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- Reassure Indian authorities of the stability of the seven party alliance government
- Address evident Indian nervousness about the Maoists

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India gives Nepal NRs 16 billion in aid and debt write-offs

KANAK MANI DIXIT in NEW DELHI

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**Editorial**

Bhai Bhai

Artha Beed’s Economic Sense

Leveraging India

**FOOTBALL**

LIKE HOT CAKES: Porters carry TV sets at Indrachok on Thursday. With a month of World Cup games set to start in Germany on Friday, shops can’t keep up with the demand.

**World Cup Special** p8-11
A secular Hinduism

If there is to be a monarchy it must be separated from religion

To those agitating against the declaration of Nepal as a secular state, prepare to be left behind by logic and history. You may think you’re playing a patriotic and faithful game but you’re just cynical. Here’s why.

To begin with, there’s no such thing as a Hindu kingdom. Even when each entity existed thousands of years ago, there was no agreement on whether they were legitimate or not. Various tracts used to justify the absurd notion that a Shah king was an avatar of a god were reissued or deliberately misconstrued. Respected Hindu scholars say the kings of early Hindustan were entreated to be just and wise, like gods, not to hold gods themselves. In those days of wandering mendicants as Buddhists, Mahavira and others, a king who claimed actual godhood would have been laughed out of court. Even Ashoka, no shrinking violet, only referred to himself as “beloved of gods.”

Very few people in Nepal know that much of what has passed for palace-sponsored Hinduism in Nepal was invented by the Ranas or members of the same courtier class, clergy picked from a variety of traditions that can only be described in and of themselves as secular.

A secular religion? Surely not. Why the Maoists is a creed, not a faith per se. The Mahatian of the Tulsi Ghata temple in Varnasi, a saint called Veer Bhadra Mishra, once told me Hindu didn’t agree on any aspect of their faith save the sanctity of the family and the responsibility of individuals for their own salvation. “We have so many schools of thought,” he said, “so few in millions of gods, some just a few, in some one God and others in no gods at all. We have atheist Hindus. Who’s to say whether anyone is more correct than anyone else.” Then, true to the notion of individual salvation, Mahatji slipped into the Ganges and took his holy bath. Toleration is the only way to apprehend such beliefs.

Nepali Hinduism calcified under state patronage. A culturally sanctioned way of life was adapted and adopted by peoples’ needs for millennia became a tool of caste-oppression and exclusion in Nepal. Pretending to be a force for unity, the Hinduism encouraged by the Nepali elite was largely a way to divide and rule the diverse masses.

It’s no accident that the number of Hindus in the country decreased. Extremists were spooked. That’s because the government stopped simply designating people by religious community and asked them what their faith ways, Megans, Tamangs, Gorkhas, Virochana, all the so-called ‘automatic Hindus’.

None of the Hindu reform movements of the past have found root in Nepal given the role of the state authorities in determining the official stature of religion. What would the Ranas have done, for instance, with Swami Vivekananda’s concept of ‘civiliser’? More than surviving, Hinduism flourished. It still does. As India becomes prosperous and more modern, its secularism is being symbolised. But for long, its religion is a national shame in many parts of this country, particularly rural Hindu women.

Their religious beliefs, and those of their husbands, have kept them in bondage. No faith justifies slavery. Furthermore, the endless spectacles of Hindu ritual need to be removed from state functions, including those involving the national anthem, the president and peoples’ homes where they belong.

So here’s to secularism. And to Hinduism, whether Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Bhumnali or any other kind. Not to mention Borgian, Islamic, Catholic, Christinism, Anagotic, Atheism and others. Most of all, here’s to tolerance that is neutral towards the land itself is truly united in diversity.

Gross national happiness in Pokhara

Equality in politics and equity in economics are two sides of the same coin

POKHARA—Here we are in the place with the highest annual rainfall in Nepal, and yet the wet streets are slick and rainwashed. In Kathmandu they are muddy and potholed. The reason for this can be found in a span proves that the reason Kathmandu is so scruffy is because it wallows in its own cloud. Even the rainy season is photogenic so scruffy is because it wallows in its own cloud. Even the rainy season is photogenic.

The problem in Nepal has never been money, but spending it efficiently. Let’s get over our insecurities for once, and get to work. But social and political rights in the absence of economic rights are a precursor to further upheaval. Equality in politics and equity in economics are two sides of the same coin. For stability, one can’t do without the other.

We have begun to address the political inequality that is the inevitable consequence of the economic inequality between Nepal’s haves and have-nots. Nepal is the most unequal country in the world’s most unequal countries. Gini Coefficient is .34, India is at .42—Nepal is a stark .53. Four-fifth of Nepalis are subsistence farmers, yet the livelihoods of about 10% of the population are estimated to be in no gods at all. We have atheist Hindus. Some just a few, in some one God and others in no gods at all. We have atheist Hindus.

So here’s to secularism. And to Hinduism, whether Shaivite, Vaishnavite, Bhumnali or any other kind. Not to mention Borgian, Islamic, Catholic, Christinism, Anagotic, Atheism and others. Most of all, here’s to tolerance that is neutral towards the land itself is truly united in diversity.

BHAI BHAI

Listening to the rabble rousing harangues in parliament this week warning Prime Minister Koirala not to sell out to India we wondered what had happened.

Of course, it was in 1991, 1995 and 2000 before Koirala went to pay his respects at the Delhi Darbar each time he became prime minister during previous tenures. (See picture.)

To be sure, parliament has reason to be concerned. Koirala has always been notorious for not consulting. Some leaders of the seven-party alliance actually found out from the media of his plan to cancel his check-up in Bangkok and go check out Delhi instead. And, after all, the man øed the Tanalapur barrage in 1991 even though it needed ratification by two-thirds of the house.

