closed for two days by regressive forces whipping up public emotion against parliament's decision to turn Nepal into a secular state.
- On average, the Mahendra Highway is closed by irate mobs for four hours or more every day because of a vehicle hitting a pedestrian at some point between Mechi and Mahakali.

What is happening? While the government and the Maoists are trying to resolve the conflict, the country seems to

STATE OF THE STATE C K Lal



of the ruling alliance have promised to seek assistance from donors to demobilise and support the Maoist militia, it isn't clear whether they have any plans for their own radicalised cadres who suddenly have no pro-democracy rallies to keep them busy.

The real challenge lies in rehabilitating youngsters who were at the forefront of the April Uprising but are unaffiliated with any political party. Reports about Maoists-in-mufti taking part in street protests are exaggerated. Most agitated teenagers joined the movement during its last stage out of sheer excitement. Here was a revolution happening right before their eyes and they wanted to be a part of it. The problem now



KIRAN PANDAY

is that suddenly they don't have a role anymore.

Unless we find jobs for this restive and angst-filled generation, it will be impossible to establish sustainable peace. Many are internally displaced by the insurgency and counter-insurgency. They have no family, no jobs and no hope. Now they have no cause either.

The deprived have no stake in stability. When there is no adrenalin rush from a street protest to give vent to their energy, it finds escape in vandalism. Radicalised youths will willingly destroy cars they can never hope to ride, burn buildings they have no chance of ever occupying and risk being caught in the act for the simple reason that being in custody will be a release equivalent to a vacation.

Check it out next time you happen to be at the site of a traffic accident. A crowd appears apparently from nowhere that wants instant justice for the erring driver and the car. There is no patience for the due

process of law because they have just been through a revolution that has demonstrated that breaking 'unjust' laws is noble.

The extent and intensity of mass mobilisation that forced the king to kneel was tremendous. Despite parliament's passing of the Nepali Magna Carta, passions have taken time to subside. In 1990, the interim government messed the process of transition and prepared the grounds for insurgency by not taking care of highly radicalised cadre, particularly those of the Left Front. The government must not repeat that mistake. This time the stakes are much higher.

The demobilisation of Maoist guerrillas is a national priority. Without that, constituent assembly elections will be a farce. Even when unarmed, the intimidating presence of Maoist cadres can swing the voting pattern in the countryside. But the rehabilitation of radicalised cadres is no less complex. Minds of agitated youths require as much

attention as the management of insurgents' weapons.

The only way to handle this problem over the longterm is to create gainful employment for our restive youth. In the medium term, short courses should be offered to equip radicalised cadres with life supporting skills here and abroad. In the short-term, neighbourhood clubs, sporting societies and social service centres can be set up to channel their energy to constructive pursuits.

But there is an even more immediate task—all political parties must prepare a roster of youthful supporters in every ward and run peer counselling sessions the way the NC and UML used to do in their days in the wilderness.

Our youths, educated or not, aren't anarchists despite the logo on some of their t-shirts. They don't even know what they are. Someone has to tell them who they are otherwise religious zealots will get them. ●

state of affairs regarding Nepal's public life. An emphasis on rights rather than duties has shattered the myth that democracy is synonymous only with enforcing one's free will. Whether it is trying to queue in a government office, driving amidst chaotic traffic or arguing with a neighbour when his dog disturbs the neighbourhood, there is something wrong with our psyche that puts self-interest before common welfare. While our educational institutions may take pride in churning out qualified citizens each year, it is doubtful that they have been endowed with the sense to contribute towards a better functioning society. While the state should work to provide essential public goods, rules and regulations should either be enforced strictly or not adopted at all.

Shyamal Shrestha, email

PETER ENGLAND

MORE IS LESS

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Turning symbolism into equality

The laws are addressing women's rights but when will their lives start to improve?



NARESH NEWAR

MALLIKA ARYAL

In 2002, Nepal's parliament passed a bill to allow women to inherit property at birth. The same year, a new law decriminalising abortion came into effect. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court scrapped the law that allowed men to seek divorce if their partner was infertile.

Then on Tuesday the parliament unanimously passed a proposal that says Nepalis can be citizens based on a mother's citizenship.

Great victories all, but activists say there are still lots of other discriminatory laws and

the real test will be in implementation of the ones that have been passed.

The Forum for Women Law and Development (FWLD) there are still 173 provisions and 102 schedules in 83 laws that discriminate against women on issues ranging from property, marriage and family, nationality and legal and court proceedings to trafficking and sexual abuse, employment and education. In addition, even after their historical contribution in the April Uprising women are still discriminated against at policy-making levels. For example, no women are on the current

government-Maoist talks teams and there is only one token woman in the new cabinet.

"It has to do with the feudal patriarchal thinking that our society still suffers from," says Sahana Pradhan of the UML, "why do Nepali women have to ask for what is rightly theirs? The answer is simple: Nepali men refuse to admit that women can do a good job."

Although the constitution guarantees non-discrimination, the document itself explicitly discriminates against women. With the Eleventh Amendment to the Muluki Ain, daughters are by birth recognised as co-partners in

ancestral property but the right is limited. Upon marriage, they have to return their property to the maternal family but sons face no such limitations.

"Any discrimination based on sex as a consequence of law made by the state itself is a gross violation of basic human rights," says Sapana Pradhan Malla of FWLD. Even when laws could empower women, often women are unaware of them. Rita Tandukar, 27, of Kathmandu filed for divorce from her husband of 10 years and is asking for recognition of her right to property and a living allowance. "Had I known that there are provisions where women can file cases against their husbands, I would have done so earlier instead of tolerating all these years," Tandukar says.

Experts agree that courts are doing a commendable job in changing laws in response to public-interest litigation or government intervention, but that has still not improved the lives of many women.

Although abortion was legalised in 2002 women can still be charged with infanticide and jailed. Changing that law did not bring about the desired results because authorities did not think about providing additional services or educating women about the change.

"How many people in rural Nepal know abortion has been legalised? How many women in these places know where to go for safe and affordable services?" asks Malla.

Sahana Pradhan thinks that the House's adoption of the citizenship proposal was a great victory but she is wary about its implementation. "It is not a big deal to be a party to international conventions or to pass laws, it is how they are put into practice that matters," she says.

Activists are also excited by the house decision Tuesday to reserve 33 percent of seats in all state offices for women. "Do your math-of the 205 members of parliament, 68 are going to be women. Imagine the kind of difference these women will make," Pradhan told us.

But Ashtha Laxmi Shakya, former Minister of Women, Children and Social Welfare is not satisfied with 33 percent: "Our new demand is for 50 percent seats to be reserved for women."

Minister of Women Children and Social Welfare Urmila Aryal says the hopes of 1990 were dashed because there was no coordination between government and women's organisation. She says: "Let's work to remedy that so we don't repeat the same mistakes again." ●

Hesitant to go home

Internally displaced Nepalis want Maoists to pledge a safe return

NARESH NEWAR

People displaced by Nepal's conflict face a dilemma: return home to their villages where security is still a question mark or stay put in safe but temporary camps and shelters far from their roots.

There are anywhere up to 150,000 internally displaced people and even human rights groups are divided over what protection and security awaits conflict-displaced people if they return.

"The situation for the IDPs is better now since the political atmosphere has changed positively," says rights activist Bholu Mahat from the group Insec in Nepalganj. Last week, Mahat's office helped 32 Jumlis living in Nepalganj and Kohalpur to return to their villages where the Maoists promised to welcome them back with 'dignity and honour'.

But despite the ceasefire others are still traumatised by their evictions and are hesitant to go back until they are guaranteed safety. Many have had their property destroyed or confiscated by Maoists and also want them returned. Only a small fraction of IDPs have actually returned, activists say.

"The IDPs cannot return just for the sake of going home, there is a need for a mechanism to ensure their proper reintegration," says Amar Bhattarai from Community Study and Welfare Centre. The issue of IDPs was included in the 25-point code of conduct signed during the first round of preliminary peace talks in Gokarna last week. But the two sides don't have a clear plan on how to reintegrate



NARESH NEWAR

and rehabilitate IDPs when they decide to go back.

"The Maoists are still carrying arms openly even in mass assemblies. Imagine how it is in the core areas from where we have been displaced," says Bishnu Prasad Neupane, a member of the Maoist Victims Association, a support group established by IDPs. None

of the 27,000 members of the association are willing to return to their villages, he added.

Maoist leaders have repeatedly pledged to return confiscated property and allow displaced families back. But villagers are just not convinced. "We still don't trust the local Maoists and you can see why from their activities," says Kalyan

Budhathoki from Ramechap, who moved to Kathmandu six years ago. He was abducted for allegedly spying against the Maoists and although he managed to flee, Budhathoki says his life is still at risk.

The UN's Nepal Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR) which may soon be monitoring the ceasefire, told us Maoists sometimes do not permit locals safe, dignified and sustainable return despite such commitments from their leaders. "During recent field visits, CPN (Maoist) representatives at the VDC level informed OHCHR that returning IDPs might have to appear before people's courts and be punished before being allowed back into the community," said spokesperson Kieran Dwyer.