Listening to the rabble rousing harangues in parliament this week

Equality in politics and equity in economics are two sides of the same coin
GOOD EXAMPLE

I am not convinced by Pravin Rana’s apple-with-apple comparison of the military in conflict places with Nepal’s own (Guest Column, ‘Loving to hate the NA’, #300). The United States in World War II is hardly to be compared with Nepal and as a Colombian myself I dare say that $3.9 billion a year spent for the military only shows how much money, not to mention lives, can be wasted in a war.

That amount is only possible because Colombia is, after Israel, the second largest recipient of US money for military purposes, directed in principle to combat the drugs trade. Apart from other strings attached to it, Colombia is completely dependent on that money for any improvement in security the government wants to achieve. In spite of it all, the drug business has not decreased and the military is implicated in gross human rights violations. Although some improvement in security has been achieved by militarising roads and parts of the country in recent years, the conflict goes on and the country remains one of the most violent in the world.

A peaceful way out is not in sight, at least for the next four years, since the president and the people who recently re-elected him still believe in a military solution. The guerrillas have ruled out any dialogue during his regime.

After watching with pain for the last eight years Nepal follow in the steps of Colombia, the recent developments in this country are, as my enthusiastic mail to friends in Colombia can testify, the most encouraging I have ever witnessed. Now it is Nepal’s example which has to be followed and not the other way round.

Karin Eichelkraut, Dubai

Re: Pravin Rana’s Guest Column ‘Loving to hate the NA’, #300)

He has rightly conceded that hatred for the (RNA) is rife among intellectuals, civil society, media and the common people. But that it stems from their ignorance is anything but true. In fact, it is the army’s own misdeeds that are to blame. Even though M Rana belittles the NA as a messiah of democracy, I wonder how he analyses the royal coup, which would never have been possible without the military backing it to the hill. The NA, notwithstanding the cosmic change in its role, remains unaltered in its essence. It wasn’t ‘restrained’ during the pro-democracy movement, soldiers opened fire at peaceful demonstrations in Pokhara, Jhapa, Banepa and Gulmiya, killing and seriously injuring many. The claim that Nepal is not yet heavily militarised compared to other countries is premised on a spurious paradigm because it’s not the number of arms or army per se but its use that is crucial. The incidents of Nauwato, Belbari and Chisapani barracks, besides many others, are not just isolated events but a vivid reflection of the modus operandi of the NA that can be considered anything but ‘professional’. Maoists certainly can’t be sanitizable either, but redeeming the NA just because it was fighting an insurgency is not acceptable.

Subhash Paudel, Institute of Medicine, Maharajgunj

I do not agree with CK ‘Pundit’ Lal giving the benefit of doubt (‘Fear of the future’, #300) to our anarchic youth. If you act like an anarchist you are an anarchist— it is as simple as that. I agree that there is a need to create jobs for youths but forget pursuits that do not offer monetary benefits, they will not be attractive enough. The problem arises as Nepal’s labour law is quite unfriendly for investors and this is made much worse by the Maoists’ recent demands in Birganj. No sane person would even think of investing in such an environment.

The proposed amendment to the labour act by the royal government was more industry-friendly and could have done magic. But, unfortunately, the ‘new’ government chose to throw the baby along with the bath water. Short sighted as it was, they chose to slaughter the goose for the sake of one meal.

Armugam Ananta, Jawalakhel

The leadership of the insurgent revolution has repeatedly declared its acceptance of any outcome of the constituent assembly, even a u-turn back to absolute monarchy. It has also clarified that a competitive multiparty system is not similar to the party system in western democracies—but in accordance with the socialist republic established by Prachanda Path. This is the latest version of militant Marxism-Leoninism-Maoism enriched by the Latin American experience of Peru and Nicaragua. If the seven-party alliance understands competitive multiparty system differently, the implementation of the 12-point agreement may face serious confusion. Besides, the performance of the honourable members of the House of Representatives in the past 15 years has never been very rosy. The common people on the basis of their representatives’ performance may not be comfortable entrusting them with their destiny. Instead, a new fully constitution jointly drafted by the parties and the Maoist leadership with the expert advice of the UN Office of the Commissioner on Human Rights and ratified by the common people through a national referendum would be the quickest, simplest and most risk-free road ahead. We thank you, Ms Yadav, for your support to the people of Nepal in their struggle for peace, happiness and freedom.

Ravi Manandhar, Kuleswor

Re: your editorial ‘From theocracy to democracy’ (#300). Everyone has been saying that because of the recent changes the king has lost. On the contrary, it has presented King Gyanendra a golden opportunity to redeem himself in the public eye. If he sincerely sticks to his new duties and accepts the outcome of the constituent assembly polls, people will be willing to forgive him his past wrong deeds and he can go down in the history of Nepal as a prominent personality. The choice is his: does he want to be remembered as a tyrant or a statesman?

Sagar Sharma, email

Thank God we still have people like Chitra Lekha Yadav who do not believe that you need power and position to be a leader. (‘Still speaking for women’, #299) I salute you, Ms Yadav.

Sandhya Sharma Amaty, email

STARS

I’m glad to see people like Kedar Badi keeping up the good work in Nepal so astronomy is relevant to the people despite the political crisis (‘The stars’, #300). There is a lot astronomers can do to work for peace and understanding much as he is doing in Nepal.

Mike Simmons, California USA

After the Indonesian earthquakes, it is clear that the threat of an earthquake must be taken seriously by all media in Nepal. Every school must run awareness programs and the government must not ignore this natural threat. We ignored them in the past and regretted it. It is not if but when the next big one will come. Awareness today will help save lives tomorrow.

Shradha Mukhija, email

Kunda Dixit should stop writing Under My Hats, we now have parliament to entertain us. (‘All the hearsay that’s fit to print’, #300).

Gyan Subba, email

LETTERS

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

Email: letters@nepaltimes.com
Fax: 977-1-5020103
Mail: Letters, Nepal Times, P.O. Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.
India attached great importance to the visit as evidenced by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh taking the unprecedented step of coming to the airport to greet Koirala on Tuesday. He told a visibly touched Koirala that he could not do less for one of Asia’s ‘seniormost statesmen’. But Indian media was distracted by the case of young Rahul Mahajan’s run-in with cocaine and champagne to pay much attention. 

Severely weakened by a failing right lung, 84-year-old Koirala was mostly bound to the Imperial Hotel where the

**TRAVELLING ROYAL: Girija Prasad Koirala on board flight RA 217 to New Delhi on Tuesday.**

Indian side had put up the 42-member delegation from a newly democratic Nepal. Aside from immediate aid and debt write-offs, the Nepali delegation has also discussed hydropower projects to meet Nepal’s own urgent demand. There is hope Nepal can build on this for joint river projects in future. Full details are to be unveiled in a joint communiqué on Friday, and at press time New Delhi hadn’t said no to seeing a four percent countervailing duty that India places on Nepali products, which Nepali business has been seeking. India has asked for a list of all Nepali manufacturers, so third country products aren’t fobbed off as export to India. Bangladesh has reportedly also approached India for similar consideration which is said to have put Delhi in a bind.

The South Block official conceded that India was trying to be less prescriptive in its relationship with Nepal, with the promised assistance to be used according to Nepal’s defined priorities in highways, rural infrastructure, public health and education. Knowing of Kathmandu’s sensitivities and the transitional nature of the present government, the Indian side resisted attempts by Nepali officials to link in reference to hydropower projects. Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Arun Shourie and Man Mohan Singh’s National Security Advisor MK V Nandan are known to have expressed concern about the Maoists in separate meetings with Koirala. “The Indians seem nervous about the rebels being seen to be at par with the state,” one Nepali official told us. “Disunity within the seven alliance can only help the Maoists.”

Indeed, a Ministry of External Affairs official also confirmed that this was his government’s position on the rebels. “The seven party alliance government must deal with the Maoists from a position of strength so that the rebels move towards demobilization of arms and a free and fair election to the constituent assembly. This process must be accelerated if peaceful politics is to be consolidated in the direction,” he said.

New Delhi, however, remained firmly against any kind of United Nations facilitation of peace talks between the government and the Maoists. It would prefer to see the United Nations as observer rather than monitor of the constituent assembly elections. However, Indian officials conceded that the UN had the expertise and credibility required for the ‘management of arms’ before the elections. The Maoist leadership is anxious for the release of more than 130 of its comrades presently in custody in India, some of them senior central committee members. But Delhi doesn’t seem to be in any great hurry to go down this road. Said one Indian official, “We see the rebels in jail as a bargaining tool that the government of Nepal needs during the negotiations.”

“When asked to decide, India will of course side with the political parties,” explained Indian political scientist and Nepali expert SD Muni. “New Delhi wants the Maoists to be mainstreamed but how this is to be done is up to Nepal’s political parties. Girija Prasad Koirala is powerful today like never before and it his responsibility to ensure that the parties in his alliance do not complicate the peace process.”

The enormous weight put by the Nepali side on Koirala’s New Delhi trip and the extreme sensitivity to what the Indian side has to say is indicative of the unfinished Nepal agenda of building a competent, independent India policy. The hope is that the self-confidence exhibited by the Nepali people during the April Uprising will also translate into Kathmandu’s assertive engagement with New Delhi. Over the decades and till today, this engagement has been marked by two extreme: knee-jerk anti-Indianism and supplication. 

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Here comes the rain

**Mains dry? Tubewell exhausted? Water tanker too expensive? Try rainwater harvesting**

Harvesting rainwater is simple. You collect it from the roof, filter it using a simple screen, collect the water in a tank, purify it and then use it for washing, cleaning, watering the garden and even drinking if you purify it properly.

Installing a simple harvesting system in a private house costs as little as Rs 3,000. The amount of water collected depends on the rainfall and the surface on which it lands. With Kathmandu’s rainfall and a roof collection area of 100 sq m, a household can collect 128 cu m of water annually—enough even for a five-person family. The only catch: you need a tank to store all that water.

Kathmandu gets an average of 1,600 mm of rain a year. But 80 percent of this falls in the three monsoon months and much of it goes to waste. But with underground supplies being sucked dry by tubewells and drinking of open spaces that help to recharge underground water, alternatives are needed.

In fact, rainwater collection is not something Kathmandu’s environmentally conscious do, it has become a necessity for survival in Kathmandu. 

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**Where it has worked**

Rainwater harvesting systems have already been installed in various school buildings, campuses, housing complexes and even government departments (see pic left). And everywhere, it has been heaven-sent.

The NGO Forum for Urban Water Sanitation has even trained plumbers who will come and fix the pipes in your house for a minimum charge. All you have to do is call 2042122.