The UN agency also received reports of Maoists imposing 'special' charges on the returnees. But activists say although there are cases of IDPs being harassed upon return some displaced families make excuses of insecurity so they don't lose services they get from relief agencies at IDP camps.

"The main problem is that people are making too many guesses, mostly negative, about how they would be treated in their villages," says Rameswar Bhuju from the British group Ockenden International, which has helped build 60 mud houses with tin roofs at Rajena camp in Nepalganj. None of the 60 households has shown any signs of wanting return to their villages. ●

Rhinos, tigers in danger

The first sweeping operation conducted in two years by 40 Bardia National Park employees with support from WWF Nepal has revealed alarming signs of decline in rhino and tiger populations. The team found evidence of only three rhinos in the favourable habitat in the southern part of the Babai valley. Since 1986, about 83 rhinos have been moved to Bardia. The findings indicate widespread poaching and the team detained two poachers with locally made muzzle guns and seized four weapons and a large cache of ammunition. It observed evidence of three tigers during the operation compared to reports of 13 tigers in the Babai Valley (1998-2001). The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation and WWF have already initiated joint patrols to protect the two species. The team also noted that in areas where the conflict had little impact on conservation activities, rhino and tiger populations are stable or growing. A survey in August 2005 survey found that the population of 11 rhinos released in 1986 in the Karnali River floodplain in the park had grown to more than 30.

India renews salt support

The Indian government has decided to provide Rs 200 million to Salt Trading Corporation in its campaign to eradicate visible goiter. The money will be used in transportation, reiodisation, packaging materials and publicity of Ayo Nun. This campaign, with the support from the Indian government, has been successfully running for 25 years, as a result of which visible goiter has been eradicated from Nepal.

NEW PRODUCTS

TOYOTA SUBCOMPACT: United Traders Syndicate is introducing its latest model car in Nepal—the Toyota Yaris Sedan. The Yaris is built on a new platform that is longer and wider than conventional subcompacts. It also features a transverse front engine, front-wheel drive chassis, independent front suspension and a torsion beam rear axle. The vehicle promises fuel efficiency of 16km in the city and 18km on the highway. According to its makers, Yaris' stiff suspension and retuned steering gear ratios help to deliver good manoeuvrability.



DEPOSIT PRODUCT: NIC Bank has launched a US-dollar savings account scheme, the NIC USD Super Savings Account. The scheme provides interest of four percent per year, overdraft facility in rupees against dollar deposit, free any branch banking facility and a 50 percent discount on travellers' cheques.

Small is essential

Smoothing the path for small biz is an easy recipe for boosting our economy

Last week, I was one of two lecturers at Kathmandu's Ace Institute of Management's MBA class on entrepreneurship. I focused my talk on the economics of entrepreneurship citing relevant global and South Asian examples. My co-panellist, a smart Kathmandu University MBA graduate who's been involved in several small businesses, talked about his own experiences doing business in Nepal. Listening to

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



him, I was struck that the issues he raised are similar to those I've been hearing about from other small business entrepreneurs since 2001. What, then, are the joys and challenges of being an entrepreneur in Nepal?

Do what you really know: Most Nepali businesses fail because the entrepreneurs behind the ventures do not bother to learn how what they know offers them an advantage in what they do. Often they get into a business simply because they see someone else making money and think that they too can easily do something similar. They thus assure themselves that if they copy only the idea and do it themselves, they too will start minting money.

But there is no substitute for

really getting to know one's own business the old-fashioned way: with hard work and continuous learning from experience. If Shyam Kakshapati had not started out serving tea at his then one-room café in Ratna Park in the 1970s, it's doubtful that he would have become the head of Nanglo Bakery Café 30 years later. **Find a niche:** There is a low barrier to entry in most fields in Nepal, indicating that the level of competition is generally low. Those are advantages that can be put to use in the short run. But to stay in business for long, the challenge is to spot opportunities to move into niches in which one does well. In my co-panellist's case, the niche was to start not another clothing store (as if the newly-opened Kathmandu Mall were not full of them already) but an exclusive lingerie store in Kupondole.

As competition heats up in days ahead, businesses that offer general merchandise—ready-made clothes, dal bhat, electronic appliances—will not command much attention. But those that offer specialized twists on existing products and services will continue to attract customers.

Access credit: Entrepreneurs report that Nepal's banks do business only with a few big firms. Banks defend their action by arguing that catering to small

businesses, no matter how heart-warming, is costly. Meantime, a few savvy entrepreneurs have reached out to neighbourhood financial co-operatives even when that meant higher interest rates. But most remain strapped for cash and cannot dream of growing big. Is it any wonder that many of our businesses are doomed to serve subsistence functions for their owners and can never be scaled up?

Entrepreneurs agree that accessing credit, along with problematic government regulations, is a major bottleneck to doing business in Nepal. Given this problem, one broader policy opportunity in coming years is to look for market-friendly ways to make credit available to all Nepalis, much in the same way that most think of making education, water and electricity available to all.

Paying attention to these issues of entrepreneurship has become urgent. That is because however one looks at the new Nepal, everyone wants to see it as a prosperous nation. But for this to happen, Nepal has to create wealth from the resources it has. Entrepreneurship is one proven way to do this. That's why the sooner we make it easier to start, run and scale up businesses, the more likely we are to see this country a prosperous nation in our lifetime. ●



Richard Ragan is the new country representative of the World Food Programme in Nepal. He brings with him a wealth of diverse experience in war-torn and post conflict countries in both Asia and Africa. He led the WFP's biggest operation, in North Korea, targeting 6.5 million people and also ran another huge WFP operation in Zambia during a drought. Nepali Times spoke with Ragan about challenges in Nepal:

Nepali Times: You've come during interesting times in Nepal.
Richard Ragan: WFP has been working here since 1967 doing basic poverty alleviation type of work and because of that we have a good understanding of how people in remote parts of the country live. Of the different UN agencies that are here, we probably have a deeper field presence than most. So, we are trying to use that to help particularly people who live in more remote areas.

How can the UN contribute as a humanitarian organisation during Nepal's transition to peace?
For example in other parts of the world, we have supported programs that help in the demobilisation of combatants. Once demobilisation occurs, there is the key issue of reintegration, or what people who were once soldiers are going to do next. As the UN's food organisation, we have food that can be treated as a commodity and used as money. We can tell people "we will give you food to learn to read, develop skills and train people in micro finance or even how to use computers." What limits you is creativity and we're willing to be very creative in the transition process.

“We probably have a deeper field presence than most UN agencies”

You have worked in countries during a ceasefire. What lessons can you bring to Nepal?
Anytime, there is conflict, civilians suffer the most. Right before I came to Nepal, I was in the Philippines, where the rebels and government are in the process of negotiating a ceasefire. The WFP was asked to provide incentives to support the peace process. For example, folks that have been displaced by the conflict and unable to farm will receive food. In addition we are planning to provide food to school children in areas that have been hit hardest by the fighting. The goal is to try and return some sense of normalcy to the area. Should a ceasefire be negotiated, we would also provide food to demobilised soldiers. If the government asks and all the parties agree, it's the kind of thing that we could also do here.

What is your immediate priority?
We have started Nepal's first ever emergency food assistance in the west, which you reported on (#296 'The West is Hungry') where we will try to very quickly target around a quarter of a million people. Hopefully that will provide immediate impact.

Food deficits are nothing new in Nepal. What should be done over the long term to solve the problem?
There are two ways to deal with a food deficit problem. One, you produce enough food to feed the population and two, make your economy grow so you can buy food in the international market. With the exception of the tarai, Nepal doesn't have a whole lot of arable land so it's always going to be tough to produce enough food. You can try to introduce different varieties of crops that are drought resistant or grow better in the mountains. Potatoes are not indigenous to Nepal but were introduced in the mountains and are now eaten by everybody. The other element is making your economy grow. As long as there was conflict, the economy will suffer. Now that there is peace, you can refocus on building the economy.

The WFP is running short of funds in Afghanistan, Sudan, Somali and Kenya. Should Nepal be worried?

Nepal has been relatively well funded although it is not a large-scale operation like in other countries. For instance, the WFP has a \$200 million operation in North Korea whereas in Nepal it is only about \$20 million. It is easier to fund smaller operations than bigger ones.

How much should Nepal rely on the WFP?
Nepal should never rely entirely on the WFP. What we can bring to the table is our experience around the globe as the largest humanitarian agency in the world and one of the key UN agencies to deal with development assistance but at the end of the day it is up to the national authorities and the people of Nepal. The best part of our job is ultimately when a government says "we don't need you anymore." Take China, where I was a WFP deputy. We left China two years ago after a four-year operation when the government said "listen, we are a food producing and food exporting country. Our economy is growing. Now it's time for the WFP to leave." Now we are hopeful that China will soon become a donor.