Shuvatara School installed a rainwater collection system in 2004 at a cost of Rs 50,000. The four tanks can collect 10,000 litres. “We are using rainwater for everything,” says Mohan Nairaula, the ecology and environment teacher who built the system. Residents of a housing complex recently built on the outskirts of Kirtipur on seven party alliance can only help the Maoists."
Balancing migration

Migration can both hurt and help developing countries, said a report released this week by the United Nations. “It is for governments to decide whether more or less migration is desirable,” said UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in the introduction to the report, International Migration and development. “Our focus in the international community should be on the quality and safety of the migration experience and on what can be done to maximise its development benefits.” Annan proposed a standing forum of all 191 UN member states where governments could share ideas and best practices related to migration and its links to global development. People living outside their home countries numbered 191 million in 2005—15 million in developed countries and 75 million in the developing world. Developing countries earn roughly $167 billion a year in money repatriated by migrant workers. Remittances contributed 11.7 percent of Nepal’s GDP in 2004, says the report.

International album

Nepal’s rock headliners 1974AD will release their seventh album On Air, at a concert in Dresden, Germany on 17 June, the first time that a Nepal album has been released internationally. The event is part of the band’s upcoming tour of Germany and Dubai in partnership with PartyNepal.com. 1974AD will play in various German cities 16-18 June and from 22 June till 1 July will perform for Nepalis living in Germany and Belgium before flying to Dubai for two shows.

Unions in the movement

Eighty-five leaders and activists of the General Federation of Nepali Trade Unions (GEFONT) were arrested during April’s people’s movement, according to a new GEFONT report — Nepal Trade Unions in the Laktander Movement. Twenty-five GEFONT members were injured by bullets and 338 others in clashes with security forces. “The Nepal trade union movement stood against the royal takeover from the very beginning. Workers embarked on a great struggle,” said GEFONT. “We want to make sure there is no slippage.”

ECONOMIC SENSE

Let’s start by examining our approach. We look to India the way a school kid approaches a patent for pocket money. In our eyes, every India visit is about our leaders carrying an empty jute bag across the border to be filled up. We never see India as a partner nation. We never think to tell its leaders: “You need energy desperately and we have plenty of hydropower. Let us see if we can work together.” No, we want India to dole out projects as it does for Bhutan, but we want to keep our self-respect at the same time.

The fact that the prime minister’s entourage does not include a water resources minister is another shock. In the past, we have negotiated refugee issues without having a foreign minister and look where that has led us. Fifteen years of mistakes but we do not want to learn from them. If tiny Laos can benefit from its powerful neighbour Thailand, why can’t Nepal benefit from India?

Our fixed exchange rate and open border are to Nepal’s advantage. The former lends stability to our macro-economic indicators but it will be interesting to watch how long India will want to keep its border open. There is a potential for Nepal to become a Mexico to India’s United States, with border fences and migrants risking their lives to cross over. Instead, we need to leverage the open border.

Why do we only look to India when we need to be bailed out, politically and economically, without taking into account our strengths and potential? Rather than asking for cash handouts that would be chewed up in the cogwheels of the bureaucracy and shrouded by political cobwebs, it would be more profitable for Nepal to push Indians to invest here. Many millions of our border is hungry for success and recognition. In today’s India, a deal worth less than $100 million is not even noticed but an Indian entrepreneur with $10 million in his pocket can be a big wheeler-dealer in Nepal. We need to revise our laws and institutional framework to encourage such investments.

Instead of spitting venom about our great Indian adversary, let’s at least ask isn’t it time that we followed the rest of the world and started to build our partnership with India, and China? If we neglect this task and continue to brood over our shared past, future generations of Nepalis will not forgive us.

NEW PRODUCTS

ECO-TIME: Japanese watchmaker Citizen has opened a showroom on the first floor of Rana Plaza, New Road. Called ‘First Citizen’ the showroom will feature Citizen’s Eco Drive model, which runs on light energy.

JOLLY TASTES: Gorkha Brewery has launched Nepal’s first strong and lemonade drinks, Jolly Shandy and Jolly Lemonade. Jolly Shandy is a mix of lemonade and beer with an effective alcohol content of below 1 percent. Jolly Lemonade is a non-alcoholic, thirst quencher with added Vitamin C. It is priced at Rs 25 per bottle while Jolly Shandy sells for Rs 35 for a 330 ml bottle.

“What we want to make sure there is no slippage”

Herve Jouanjean: Very positively. The problem is that the degree of information available to the average citizen in Europe. From the media, the European public knows that the degree of information available to the average citizen in Europe.

Nepali Times: How do you evaluate Nepal’s People’s Movement of April 2006?

Herve Jouanjean: Very positively. The problem is that the degree of information available to the average citizen in Europe. From the media, the European public knows that the people were fed up with the royal regime, that the seven party alliance started a people’s movement and that the king retreated under pressure. The public is much less aware of the intricacies within this general scenario, including the role of the Maoists in making the movement successful.

What are the challenges ahead?

All the energy has now to be put into the process of peace and reconciliation. The people of Nepal have said that they want a political resolution and everyone must support this 100 percent. The government is made up of some very astute politicians who have gone into this with their eyes wide open. They know the risks and have evaluated the challenge. They know how to play poker, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the partners. This is a dangerous game but what else can you do when a force that has been underground for 10 years says that it is ready to talk?

Are you confident they can resolve their differences?

I look at the wisdom of the Nepali people, who have told their politicians to go ahead in the dialogue with the Maoist rebels knowing there is no military solution. At the same time, this wisdom will not be well served if the elections to be held in the future are not free and fair.

The European Union represents one of the finest models to encourage such reconciliation. The people of Nepal have said that they want a political resolution and everyone must support this 100 percent. The government is made up of some very astute politicians who have gone into this with their eyes wide open. They know the risks and have evaluated the challenge. They know how to play poker, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the partners. This is a dangerous game but what else can you do when a force that has been underground for 10 years says that it is ready to talk?