What challenges do you foresee in Nepal?
The biggest challenge is the next phase of the peace process and what that means for rural Nepalis and for the government. How that dynamic plays out is, to me, a key thing to watch. If the ceasefire doesn't hold, insecurity becomes the menu of the day in the countryside, which makes it very difficult for us to work. As a UN agency we have basic operating guidelines but if we can't operate under those guidelines, we can't work. If someone tries to hinder our ability to move into an area or charge us fees to work, we won't operate. Another immediate challenge is the emergency in the west because it is a remote part of the country, we need resources and we need to move now. In fact, I had three MPs in my office today from Humla, Jumla and Mugu explaining how dire the situation is in their districts. We have been talking to the Nepal Food Corporation about borrowing some food for them so that we can get started and we are hopeful that process will end positively.

PM meets COAS



Sanghu, 29 May
On 13 May, a day after the Rayamajhi commission recommended the suspension of the security chiefs, Chief of Army Staff General Pyar Jung Thapa and seven other top ranking army officers visited Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to

express their dissatisfaction with the government's action. How a recorded tape of the meeting was leaked is still unknown.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala: Tell me, what can I do?

Chief of Army Staff: The immediate suspension of the three security chiefs by the cabinet has reduced the morale of the security forces. No government in the world treats its forces like this.

Deputy Prime Minister KP Oli: Even though the commission had recommended that we also suspend the army chief we did not do that. In reality, the government has not thought of the army otherwise. This is your misunderstanding.

Lieutenant General Katuwal: Vice-premier, I will interrupt you. Ideologically we agree with you but this has not been seen in practice.

PM: No, it's not like that. You have to help the government brought by the people's movement. I urge you to do so.

COAS Thapa: You are politicians and that is why you look at the security forces through a political lens. But the security forces do not follow politics. Our main responsibility is the security and welfare of the people of the country, lasting peace and preservation of the sovereignty and boundaries of the state. We do not agree with your policy to take action against officers and soldiers of the security forces. The cabinet not taking the security forces into confidence could have adverse effects. You have to think seriously about this.

LG Katuwal: You suspended three chiefs of security. But why did you not suspend COAS Thapa? I may not ask you for an answer but the people surely will. What will you say then? You knew that we had a unified command security

force under which the army, armed police, Nepal police and the investigation department worked together. By suspending all the chiefs except the army chief it looks like you are trying to break the unified command.

Home Minister Krishna P Sitaula: No, no. You must not think in this manner. The Maoists are trying to come to the mainstream. Our efforts are also aimed at that and all the security forces must help the government in this effort.

COAS Thapa: We, non-political entities, are being pushed towards politics. This is creating a difficult situation for us. As chief of the army staff, I will say that the security forces always were, are and will be united in its objective. The Royal Nepali Army is the oldest institution in the country. The current move to change its chain of command is extremely wrong.

LG Katuwal: Security forces operate on the basis of a chain of command. This chain is intact and will remain so. Some people seem to have the intention to break it but it seems they have not understood the character of the Royal Nepali Army.

PM Koirala: I understand the COAS. You can remain assured that this will not happen. These sorts of problems occur during the transition period and must be solved. We will help you in this.

COAS Thapa: The people only revolted to bring peace. Talks that will divide the country even before the election for a constituent assembly frames a constitution should not be made. The people will make the constitution that they want—only they have the mandate to do so. The movement has only given you the mandate to establish peace, you must work accordingly.

DPM Oli: We have analysed the situation seriously. We respect your sentiments. We also have to fulfil the expectations of the people. The country is on the brink of division. The political parties also have the responsibility to save the country from being a failed state, to stop anarchy and division.



People's army
.....
Radheshyam Adhikari in
Himal Khabarpatrika,
30 May-14 June

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

From the time of its conception, the Nepali military's leadership, organisation and deployment have always been a topic of controversy. Their discipline and strength is unmatched but they have always been accountable to the king. When army generals are strong, the kings always forms alliances with them and waits for the right time to use one against the other. It happened during the Rana regime but the Ranas were too smart for the kings and they succeeded in ruling the country for 104 years. When democracy was established in 1951, the military was also reorganised. But the leaders did not understand the importance of the security forces and the king was able to convince the Nepali army to be loyal to him instead. As a result, kings Mahendra and Birendra exploited that weakness and ruled directly in the name of Panchayat. In the 1990 constitution, all power over the army was given to the prime minister and deputy prime minister under the Security Council. The army's deployment was to be done with the king's recommendation. The commander in chief was to be chosen on the recommendation of the prime minister. The prime minister has always held the defence portfolio and the country has suffered a lot due to this provision because the prime ministers have never had enough time to understand the military's workings. As a result, the army grew stronger and whatever decisions the military leadership made, political leaders started agreeing. The spirit of the military law hasn't changed. It still says that the army should answer to the king. We need to critically look at the mistakes and weaknesses of the military. First, why couldn't the military that is now demanding that all political parties stand together in parliament demand the same thing from the king's leadership? The army does not receive a penny from the king's funds, whatever it receives is from the taxpayers' pocket. So the army should be accountable to people. The new



topic of discussion is the army's role in coming days. People have already removed the king's authority over the army. The Nepali army has a very good reputation in international peacekeeping. But if it starts violating human rights the reputation will erode. To avoid that, the army must remain under the people. The people's representatives may be ugly, illiterate, slipper-wearing and wear long, dirty hair but to change the culture the army has to accept them because they were chosen by the people.

Royalists' moves
.....
Ghatana Ra Bichar, 31 May

घटना-बिचार

Some of the main supporters of the former royal regime are starting to look for excuses to make their moves. One group is focussing on the parliamentary proclamation that declared Nepal a secular state. Reportedly, Bharat Keshari Simha, who allegedly had a role in murdering the famous priest Narayan Pokhrel, is eager to start politicking in the name of Hindus. Simha is said to be preparing to bring 100,000 ascetics to Kathmandu within three weeks to demand that Nepal be declared a Hindu state and has sent five messengers to India to ask for help from right-wing Hindu organisations there. Keshari's team is reported to have returned to Kathmandu after



Board on pedestal: Parliament Proclamation 2063
Board on man's hands: Cabinet expansion recommendation

समय Samaya, 1 June

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“We are ready to take the responsibility of leading the interim government if the people ask us and feel that is necessary.”

Senior Maoist leader and member of their negotiating team, Dinanath Sharma, in *Janbhabana*, 29 May



STUDENTS FIGHT FEES: Students of Sri Public High School in Dharan protest in front of the Dharan municipality office against the school's imposition of fees despite the government's policy of free education. Children of the area's poorest families are unable to attend school due to the charges.

समय Om Ashtha Rai, Samaya, 1 June

meeting the likes of BJP Chairman Rajnath Singh, Ashok Singhal of the Viswa Hindu Association and close associates of Shiva Sena leader Bal Thackery in India. However it is highly likely that Keshari, who played a major role in helping the royal regime suppress the people's movement, will be arrested by the government soon. The high-level commission headed by retired judge Krishna Jung Rayamajhi formed to investigate atrocities by the royal government has reportedly already submitted a recommendation to the government to arrest him and Sachit Samsher Rana. However, the government is delaying arresting the duo. Party workers of high-profile supporters of the royal regime, including Rabintra Sharma, Padma Sundar Lawati and Kamal Thapa, are also planning to focus their efforts on the issue of a secular state. A meeting of Thapa's party held on 23 May at Rabintra Nath Sharma's residence in Budanilkantha concluded that it would be most beneficial for them to take up religion (Hinduism) as their main issue. The meeting protested the declaration of the secular state and took out a protest rally in Gaushala. They have also devised a long-term strategy to scrap the reinstated parliament by filing a case in the Supreme Court. Sachit Shamsher Rana is heading this attempt and is also known to be preparing a case against the razing of the Upper House.

Maoists' respect
Tarun, 29 May



The Maoists should realise the important contribution that the parties made that permitted an armed group such as theirs to play a role in the peaceful people's movement. They should also see that they are now able to reach the masses at a time when questions were being raised about their 10 years of violent conflict. There is a big difference between going to the masses with guns and without arms. Now, the Maoists should be able to get used to the latter. In addition, they should also start to respect differences of opinion if they really are sincere about playing a role in a multiparty system. Only this will earn them the trust and confidence of other parties and enable healthy political competition. The Maoists' arms have traumatised everyone, especially political leaders and workers. It's time for party leaders to openly discuss this with the Maoists. At a time when there is complete consensus on framing a new constitution through a constituent assembly, the Maoists have an equal responsibility with the parties to ensure those elections are successful. The parliament is fully prepared to move ahead by breaking the state's traditions in order to find a peaceful political solution. But the Maoists have retorted that they will only participate in an interim government after parliament is dissolved. This goes against the spirit of the people's movement, especially at a time when parliament is actively working to find solutions.