What is your level of confidence in Nepal’s future?

My answer is simple–let us do it, let us move ahead with the best of expectations. Among the politicians there is a road map and a political vision. However, we are not blind to the fact that there are so many complex details to be managed. This includes demobilisation, decommissioning of arms, rehabilitation of the victims, affected population and reconciliation. The rebel fighters have to do so for another 50, or until we start seeing our neighbour in a new light.

What is the impact of your report on India?

The impact of the report on India is significant. It is for governments to decide whether more or less migration is desirable. Our focus in the international community should be on the quality and safety of the migration experience and on what can be done to maximise its development benefits.”

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Interview with Janardan Sharma (Comrade Prabhakar), deputy commander of the Maoist western division, by Kiran Pokhrel on Radio Sagarmatha’s ‘Aja ka Kura’, 3 June

Radio Sagarmatha: What is your troop strength?

Comrade Prabhakar: We have seven divisions at present, this is our national army. At the local level there are hundreds of thousands of militia.

How about regular guerrillas?

This is an internal matter. It is not necessary to give you the exact figure. You can calculate yourself from the fact that we have seven divisions.

What I can say is that we have enough strength to challenge the royal army.

When will you declare your exact troop strength and your weapons?

When Comrade Prachanda is involved in negotiations and when the subject of arms management comes up, headquarters will announce it.

Would you include your militia under a future arms management agreement?

It can be done separately from the PLA because it is not part of our main force.

Are you trying to hide your true strength?

No, we don’t need to do that. It is not our intention to hide true numbers to hatch another conspiracy. We are trying to move towards a democratic republic as per the wishes of the people and that is what our party and our headquarters are involved in under the leadership of Comrade Prachanda. Guns aren’t as important as ideas. We amassed weapons with our ideas. We started from zero weapons.

So how many weapons do you have?

I don’t need to answer that either. This much I can say: we have captured some from the army and some we manufacture ourselves.

You stuck to your slogan of people’s democracy and started your people’s war and now you have changed the slogan to democratic republic. Why?

We have not lost our way. We have a dream of socialism-communism. But we have to move with the times. For the moment the Nepali people want an end to feudalism and to set up a capitalist democratic republic.

What I can say is that we have enough strength to challenge the royal army.

So your armed struggle was a mistake?

As I said, we want to end feudalism and we want an inclusive democracy so that all the marginalised, suppressed and discriminated classes and groups are represented so they can participate in governance.

How do you aim to get there, through federalism?

We have suppressed classes, gender, ethnic and regional groups. We need to grant them autonomy and set up a united federal Nepal. We need to include all their needs, their cultures, their languages by giving them a say in the new constitution. The development of Nepal means the development of the janajatis. If they don’t have a say in the state power they’ll never have development. We have a dream of making Nepal into the Switzerland of Asia.

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Secularism

Yubhari Chitrin in Saptahika, 1 June

Secularism is a noble idea, its main task is to create a secular state that respects the rights of all religions in the country. The state should treat all religions equally and it shouldn’t allow religion to be used by a political force to perpetuate itself. Parliament passed a resolution on secularism but doesn’t seem to have done enough homework on how to implement this. Because of this, elements opposed to secularism are spreading rumours that this is against Hinduism and could use these rumours to push the country towards communalism. Despite being a Hindu kingdom, secularism has been the character of the Nepali state.

Even the 1990 constitution couldn’t resolve these contradictions, it couldn’t address the people’s concerns. If we hadn’t taken up arms, even the 18-day andolan wouldn’t have happened. Let me ask you this: if it was possible without armed struggle why didn’t it happen? The people understand this. The uprising was something the war brought about. Back when we made our 45-point demand no one listened to us. We didn’t want to drag this country into conflict, but we had no choice.

Are you trying to hide your true strength?

No, we don’t need to do that. It is not our intention to hide true numbers to hatch another conspiracy. We are trying to move towards a democratic republic as per the wishes of the people and that is what our party and our headquarters are involved in under the leadership of Comrade Prachanda.

Can you point out the strength of your army?

We have seven divisions at present, this is our national army. At the local level there are hundreds of thousands of militia.

So your armed struggle was a mistake?

As I said, we want to end feudalism and we want an inclusive democracy so that all the marginalised, suppressed and discriminated classes and groups are represented so they can participate in governance.

How do you aim to get there, through federalism?

We have suppressed classes, gender, ethnic and regional groups. We need to grant them autonomy and set up a united federal Nepal. We need to include all their needs, their cultures, their languages by giving them a say in the new constitution. The development of Nepal means the development of the janajatis. If they don’t have a say in the state power they’ll never have development. We have a dream of making Nepal into the Switzerland of Asia.
Finance Ministry Secretary Bhoj Raj Ghimire in
Deshantar, 4 June

Deshantar: What are the main challenges for the
economy at present?
Bhoj Raj Ghimire: The biggest challenge is
maintaining financial stability. The second
challenge is to increase investment and to use it to
benefit the poor. We also need to create
opportunities for employment and income
generation.

How are the government’s financial plans
progressing?
We are nearing the end of the financial year so it's
not possible to make big changes. We are now
working on cutting unproductive expenses and
investing the savings in future development
activities. The coming year's budget is being
prepared. The white paper addressing the
country's economic problems and the
government's future economic programs has
already been issued. Priority will be given to rural
areas and making various services more
accessible to the people. The government will
focus on meeting the people's needs and
promoting their participation in development
activities such as building roads. These activities
will not only increase facilities but also help
people earn an income.