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Vacancy Announcement

The USAID/Nepal invites applications for employment from all interested and qualified individuals for the position of AID Project Management Specialist in the Health and Family Planning Office:

- OPEN TO : All Interested and qualified Nepali Citizens
POSITION : AID Project Management Specialist- FSNPSC-11
OPENING DATE : June 5 , 2006
CLOSING DATE : June 23, 2006
WORK HOURS : 40 hours work week

1. AID Project Management Specialist, FSNPSC-11

Basic Functions of Position: The Project Management Specialist (PMS) is an FSN senior-level professional on the USAID/Nepal Technical Health Team reporting to the Deputy Team Leader/HIV/AIDS Program Manager and working in close collaboration with the senior technical staff on the Health Technical Team. The PMS serves in a senior-level capacity with minimum supervision providing technical, administrative and programmatic support and policy development in overseeing the HIV/AIDS programs. Main responsibilities include U.S. Government representation to the National Centre for AIDS and STD Control (NCASC), Ministry of Health and Population (MOHP) and other appropriate line ministries as well as donors and implementing agencies. In addition, the PMS provides technical services for policy, program planning and monitoring and evaluation of annual results. The PMS serves as the backstop to the HIV/AIDS Program Manager, acting in his or her absence as the Program Manager for all HIV/AIDS activities and as USAID representative at high-level meetings with government officials.

2. QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED:

NOTE: All applicants must address each selection criterion detailed below with specific and comprehensive information supporting each item.

A. EDUCATION: Masters Degree in public health or related field required. Advanced degree in social or behavioral sciences, health, public health or other relevant field including doctoral degree in public health desired.

B. EXPERIENCE: Minimum 5 to 7 years of progressively responsible senior level experience working in public health in Nepal. Experience with I/NGOs, multi-lateral or bilateral funding organizations and program experience with HIV/AIDS is desirable. Familiarity with MS Word and Excel computer programs as well as E-mail and Internet applications is essential and experience with Power Point is desirable. Experience in budgeting and financial management is advantageous.

C. LANGUAGE: Fluency in written and spoken English (Level IV) and Nepali.

D. KNOWLEDGE: Working knowledge of multi-sectoral technical and programmatic HIV/AIDS issues in Nepal and the approaches to address them. Knowledge of the epidemiology of HIV/AIDS in a concentrated epidemic required as well as knowledge of effective programming approaches to provide the continuum of prevention and care services to the most-at-risk populations. Knowledge of evaluation methods, both quantitative and qualitative, required.

E. ABILITIES/SKILLS: Must possess the ability to establish and maintain effective working relationships with USAID, its implementing partners, central and district level Government of Nepal and non-governmental organization counterparts. Must possess a high level of analytical skills and the ability to assess ongoing HIV/AIDS and public health interventions to evaluate their efficacy and efficiency. Ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing is essential. Word-processing and computer skills are required. Excellent interpersonal skills and an ability to work in a team environment are essential. Proven ability to work with diverse groups and backgrounds essential.

A detailed job description and biographical datasheet may be collected at the USAID/Nepal, main gate during office hours. Interested applicants should submit a completed biographical datasheet and a C.V. not to exceed 3 pages and any other documentation (e.g., essays, certificates, awards, copies of degrees earned) that addresses the qualification requirements of the position as listed above. Submit application to the attention of Human Resources Office no later than 1700 hrs on June 23, 2006. Applications received after the submission date will not be considered. Please mention your telephone contact number in the application form. **TELEPHONE INQUIRIES ARE DISCOURAGED.**

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Human Resources Office
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Rabi Bhavan, Kathmandu



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Monsoon bloodletting

Polka-dot leeches warm some researchers hearts

CARL ZIMMER

The tub full of leeches sat on a table in Mark Siddall’s office at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The leeches, each about five cm long and covered in orange polka dots, were swimming lazily through the water.

One leech suddenly began undulating up and down in graceful curves, pushing water along its body so that it could draw more oxygen into its skin.

“This is beautiful. Look at that,” Dr Siddall said. “It’s a very complex behaviour. The only other animals that swim in a vertical undulating pattern are whales and seals.”

For Dr Siddall, leeches are a source of pride, obsession and fascination. His walls are covered in leech photographs. He owns a giant antique papier-mâché model of a leech, with a lid that opens to reveal filigrees of blood vessels and nerves. His lab is filled with jars full of leeches that he has collected from some of the most dangerous places in the world.

He considers the risks well worth it

because he can now reconstruct the evolutionary history of leeches—how an ordinary worm hundreds of millions of years ago gave rise to sophisticated bloodsuckers.

As a boy growing up in Canada, Dr Siddall was disgusted by the leeches that attacked him when he went swimming in forest ponds. But their biology began to intrigue him as an undergraduate at the University of Toronto, where he became interested in how leeches spread parasites among frogs and fishes.

“It was hard for family conversations,” he said. “You couldn’t exactly talk about it over Thanksgiving dinner.”

By the time Dr Siddall joined the museum in 1999, the evolution of leeches had become his chief obsession.

To chart the leech’s entire evolutionary tree, Dr Siddall had to obtain species from all of its major branches. That required a series of expeditions to places like South Africa, Madagascar, French Guyana, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina, where Dr Siddall and

his colleagues took off their shoes, rolled up their pants and waded into the water.

“You can’t set traps for leeches,” Dr Siddall said. “We are always the bait.”

His research has shown that the ancestors of leeches were probably freshwater worms that fed on the surface of fish or crustaceans, as the closest living relatives of leeches do.

Dr Siddall has identified several major innovations that early leeches evolved as they became blood feeders. They acquired a proboscis that they could push into their hosts to drink blood. Later, some leeches evolved a set of three jaws to rasp the skin.

Leeches also needed chemicals that could keep their host’s blood thin so that it would not clot in their bodies. They have evolved many molecules for that purpose, along with others that prevent inflammation. Pharmaceutical companies have isolated some of these molecules and sell them as anticoagulants.

The leeches in the tub in his lab, Dr Siddall explained, belong to the species

Macrobdella decora, the North American medicinal leech. Dr Siddall has been making a careful study of North American medicinal leeches for years.

But the biggest surprise came when he applied new DNA sequencing techniques to the best-known leech of all, the European medicinal leech, *Hirudo medicinalis*.

In ancient Rome, physicians used that species to treat maladies like headaches and obesity. The tradition continued for 2,000 years.

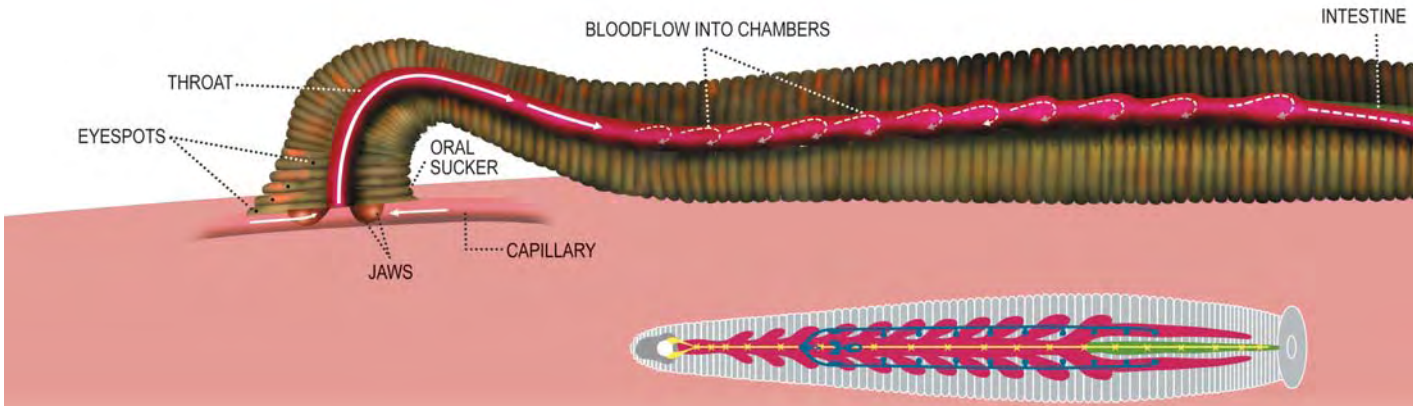
Although physicians no longer bleed their patients, *Hirudo medicinalis* has been enjoying a renaissance. Surgeons reattaching fingers and ears find that patients heal faster with the help of leeches. By injecting anticoagulants, leeches increase the flow through the reconnected blood vessels.

When Dr Siddall and Peter Trontelj of the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia analysed the DNA of the European leech, they received a big surprise. “The European medicinal leech is not one species at all,” Dr Siddall said. “It’s at least three.”

The researchers are now trying to determine the abilities among the three species and their differences. More important, they hope that their work will draw attention to the plight of European leeches. Over-harvesting and habitat destruction have cut their numbers drastically.

Dr Siddall knows that the notion of leech conservation may seem odd to some people. But he points out how many medical surprises leeches have yielded. New species will presumably yield new surprises. But he also thinks people should be concerned about leeches simply because they are leeches.

“Don’t you think the world would be a colder, darker place without leeches?” he asked. He raised his tub with a smile. “Especially ones with orange polka dots?” ● (NYT)



THE BITE
1 Three jaws, each with a row of tiny teeth, make a Y-shaped incision. The oral sucker creates a tight seal around the wound.
2 Salivary cells release anticoagulants to prevent blood clotting.

3 Blood is sucked into chambers in the gut. Bacteria in the chambers provide additional nutrients.
4 Blood is slowly moved as needed into the intestine where it is digested.

A true tale

BROUGHTON COBURN

Anxious and distracted, I gripped the table leg where I sat in a tea stall in Kathmandu's noisy central bazaar. A boy stepped from behind the counter balancing a tray load of tumblers of tea, set a glass at an adjacent table. Then, he looked at me.

The boy froze as if electrically shocked. Dropping the tray, he ran from the teashop as if fleeing the curse of Kali, Shiva's wrathful manifestation. Reflexively, I leaped up and found the boy trembling against the wall of a nearby building. "What did you see?" I asked him in Nepali. I felt as frightened as he. Shielding his eyes from mine, he ran from my voice through the alley.

Recently graduated from college, I was a Peace Corps volunteer posted in Nepal. It was the monsoon of 1975. As I relaxed in the office lounge reading my mail, a drop of blood splashed onto the aerogramme. I looked up, unable to see where it came from. More drips appeared—from my nose, bloodying my fingers. Not an early symptom of yet another exotic Asian disorder, I thought.

I had recently returned to Kathmandu from a trek to Everest base camp. In my mind I reviewed the trip—the 18,000 ft altitude, the thin, crystalline air, the simple meals and the cold, refreshing mountain spring water. At lower elevations, to drink untreated water would risk infection with hepatitis, typhoid fever, giardia, amoebae, roundworm and other parasites.

Perhaps Warren, a scholar friend who lived downstairs, would have an idea. Warren's guru was a Newari Buddhist priest who practiced Ayurveda and was descended from a 700-year lineage of royal physicians.

We set off for his office. The ageing doctor appeared in the vine-framed doorway and summoned me to his examining room. Dr Mana Bajra Bajracharya was puzzled by the duration of the bleeding. He prescribed aloe, an herbal astringent. That didn't work.

On the 18th day of nosebleeds, I bicycled down a cluttered side street of the central market. Thankfully, my nose hadn't dripped in several hours. But from the corner of my eye I thought I saw something emerge from my right nostril. I reached for my nose, which felt normal. I continued pedalling, presuming it to be a piece of coagulated blood.

There it was again. Then gone. Yes, something was in there, working its way out. A panic flushed over me. My nose grew large in my field of view, while the world beyond my face diminished. I needed to have this sighting confirmed by someone. But if this thing was part of a generalised, insidious infection, I feared, people might not tell me the truth. I pulled over to a teashop, ordered a glass of tea, and waited. That's when the boy in the teashop saw it too.

Back home I headed for my bedroom mirror. I drew up a chair, resolving to watch my nose until I saw the thing. For a quarter of an hour I focused. Then, as if trying to catch me unaware, a long, brown, eel-like creature slid out silently, offering no physical sensation at all. It scanned the air and retracted. I momentarily felt non-human, an alien sent to earth on reconnaissance to test the spiritual or intestinal fortitude of those who dared look at me.

I called the Peace Corps doctor, Barney, at home and described the events. Yes, a leech stuck its head out of my nose, I insisted. No, it always disappeared before I could touch it. "I don't know what to say," Barney finally responded, adding, "I'd like to make an appointment for you to see the embassy psychiatrist."

"I want you to take it out," I tried to say calmly.

Wearing the reluctant expressions of first-year anatomy students just introduced to their cadaver, Barney and a nurse greeted me with tentative nods in the driveway of the American medical compound. I sat on the examining table. Barney inserted the nasoscope but saw nothing. He flicked his head as if shaking off a dream then set the nasoscope down. Then he fished out a pair of hemostats, resigned to having a go at grabbing it.

I could tell that the leech appeared when Barney's body jerked. He hesitated, then bit his lower lip and approached, cautiously, as toward a dormant beast. Wait. Silently emerge. Clamp. Vanish. Wait. Emerge. Clamp. Missed again.

After several minutes, he nabbed the end of the leech, the head, on its way out for air. He cinched down the haemostats' miniature grippers and there the two of us paused, locked together in suspended animation. Then, with one palm on my forehead, he began to pull, slowly increasing the pressure.

For the first time I could now feel the thing—pulling vaguely from the interior of my head. It wouldn't let go. "Let me know if it hurts. Otherwise I'm just going to keep pulling until something happens," Barney stuttered, sounding unsure what that something might be.

The leech was now stretched out nearly a foot. My neck strained against the pull. I realized that I might never again experience this, nor again see such an expression on a doctor's face. I had been told to expect the unusual in this country but this was more like some altered, metaphysical dream.

Something snapped. Barney hit the wall directly behind him, while I fell over backward across the examining table. I couldn't see where the leech went, if in fact it came out, or if it had taken part of me with it. I wasn't sure Barney knew, either, until, with deliberation, he held up the trophy—a fidgeting, unattached leech, tightly seized in the clamps measuring four inches long, thick as a pencil, with a nickel-sized sucker on the host end.

Barney's mouth hung open, grinning at the same time. He had done the right thing. My nose dripped not a drop of blood. The leech was gone. I said thanks and shook hands with Barney and stepped from the clinic to again join the world of benign, unencumbered humans. ●

Broughton Coburn is author of *Nepali Aama: Life Lessons of a Himalayan Woman* and *Aama in America: A Pilgrimage of the Heart* and the US national bestseller *Everest: Mountain Without Mercy* (National Geographic Books). This article is excerpted from one that appeared in an anthology titled *Nepal Travellers' Tales* (O'Reilly and Associates) and another called *No Shit, There I Was*. Again.

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Radio's independent

PRATYOUSHT ONTA

It's time to re-imagine the role of radio journalism in safeguarding Nepal's democracy

If April will be remembered in Nepali history as the month in which two Jana Andolans tamed monarchical autocracy, first in 1990 and hopefully for the last time in 2006, May marks the month that Nepal's first independent FM radio station went on air.

Radio Sagarmatha FM 102.4 got its license on 18 May 1997 and went on air four days later. Since then 56 independent radio stations had been issued licenses, out of which almost 50 are broadcasting in more than 20 districts. When the last license was issued in December 2003, some 60 other stations were in various stages of the application process. The 10th year of independent radio is a time to look at factors that have facilitated and hindered independent radio journalism in Nepal.

While the freedom of the print media had been explicitly recognised by the 1990 constitution, the status of broadcasting had been left unspecified even as it guaranteed freedom of expression and information.

Thirteen years ago the National Broadcast Act put an end to state monopoly in broadcasting so FM radio stations could be owned and operated by NGOs, private companies, cooperatives and locally elected bodies.

The legal foundations of radio pluralism have been strengthened by various Supreme Court decisions since 2001.

Democratically elected



MIN BAJRACHARYA

governments prior to October 2002 slowed down the growth of this plural structure by making the license application process opaque and thus costly for those without reach in the party and government bureaucracy. City-based and commercial broadcasters were also favoured over village-based and non-commercial operators.

During King Gyanendra's

direct rule, attempts were made to shut down FM stations. Transmission equipment was seized from some stations and others faced harassment from the state. The opening of some stations was delayed due to objections raised by the army in the name of security. Some FM stations were also ransacked by the Maoists and others faced temporary closures.

Even so, the spread of radio stations and the variety in ownership have been the two biggest assets of our independent radio sector in the past ten years. Almost a third of the districts now have a radio station of their own and that number is only going to grow.

Unable to reverse radio's plural structure even democratically-elected

governments have tried to influence content by bureaucratic means and executive orders. The most notorious was the executive order issued in January 2001 by a GP Koirala-led government which tried to establish veto power through its representative in proposed boards overseeing each radio station so that programs not approved by its

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Birganj or



JIGME GATON

JIGME GATON
in BIRGANJ

For those of you looking for a good weekend trip out of the Valley and sick of walking up and down mountains, here is a tip: take your motorbike and

head for the plains.

Birganj is hot: 42 degrees, humid and closed down for two days last week by the Hindutva wallahs. You should go now before the road is washed away by the monsoon. My preferred mode of travel is by Royal Enfield but

your Hero Honda will do.

The route is simple, once you get past Checkpoint Thankot (still unmanned) to Naubise. Here, instead of heading west to Mugling, turn off to the Tribhuban Rajpat (they haven't got around to renaming that one

decade



MUKUNDA BOGATI

representative could not be aired. The directive also specified that radio stations couldn't broadcast news based on their own sources.

When this order was challenged in the Supreme Court in July 2001 it ruled that the government's attempt to monopolise the sources of news restricted citizens' right to information and their freedom of thought and expression. The court assured broadcast media of the same freedoms as those available to print. But before the radio stations could take advantage of this landmark decision, the Sher Bahadur Deuba-led government imposed a state of emergency in November 2001 and placed severe restrictions on FM radios.

State interference in FM content reached its height during King Gyanendra's direct rule with the presence of security personnel in FM

stations from 1 February 2005. It continued with many executive orders, undermining of financial viability of radio stations through withdrawal of government public service advertisements and an ordinance that revised some articles of the National Broadcast Act.

The king's regime tried its best to stop news and current affairs programs in independent radios. Some stations sacked their entire news teams and others cut staff. Radio journalists were forced to take to the streets in protest while their lawyers took the fight to the Supreme Court. Its many decisions kept independent radio alive through those dismal 15 months of Nepali history.