Previous governments also talked of pro-poor
budgets but failed to raise living standards.
Most reforms since 1990 have focused on
changing the economy's structure by increasing
private investment and adopting an open market
policy. However, the expectation that commerce
and trade in urban areas would spread to rural
regions did not happen. Only the urban areas
developed, excluding a large chunk of the country
This is also a warning against
the Maoists. They shouldn't be
hurt religious sentiments of the
people by slaughtering cows,
demolishing temples setting fire
to Sanskrit University. In fact, by
being involved in the murder of
Hindu social reformer Narnyan
Prasad Pokhrel, the Maoists have
actually allied themselves with
the Hindu fundamentalists. By
not carrying out self-criticism,
the Maoists are helping the anti-
secular forces in this country.
The government must
immediately prohibit
organisations that spread
religious hatred. It must invest
in education that emphasises
tolerance and secularism so
future generations of Nepalis
will grow up with that culture.
It's time to put secularism into
practice.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad
Koirala had held up the passing
of Parliamentary Rules 2063, so
the house debated it while he was
in New Delhi. Koirala had wanted
the prime minister to be the
caretaker in the event of the death
or incapacitation of the monarch,
while others wanted the speaker
of the house to have the
authority. Parliament seems to be
in a tearing hurry to decide on
royal succession, while Koirala
had been delaying it. The rival
proposal is for a 17-member interim committees lead by the
speaker to be caretaker if the king
dies. The state affairs committee of parliament had felt that the
prime minister’s head of
government shouldn't be the
caretaker.

Interestingly, if the king dies
while parliament is not in
session and succession has to be
decided, there is a provision to
reconvene parliament for the sole
purpose of choosing a new
monarch. Under Rule 206 of the
draft rules of parliament, a king
can also be deposed if one-
fourth of parliament signs an
affidavit declaring him of
unsound mind. Such a
declaration will be passed on to
the cabinet for decision. The rules
also allow parliamentary
decisions and resolutions by the
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without the formality of a royal
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People’s budget
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GROUP A
- Germany vs. Costa Rica: 9:45 PM | 9 June
- Poland vs. Ecuador: 12:45 AM | 10 June
- Germany vs. Poland: 12:45 AM | 15 June
- Ecuador vs. Costa Rica: 6:45 PM | 15 June
- Ecuador vs. Germany: 7:45 PM | 20 June
- Costa Rica vs. Poland: 7:45 PM | 20 June

GROUP B
- England vs. Paraguay: 6:45 PM | 10 June
- Trinidad & Tobago vs. Sweden: 9:45 PM | 10 June
- England vs. Trinidad & Tobago: 9:45 PM | 15 June
- Sweden vs. Paraguay: 12:45 AM | 16 June
- Sweden vs. England: 12:45 AM | 21 June
- Paraguay vs. Trinidad & Tobago: 12:45 AM | 21 June

GROUP C
- Argentina vs. Ivory Coast: 12:45 AM | 11 June
- Serbia & Montenegro vs. Netherlands: 6:45 PM | 11 June
- Argentina vs. Serbia & Montenegro: 6:45 PM | 16 June
- Netherlands vs. Ivory Coast: 9:45 PM | 16 June
- Netherlands vs. Argentina: 12:45 AM | 22 June
- Ivory Coast vs. Serbia & Montenegro: 12:45 AM | 22 June

GROUP D
- Mexico vs. Iran: 9:45 PM | 11 June
- Angola vs. Portugal: 12:45 AM | 12 June
- Angola vs. Mexico: 12:45 AM | 17 June
- Portugal vs. Iran: 6:45 PM | 17 June
- Portugal vs. Mexico: 7:45 PM | 21 June
- Iran vs. Angola: 7:45 PM | 21 June

Round of 16

MATCH 1
- Winner A vs. Runner Up B: 8:45 PM | 24 June

MATCH 2
- Winner C vs. Runner Up D: 12:45 AM | 25 June

MATCH 3
- Winner B vs. Runner Up A: 8:45 PM | 25 June

MATCH 4
- Winner D vs. Runner Up C: 12:45 AM | 26 June

Semifinals

MATCH A
- Winner Match 1 vs. Winner Match 2: 8:45 PM | 30 June

MATCH B
- Winner Match 5 vs. Winner Match 6: 12:45 AM | 1 July

Match 1
- Winner A vs. Winner B: 12:45 AM | 5 July

Third Place
- Loser 1 vs. Loser 2: 12:45 AM | 9 July
**Football World Cup**

**GROUP E**
- Italy vs Ghana: 12:45 AM | 13 June
- USA vs Czech Rep.: 9:45 PM | 12 June
- Czech Rep. vs Ghana: 9:45 PM | 17 June
- Czech Rep. vs Italy: 7:45 PM | 22 June
- Ghana vs USA: 7:45 PM | 22 June

**GROUP F**
- Brazil vs Croatia: 12:45 AM | 14 June
- Australia vs Japan: 6:45 PM | 12 June
- Japan vs Croatia: 6:45 PM | 18 June
- Japan vs Brazil: 12:45 PM | 23 June
- Croatia vs Australia: 12:45 PM | 23 June

**GROUP G**
- France vs Switzerland: 9:45 PM | 13 June
- South Korea vs Togo: 9:45 PM | 13 June
- France vs South Korea: 12:45 AM | 19 June
- Togo vs Switzerland: 9:45 PM | 19 June
- Togo vs France: 12:45 AM | 24 June
- Switzerland vs South Korea: 12:45 AM | 24 June

**GROUP H**
- Spain vs Ukraine: 6:45 PM | 14 June
- Tunisia vs Saudi Arabia: 9:45 PM | 14 June
- Tunisia vs Spain: 12:45 AM | 20 June
- Saudi Arabia vs Ukraine: 9:45 PM | 19 June
- Saudi Arabia vs Spain: 7:45 PM | 23 June
- Ukraine vs Tunisia: 7:45 PM | 23 June