The development of radio has also been hindered by the lack of investment by commercial and non-commercial radios in their journalists. While many stations have increased the

number of their news bulletins over the years, they haven't recruited enough journalists to produce them. In one leading commercial station in Pokhara in 2005, the person who headed the news section besides managing the station also hosted several talk shows a week and handled phone-ins. Management of radio stations, commercial or otherwise, seems to want the same thing: increase the quantity and variety of programs broadcast with very little new investment on the producers.

As a result, there is a severe lack of editorial depth even in stations that have been on air for more than seven years. This lack shows up in poor news judgment and less-than-probing talk shows. While radio producers know this lack first hand, station management is so feudal that those who blow the whistle publicly are likely to face expulsion.

Management problems are severe in non-commercial stations. Radio Sagarmatha has seen more than a dozen station managers in nine years and the story in other stations is not very different. Managerial mess has resulted in good journalists seeking work elsewhere.

As we enter a new era in Nepali history, we need to re-imagine our major political institutions as well as the role of radio journalism in safeguarding democracy. ●

Pratoush Onta has co-edited two Nepali books related to FM radios in Nepal, Local Radio (2002) and Radio Journalism (2005).

An environment for peace

In Nepal, environmental scarcity and state failure are linked

Nepal recently pulled itself back from the brink of state failure. As the dust of the demonstrations settle, it will be important for scholars, civil society leaders and others to assess not only the root causes of the conflict but also the indirect causes, such as environmental scarcity.

With analysis and reflection, leaders and security policy experts interested in countries with similar preconditions can potentially learn from the Nepali case and avoid unnecessary loss of life.

The term environmental scarcity incorporates several sources of scarcity: natural resource scarcity, population growth (leading to a reduction in per capita availability of a resource) and unequal resource distribution.

NEPALI PAN

Fiona J Y Rotberg



The increase in environmental scarcity is linked both to the decline of the state's capacity to secure basic public goods and an increase in civil violence and as a result, in the Nepali case, its state was very close to abject failure. Because environmental scarcity causes economic deprivation, it in turn causes institutional disruption and civil strife. An eventual breakdown of the state is likely to follow.

Environmental scarcity and related issues aren't the sole cause of the conflict in Nepal, however they can't be ignored and must be incorporated into political, social, economic, and other analyses of the conflict. For example, natural resource scarcity, connected to unequal access to natural resources, is one of the central political causes of the Maoist insurgency. A recent study concluded that 'resentment over discriminatory natural resource access is one of the underlying political causes' of the conflict in Nepal.

Richard Matthew and Bishnu Raj Upreti note that an increase in environmental stress throughout the Nepali countryside in combination with an increasing population, lead to 'acute insecurity and instability'. Indeed, peasants constitute approximately 90 percent of Nepal's population, many of who depend on agriculture, and thus secure land ownership to make a living. However, close to 69 percent of land holdings are less than one hectare, making it difficult to make a sustainable living.

Because the elite class has traditionally had a loud and successful voice in policy making in Nepal, they have been able to maintain dominance and keep the peasants at the low end of the class (and caste) system. As a result, the Maoists strategically and conveniently found peasants as a fertile group for their promises of better economic, social, cultural and political policies.

The lack of the monarch's legitimacy and its inability to cope with both the growing insurgency and the environmental pressures put on the Nepali population helped lead the way to near and total state disarray. Thus, the capacity of the Nepali state as a function of 'legitimacy, internal coherence and responsiveness' led to civil violence and the eventual teetering on failure.

Clear definitions and indicators of state failure are few but variable. But the fact that the state provides few political goods to its citizens where the economic infrastructure has failed, the educational system is in shambles and where GDP per capita is in sharp decline, Nepal falls into this categorization.

But after the events of the past month perhaps Nepal is picking itself up from a hard fall. Whether it can pull itself up from the edge of state failure once and for all will remain to be seen. But if Nepal pulls it off, its experience will have lessons for other countries in the world. Whatever happens, one lesson is already clear: environmental scarcity issues should not be ignored when analysing direct and indirect causes to complex national conflicts. ●

Dr Fiona J Y Rotberg is Director of the Environmental Security in Asia Project at the Central Asia Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program at Uppsala University, Sweden.

bust

yet). Many of my friends who have lived here all their lives have never been on this wonderful, serpentine road that used to be Kathmandu's lifeline.

Till Palung there are lots of repairs going on but once in that picturesque valley you start going up the Daman stretch and then it is smooth sailing right up to the bhanjyang. Make sure that you stop for dhal bhat at the last eatery on the left before leaving Dama—the chicken curry there is chuank. The southern side of these great Mahabharat massifs are perpetually clouded after midday and you may be tempted to just camp out in this majestic and moist cloud forest with tall oak and rhododendron trees festooned with wild orchids.

But the biscuit basket of Nepal beckons and you spiral down to Bhaise Doban and on to Hetauda. The Avocado Guesthouse in Hetauda is a perfect spot for a spot of afternoon tea. Look for the

entrance on the left, just before hitting the industrial zone. You could be tempted to just stay the night here and say the heck with hot weather, as the room rates are low and the premises spotless, but we are out for a Birganj adventure, remember?

Back on the road you head straight south and just follow the line of trucks heading face-first at you, destined for KTM from India full of shampoo and spare parts. The biscuit and cosmetic factories along the Simara Birganj industrial corridor are all closed thanks to Chairman Prachanda and Birganj itself is simmering with protests over Nepal being declared secular.

When you are blocked by an oxcart traffic jam at an intersection, you know you are on Birganj's outskirts. You drive past cold stores, metal and meat shops, and then you come to the most-photographed clock tower in the kingdom after Ghantaghar. For a frenzied town, Birganj has some good hotels: if you want good food and a welcome dip in the pool, go to the Vishwa. If you want cheap, go to the Kailash next to Cosmic Air. But if you want the best,

call my brother Sonam Lama and see if he will let you spend the night at the Gautam School, located next to the municipal stadium and cricket field.

If you came to Birganj to eat then this is where Birganj shines—if anything can shine in the 40+ heat and dust of the Bihar plains. Go to the main market to taste the mix of foods: sekuwa, kulfi, bhelpuri. Everything here is a fraction of the cost in Kathmandu: food, camera batteries, services and Tuborg Extra Strong. Oh yes, mobiles actually work here because everyone has an Indian SIM card.

Birganj is everything that the badlands of Bihar have to offer but with the Nepali smiles. You will *not* find a Bluebird shopping centre here, filter coffee cafes nor jazz clubs but there are major bargains in the smuggler's shops along this porous border.


The humidity, dust and sweat makes Birganj a place to go if you want to get a real taste of pre-monsoon heat in the Gangetic plains without actually going to India. Makes you think: if only there was a sea off of Birganj, imagine what Nepal would be like today. ●

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The taboo of remembrance

Forty years later, relearning the lessons for China of Mao's Cultural Revolution

Mao's Cultural Revolution was launched 40 years ago this month, yet, despite 20 years of economic liberalisation, its wounds remain a taboo subject. Today's rulers dare not face up to their own experiences or moral responsibility. So, three decades after the Cultural Revolution ended, the national self-examination that China requires has not yet begun.

RED SUNSET
Liu Xiaobo



Of course, the Communist Party has deemed the Cultural Revolution a 'catastrophe', a judgment supported by mainstream opinion. But China's rulers permit discussion of the Cultural Revolution only within this official framework, suppressing any and all unofficial reflections. The generalised official verdict, and the use of Lin Piao (once Mao Zedong's vice president and designated heir, who rebelled against him) and the Gang of Four as scapegoats, obscures the crimes of Mao and the party, as well as the entrenched flaws in the system.



The Cultural Revolution's major figures, who wrought so much mindless violence either maintain their silence or offer spurious self-defences. Most victims also use various excuses to bottle up their memories. Those who both persecuted and were persecuted are willing to talk only about

their being victims. For example, the fanatical Red Guard movement swallowed up almost every youth of the right age. Yet all but a few old Red Guards remain silent, saying, "it is not worth remembering." During the Cultural Revolution's early days, the Beijing-based Allied Movement, formed by the

children of party cadres, committed horrendous acts of violence, operating under the slogan: "If the father is a hero, the son is a good man, if the father is a reactionary, the son is a turtle egg." But the memoirs of these rebellious vanguards of yesteryear highlight only their youthful

passion and pure idealism, or their sufferings and those of their parents. They do not mention their own barbaric assaults, vandalism, and looting, or their kangaroo courts. The revolution's veterans refuse to discuss their arrogant presumption of "natural Redness," or to mention that they rebelled because they wanted power. Worse still, they express no remorse toward their victims.

The Cultural Revolution swept up all of China. So many people suffered that it is difficult to count the number of victims accurately. The terror of the Red Guards, the armed fights between the rebellious sects, the teams established to 'cleanse' the social classes, and all the bloody massacres are simply left to rot in China's memory. The official ban blocks reflection, but human weakness and careerist self-interest among those who participated buttresses the official ban.

Consider Ye Xiangzhen, the daughter of senior general Ye Jianying, who once discussed her family's Cultural Revolution experiences on television. During the early stages of the Cultural Revolution, she played a dual role: daughter of a Chinese field marshal and leader of the rebels at the School of Art in the capital. She provided extensive details about how Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, persecuted the Ye family and how the Ye children went to prison. But she had only 58 words to say about her career as a Red Guard leader - no details or explanation of how she joined, which activities she participated in, and whether she was involved in 'physical struggles' or persecuted others.

The person with the most responsibility for the catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution is, of course, Mao, yet he remains China's saviour. The children of Mao's senior cadres who enjoyed the greatest fame during the Cultural Revolution are now the principal beneficiaries of today's economic reforms.

But this continuing silence by the guilty only transfers the costs to society as a whole, with Chinese life distorted by the weight of lies and evasions. As one generation after another continues to live in denial, the lies will corrode everything they touch. The Chinese people will no longer know what is personal honesty or historical truth, and they will repeatedly abuse, miss, or forsake historic opportunities.

No amount of material prosperity can make China a healthy society without this necessary reckoning with the past. ● Project Syndicate

Liu Xiaobo is a literary and political critic and current President of the Chinese chapter of PEN.



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KIRAN PANDAY

Faster than the rest

Dipak Raj Rai beat thin air to triumph in the Everest Marathon

SAGUN S LAWOTI in NAMCHE

It was a dream come true for Dipak Raj Rai when he touched the finishing line setting a new record in the race billed as the world's highest altitude marathon.

"I have participated in three long distance races in the past and that experience helped. I've learnt that one should pay attention to time rather than just running to beat fellow competitors. That gave me an edge," the 24-year-old said soon after winning the third Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon.

Rai completed the 42.2 km race in 3:28:27 almost an hour faster than the 4:19:17 clocked by 2005 winner Dangima Sherpa. "I didn't think I would win. But soon after the race started I realised I'd be the winner," said the farmer from Gundel, Solukhumbu, who dominated the race from the start.

Rai took home a cash prize of Rs 50,000 while the second and third place finishers won Rs 25,000 and Rs 15,000 respectively.

The race, one of the toughest in the world, starts at Everest Base Camp (5,364 m) and ends at Namche Bazaar (3,440 m). Its route criss-crosses ice falls, glaciers and moraines, following the Highland Sherpa trails of the Khumbu Valley, which Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Sir Edmund Hillary climbed during their historical ascent on 19 May 1953.

"In areas closer to the Base Camp, we had to use our judgment as we had to cover tricky terrain such as glaciers and icefalls," said Karma Sarki Sherpa, a 20-year-old yak herder who came second in 3:35:39.

"The race was tough," added Lok Bahadur Rokaya, 22, who finished third in 3:39:46. The armed police force man is a middle distance runner who participated in the high altitude marathon for the first time.

Tom Perkins (6:01:24), Tris Kelly (6:11:21) and Ryan Miller (6:17:21) came first, second and third respectively among foreign entrants. They pocketed Rs 25,000, Rs 15,000 and Rs 10,000.

"The marathon is the ultimate challenge for sports and adventure lovers," said Bikrum Pandey, chairman of the Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon organising committee. "The runners endure harsh weather and even altitude sickness during the run."

A total of 140 Nepalis and foreigners ran the race held to commemorate the 53rd anniversary of the first ascent on Mt Everest. "With the increase in the flow of tourists, next year's race is going to be a real big event. Nepal is going to be a happening place," predicted Pandey.

The race organisers are also hosting the Lhasa marathon in Tibet in September. It will kick off at Potala Palace and wind past various heritage sites in Tibet. ●

Money for school

A 35-year-old mother of three, Ang Domi Sherpa, surprised everyone by winning the women's category in 5:06:55. "I took part in the race for name and fame. But I hadn't thought that I would win," said Sherpa whose eldest son is 18. Her second son is a monk while her daughter goes to school.

Sherpa, who runs a teashop in Thame, pocketed Rs 25,000 for the win. "I'll spend the money on my children's education," she said. The second and third place women finishers won Rs 15,000 and Rs 10,000 respectively.

"I'll run and try to win the race next year as well," predicted the top finisher, who participated in the Namche-to-Thame Sky Race as a warm-up for the marathon.

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With the entire nation busy assessing the country's history in order to chart a roadmap to the future, why should we stargazers be left out?

The remnants of stone-henge (*chhate-dhunga*) in Tehrathum and other districts show that during the Middle Ages, Nepali astronomers used such structures to track the position of the Sun (solstices and equinoxes). In 1790 AD, Laxmi Dutta Pande made the first sundial (*dhup ghadi*), which is now kept at the National Museum. In 1910, Bir Sumsher installed a sundial at Ghantaghar with support from the British.

STAR GAZING

Kedar S Badu



In the early 1970s, Prof Keshav

Ram Joshi of Balmiki College brought the first telescope to Nepal from Russia and organized public observations at Tundikhel.

However, institutional initiatives to develop astronomy were taken only in 1995, when the government established the BP Koirala Planetarium and Science Museum Development Board. Over the past decade, the board has been unable to run neither the planetarium nor the observatory. It has been reported that the Board recently acquired a 16-in telescope, only to find out later that they don't have

The star's stars

What's the future for astronomy in Nepal?



the skills to operate it! This is certainly irresponsible behaviour and misuse of scarce public resources.

Now, with BP Koirala's brother GP in power, amateur astronomers are expecting that the Planetarium Development Board will be reshuffled to make it more result-oriented. It is highly embarrassing that, four

centuries after the telescope was invented, astronomy in Nepal is moving at the pace of a tortoise!

The June sky

Soon after sunset, you can find the constellation Ursa Major (*Saptarshi*) in the northern sky. To the east of it is the beautiful constellation Bôotes, the

Herdsmen. Virgo the Virgin will be just overhead and Leo the lion is high in the western sky. To locate Leo, look for the curve of stars that forms the lion's mane.

Immediately west of Leo is Cancer the Crab, which now houses the planets Mars and Saturn. Similarly, you could identify other prominent summer constellations, namely Hydra (the Water Snake), Scorpius, Libra (the Scales) and Hercules.

Don't miss the spectacular show of Mercury on the evening of 20 June. And train your binoculars skyward to observe the gathering of the Moon, Mars, Mercury and Saturn on the evening of 28 June.

The Sun: The summer solstice occurs on 21 June at 6.10 PM, when the Sun reaches its highest "altitude" in the sky, making this the longest day in the northern hemisphere.

Mercury: Mercury starts the month setting over one hour after sunset but each night it sets later until it reaches its greatest eastern elongation on 20 June.

Venus: Venus is the "morning star," rising about two hours ahead of the Sun.

Mars: Mars shares Cancer with Saturn during June. Watch the 'red planet' carefully this month as it moves through Cancer and approaches very close to the ringed-planet around the middle of June.

Jupiter: Jupiter is magnificent in Libra and can be seen all night. ●
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CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

The first music shows in the series Classic Encounters kept music lovers up till late on Tuesday when Looza played at the Liquid Lounge and Stupa belted out both originals and covers at Moksh. The parties went on till midnight at the two venues, considered among the best clubs in town. While Looza focused on blues and funk numbers by artists such as John Scofield, Incubus, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Eric Clapton and Bob Marley, over at Moksh, Stupa was doing covers of hits like Jimi Hendrix's Fire and their own originals, including Right Path and Thanksgiving.

The second set of concerts in the series happens tonight, when guitarist Anil Shahi will play classical fusion along with flautist Binod Katuwal and percussionist Pritam Rai on the tabla at Absolute Bar. The ever-shy Shahi, who spent years learning classical flute under masters in Banaras, is known more for his classical fusion guitar style. His debut album Maya Mantra was a huge success that established him as one of Nepal's finest. The trio will be playing original instrumental fusion along with revamped traditional tunes and Arabic tunes on the banjo.

Also tonight, non-stop jazz improvisers Cadenza will return home to Upstairs. The band, which has won tremendous popularity among jazz lovers in Nepal and beyond, is now working on a jazz vocal album together with some of its musical friends. Tonight, Cadenza will feature guitarist Bharat Rai, saxophonist Mariano, bassist Roshan Gurung, percussionist Samir Chettri and drummer and vocalist Nabin Chettri. The first half of the evening will feature jazz vocals while in the second half, the band will swing to the beat of African latin jazz.




Classic Encounters is a series of jazz, blues and fusion music concerts organised by Party Nepal in some of Kathmandu's premium party venues, including Liquid Lounge, J-Bar and Latin Quarters in Baber Mahal.

Classic Encounters, Friday 2 June
Anil Shahi at Absolute Bar, 8PM
Cadenza at Upstairs, 8PM
Both shows are by invitation only


Improv jazz and classical guitar highlight Friday's club concerts





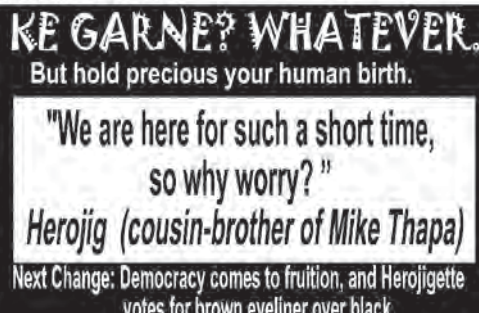
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See all the Adventures of your favorite Nepali characters at www.extreme-nepal.com or right here each Friday.