**Quarterfinals**

**MATCH 5**
- Winner E vs Runner Up F: 8:45 PM | 26 June

**MATCH 6**
- Winner G vs Runner Up H: 12:45 AM | 27 June

**MATCH 7**
- Winner F vs Runner Up E: 8:45 PM | 27 June

**MATCH 8**
- Winner H vs Runner Up G: 12:45 AM | 28 June

**Finals**

**MATCH C**
- Winner Match 3 vs Winner Match 4: 8:45 PM | 1 July

**MATCH D**
- Winner Match 7 vs Winner Match 8: 12:45 AM | 2 July

**FINAL**
- Winner Match 1 vs Winner Match 2: 11:45 PM | 9 July

**Watch this World Cup on Samsung Television**
Sports Bar
The only sports bar and café in town, the Sports Bar in Kamaladi is for those who love the game like nothing else. It also offers the longest bar in town, a 109-inch screen with surround sound, unique cocktails, mocktails, exquisite cuisine, ice cream parlour and a small lounge area. This is the place to be if you’re looking for some real action. No cover charge until the quarterfinals.
4438017

Hotel Himalaya
Having transformed its lobby into a football arena complete with a stadium-like parapet for spectators, life size posters of soccer superstars and a giant 24.5-foot screen, Hotel Himalaya is already mentally in Germany. Special snacks have been added to the menu including Zin’s French Fries, Frank Frankfurters, Patrick Burger, Beck Ham & Cheese SW, Crespo’s Crispy spring roll, Pak Ji Momo and Carlos banana split. World Cup cocktails include Ruud Punch, Shevchenko Screwdriver, Gin Terry’s Tonic, Martini a la Totti, Ronaldo Samba Special, Rooney Matetural Sling and Thierry Thunderbolt. Cover charge is Rs 300 per person per evening and includes a free beer or large peg of whisky. Rs 150 for children (not the whiskey, the cover charge). A ‘Season’s ticket’ costs Rs 5,500 per person. Rooms are also available at a special price for spectators camping in. Sony Cybershot prize in competition.
5523900

Imago Dei
This newly opened café in the centre of town, across from the east gate of Narayanhiti Palace, has a relaxed friendly atmosphere, perfect if you want to watch the games with a like-minded crowd. You’ll be viewing the game on an Epson EMP-S3 1600 lumen projector with a 250-watt sound system. Like other venues, it is offering World Cup specials and special snacks.
to town

Cup cocktails as well as special snacks by Chef Alicia. There is no cover charge but Imago Dei seats only 50, so come early and stay late.

Club Himalaya
At 7,200 ft up in Nagarkot you’ll have all the clean air you need to scream your lungs out cheering for your team as you watch the games on an 18 ft projector screen and plasma tv at Restaurant Kantipur and Bar Indrawati. For Rs 1,500 a person you get a welcome drink, breakfast, dinner, shared accommodation and shuttle service. Challenge sheets, bets, gifts and gift hampers and happy hours are all included. 6680080

Le Meridien
If you really want to focus on the bouncing ball, where better than in the middle of the Gokarna forest? The serenity of the jungle in the monsoon will put you in a zone so you can concentrate, or keep calm if your team loses. With a sitting capacity of 50, Le Meridien’s Agni Bar has the only 42-inch Sony Bravia, a new high end LCD that will team up with a 42-inch Sony Wega projection tv and home theatre. Pay a cover charge of Rs 500 and you’ll get free unlimited munchies and one complimentary beer. Or stay overnight and enjoy a round of golf the next morning to cure your hangover. 4451212

Soaltee Crowne Plaza
The Rodi Bar is offering prizes galore for Cup watchers, including the grand prize of a round trip for two to New Delhi, with two nights’ stay at the Inter Continental Eros. The special package is priced at Rs 1,500 per person, sharing, and Rs 2,500 for singly occupancy (only for Nepali nationals, so no Brazilians allowed). It also includes a buffet breakfast and late checkout in case you want to dive into the hotel’s pool to cool off. 4273999

Maki Newa Bhuto Hotel Royal Singhi
Enjoy the Cup here with a combination of authentic Japanese and traditional Newari cuisine in the heart of the city. Games will be shown on a 60-inch Optima screen to a maximum 100 people. Also includes special discounts on food and beverages and no cover charge. 4439784

Le Meridien Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com

Want power?

Practice keeping your legs quiet

Stand on any driving range and you will witness an oddly recurring event: golfers moving their legs right to left, front to back and in all directions in between as they swing, in a bid to generate more power. Trust me, I have seen this phenomenon in all levels of golfers, from seasoned hackers right up to single handicappers.

Obviously we all want to hit the ball a few yards longer. But while trying to generate more power, most golfers because they lack proper technique, ‘sway’ their legs to put more punch into their swing. When you move your legs as you take your backswing, you lose your centre of gravity. The result—a loss of 30-70 yards on your drives! Even though you swing the clubs with your hands, the role that your legs play is equally vital.

When swinging correctly, you should be able to use your legs as pivots, right leg on the backswing and left leg on the downswing. As you turn your upper torso and hips, the legs should load up the power and keep the swing intact. Remember, you will only be able to generate power if your legs work as pivots.

So, how to keep your legs quiet?

Drill 1
- Kneel on the ground and take a practice swing. Feel the turn of your shoulders and hips. Get in tune with this sensation and build it into your real swings.