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Jana Andolan II Through Poetry and Art** by Lincoln School Students, till 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
- ❖ **Every Day Loktantra** photos by Lucas Brouwer (Holland), images of uprising at Fire & Ice, till 5 June.
- ❖ **Khulla Dhoka** open doors at NAFA Art Gallery, Naxal till 6 June.
- ❖ **Watercolours from Nepal** annual exhibition of watercolour society till 18 June.

EVENTS

- ❖ **The Drag.** On a Studio 7 performance at Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra 2,3,4 June at 7.15 PM. Rs 700 (discounts available). 4271545
- ❖ **Conceptual Framework and Key Findings of the Report** 'Unequal Citizens: Gender, Caste and Ethnic Exclusion in Nepal' by Dr. Lynn Bennett, Hotel Malla, 2 June, 4:30 PM. 5548142
- ❖ **Ex Drug Users and Sathi Samuha** discussion at Martin Chautari. 2 June, 3PM.
- ❖ **Bicycle Thieves** film at NTB Bhrikuti Mandap, 4 June, 5.30 PM.
- ❖ **Communication and leadership program** with Toastmasters, meeting every Tuesday at IEM 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

MUSIC

- ❖ **Inferno the Rockconcert** with Robin and the New Revolution, Abhaya and the Steam Injuns and 1974 A.D., on 9 June BICC grounds, 3.30 PM. Rs 100
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday and Saturday, 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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 a higher side at Juneli Bar, Hotel De L' Annapurna till 2 June. 4221711
- ❖ **Mango Masti** at all restaurants in Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Jatra Ma** cold beer and sekuwa, every Saturday.
- ❖ **Floats and Fantasies** at Juneli Bar till 24 June.
- ❖ **Return of the classics** outdoor barbecue at Juneli Bar. 4221711
- ❖ **Brunch from the east** weekend brunch till 29 July.
- ❖ **BBQ** every Friday at Jalan Jalan Restaurant. Kupondole Height.
- ❖ **Beat the heat** with milkshakes and smoothies at Hyatt Regency.
- ❖ **Imago-Dei** café and gallery, food, dessert and coffee, Nagpokhari, open Monday-Friday 9AM-9PM. 4442464
- ❖ **Café U** for organic Japanese homecooking. Near Internatinal Club, Sanepa. 11AM-6PM. Closed on Tuesdays. 5524202
- ❖ **Trendy martinis** at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **BBQ Dinner** at Summit Hotel every Friday. 6.30-9.30 PM. 5521810
- ❖ **Breakfast with Birds** Lunch with Butterfly at Farm House Cafe. 4375279

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, relaxation and massages in Pokhara. 4361500
- ❖ **Junglewalks** rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Park Village**, Budhanilkantha, Full room Rs 1,600. 4375280
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- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

Entertainment

Fanaa, 'destroyed in love', is about Zooni, a visually challenged Kashmiri girl and Rehan, a local tour guide with a knack for poetry. To experience life on her own, Zooni leaves the protective confines of her home and meets Rehan, who is smitten with Zooni and they travel together. But there are other sides of Rehan which he has never shown to Zooni. He knows telling the truth will take her away from him. But he also fears that being a part of his life could destroy her.

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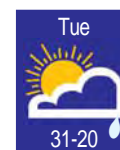
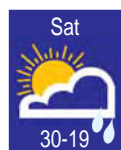
NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



As we predicted last week, this year's monsoon is here and the serious rains will start this weekend. Thursday's satellite shows storms forming over the Bay of Bengal and blowing northward to the Himalaya. The low pressure trough that creates the monsoon track is already in place along the lower hills. Western Nepal also need not wait for the monsoon this year because breakaway clouds from the strong Arabian front are already in place. May's copious pre-monsoon rains moderated temperatures to five degrees below usual maximum levels while humidity levels soared to above normal. We expect these trends to continue so get your rain coat ready.

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नेपाल सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग



TRUTH SEEKERS: Members of the High-Level Investigation Commission, Dr Kiran Shrestha and Ram Prasad Shrestha, hold an inquiry into abuses during the people's movement at Bhotahity on Tuesday.



PLAY(ING) MUSIC: The Sukarma band performs at Gurukul on Sunday to raise funds for their new theatre.



FINAL STRETCH: The chariot of Rato Machindranath being pulled towards Jawalakhel on Monday to prepare for Bhote Jatra on Friday.



NORTHERN ROCK: Nepal's Nepathya plays at the World Village Festival in Finland on Sunday.

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‘Crazy’ Uttam Sanjil

The students roam around in rainbow coloured uniforms of *daura suruwal*, waist coat and *gunyou cholo*, their classrooms are named after artists, literary figures and the zones of Nepal.

Seen striding about the school, Samata Sikshya Niketan in Jorpati, is Uttam Sanjil. He started this school six years ago with the intention of encouraging children from low-income families to study. Now with regular support from 1,200 sponsors, he has opened other schools in Bhaktapur, Kamalbinayak and Gwarko attended by more than 7,000 kids. "If they can't go to school they will end up in the streets. My responsibility is to guide them to the right path," says Sanjil.

At first people did not believe in Sanjil's campaign. They said he was idealistic. Some started calling him 'crazy'. But that changed when they saw the positive results of Sanjil's hard work. Now the same people who called him a dreamer say, "You have to be as passionate and as crazy as Sanjil to be able to follow what you believe in."

When he started his education campaign with the help of the Jorpati-Nayabasti club, Sanjil promised to not give up until he had succeeded. Within a year of the school's inception, over 800 kids whose parents worked in the carpet industry

came to him and he soon decided to abandon his flourishing film career in Bombay and embraced the job of principal at Samata Niketan.

Children at Samata pay Rs 100 each month and the school provides free uniform and books. In addition, Sanjil's school supports 16 kids who lost their parents when a soldier opened fire on villagers in Nagarkot last year.

Sanjil takes all the awards and felicitation he has received as encouragement to do better. "I dream that the children who study in my school will go back to their villages and start similar programs," says Sanjil. Judging by his perseverance, hard work and his relationship with his students, that dream does not seem entirely impossible. ●

Peshal Pokhrel





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All the hearsay that's fit to print

What a relief it is to have our press freedom restored to its former glory so that we can print all the unverified gossip and defamatory innuendo again without fear or favour of all and sundry.

Thank heavens we don't have to glance nervously over our shoulders anymore when we shout pro-republican slogans, it's just that now we have to glance nervously over our shoulders even when we mountaineers have to pay royalty to the government to climb Mt Everest. How come they haven't change that word yet?

These are the civil liberties that we fought hard for and what a great accomplishment it is for press freedom in our new people's democracy that we are ready to lynch anyone who even slightly doesn't agree with us.



UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit

No longer do we have to worry about that late night phone call from the Information Ministry informing us that we are on this year's royal birthday honours' list. And thank heavens we don't have to think twice about saying what a visionary statesman and terrific freedom fighter Sujata Koirala is. We only have to think once.

Some of us with short memory spans will have forgotten what it was like in the bad old days two months ago when we in the media were straitjacketed and couldn't be as irresponsible as we are today. Now, to celebrate the restoration of total democracy and media freedom we bring you an example of the kind of fearless journalism that now appears in the pages of our papers and which are published without any fear of the consequences:

First man to urinate on Everest

LOBUJE—(Reuters) A Nepali climber entered the Guinness Book of World Records when he unzipped through three layers of gortex trousers and thermal underwear at 12.45 PM on 28 May to take a leak on the top of the world's highest mountain, the Ministry of Tourism said.

The Nepal Mountaineering Association has officially certified that the climber indeed relieved himself at the summit after being presented with a live satellite feed from the summit attesting to the authenticity of his audacious feat. His name is being withheld pending notification of immediate family members.

"We think this represents a new achievement in the annals of Himalayan climbing and it should spur other Nepalis to similar acts of courage and endurance," NMA said in a statement.

The extraordinary feat came one day after another Nepali climber also set a new world record and broke his own Nepali record by stripping naked on top of Everest and streaking down the southeast ridge. However, he nearly had to have his backside amputated due to frostbite—indicating just how difficult it must have been for Lama to do wee-wee at -50 Celsius and in the 140 km/h jetstream.

Speaking through satellite phone from the South Col, Nepal's latest hero sounded tired but happy as he explained what a relief it was to anoint the 8,848 m summit. "I couldn't bear it any longer and nearly gave up and peed at the Hillary Step," Lama said, "but I mustered all my strength and through sheer will power made it to the summit."

There was one harrowing moment at the summit that produced a lot of frantic fumbling when the zipper jammed and there was a slight hitch when the climber miscalculated the wind direction. But in the end it all turned out well as the whole nation rejoiced at two world records broken in a week by Nepalis on Mt Everest. ●

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