Drill 2
- Practice your swing standing with a pole two inches away from your right thigh and make sure that you don’t touch it during the backswing. This will help you to develop tremendous balance and generate more speed on the downswing. Do the similar exercise on the downswing and follow-through. This will help you maintain the correct body angle and suddenly you will find your ball flying straighter and longer down the line.

I have successfully refined my golf swing focusing heavily on these drills, as have a lot of my students. So don’t wait–visit the practice range to hit a few hundred balls keeping the above advice in mind and see the improvement!

Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Le Meridien Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. prodeepak@hotmail.com
Lese majeste in Thailand

As King Bhumibol celebrates 60 years on the throne, Thailand breaks the taboo on discussing royal matters

MARWAAN MACAN-MARKAR
in BANGKOK

A
ge has not softened the rebellious streak in Sulak Sivaraksa, nominated for the Nobel Peace prize for among other things airing controversial views about Thailand’s royal family and about the threat to individual freedom posed by strict lese majeste laws. He even fled the country once.

The May edition of Seeds of Peace, a journal the 73-year-old Buddhist scholar publishes, has once again put his views in the national spotlight for reproducing a controversial interview.

“The monarchy must be open to criticism, must go along with democracy, must not be sacred,” said Sulak at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Thailand (FCCT) in Bangkok last week. “I feel if the monarchy is to survive, we must be able to speak more of the truth.”

In Thailand expressing such comments publicly takes great courage because of strict lese majeste laws and the universal respect that King Bhumibol commands among the public. Thais and foreigners who violate the law face prison terms of up to 15 years.

Sulak has been charged twice under the law for making comments deemed to have hurt the king’s reputation. But the devout Buddhist still speaks critically of the monarchy and even published a popular book Loyalty Demands Dissent.

“People who are conservative royalists will think he is terrible,” said Sumallee Vinyadityai, member of a committee that drafted the Thai constitution in the 1970s. “He is unique. There are others who may think like him but they don’t speak out due to fear.”

Sumallee was himself charged in 1973 and had to apologise after being given a two-year suspended sentence.

The issue of lese majeste has gained increased prominence in the wake of the recent political crisis that pitched anti-government protesters against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s government. Sondhi Limthongkul, an outspoken media mogul who led demonstrators against Thaksin’s Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party, has recently been served with 37 lese majeste charges for comments he allegedly made at public protests.

Thai police have declined to file similar charges urged by Sondhi’s People’s Alliance for Democracy movement against Thaksin. Filing lese majeste charges in Thailand begins with a complaint lodged by any citizen to the police about an alleged act committed by word or deed by another that tarnishes the reputation of the monarchy.

The harsh penalties attached have had an effect on freedom of expression, often resulting in censored views in public discussions and independent media reportage on the palace.

As King Bhumibol celebrates 60 years on the throne, Thailand breaks the taboo on discussing royal matters

accountancy or creative writing?
Exactly one year ago this week, the Maoists detonated a roadside bomb in this isolated valley in Chitwan that killed 38 people. It was by far the worst terrorist attack perpetrated by the Maoists in the conflict and the scars of that tragedy are still so raw in this lush land that no Maoist has been allowed into this sliver of Nepali territory between Chitwan National Park and the Indian border.

Three of the dead were security personnel riding the bus but 72 civilians were wounded in the blast and many of them have been physically disabled for life. Villagers have said they won’t allow any rebels into the territory until the Maoists meet their nine-point demand for an apology, punishment for perpetrators and compensation.

Five Maoists did go to Kalyanpur last month to try to sort things out but they were roughed up, detained for three hours and let go only after they promised that they would relay the demands to the party leadership.

“We won’t allow the Maoists and their leaders even to step into our village unless they bring those responsible in front of us,” says Krishna Adhikari who used his crutches to hit out at the Maoists who visited the village to stick up posters of Prachanda.

Local Maoists like Jagatraj Adhikari quit the movement after the blast saying they didn’t want to be associated with a terrorist outfit.

The Shaligram Travels bus was crossing a dry river bed 70km south of Bharatpur at 8AM when a wire-guided explosive was detonated underneath it. The bomb was so powerful it literally lifted the bus metres into the air, killing many of the women and children inside. The men who had clambered to the top of the bus survived. Of the 12 soldiers who had hitched a ride, three were killed. (See: ‘Mass murder in Madi’, #251)

Locals say they want to talk face-to-face with Baburam and Prachanda and ask them for an explanation and apology. Narayan Prasad Subedi lost his father and tells us: “We want to know how killing 35 innocent bus passengers helped their cause.”
The greed to make more money strikes the trio Baburao, Shyam and Raju, who rise from rags to riches in Hera Pheri (2000). So as each one is looking for investment options, Raju come up with an option that promises to double the investment. The only catch is the minimum investment required, which is beyond what the trio saves in the last outing. Raju ropes in a couple of unconvincing investors, adds it with another interesting adventure to come up with the number. Now will the riches double or get them into trouble? … – See more at: www.jainepal.com

Nepali Weather: The monsoon's one week early but no one is complaining. This satellite picture on Thursday morning shows the moisture laden air from the Bay of Bengal creeping up the Himalaya from east to west and has reached Pokhara. The existing pressure patterns have formed in such a way that they ensure a robust monsoon with a good distribution of precipitation across the mountains and tarai, and from eastern to western Nepal. The pattern of the monsoon is: clear skies and rain by evenings that continue in heavy bursts into the night. The humidity levels have soared, that's why singing in the rain, yes, we forgive you for that. The monsoon's one week early but no one is complaining. This satellite picture on Thursday morning shows the moisture laden air from the Bay of Bengal creeping up the Himalaya from east to west and has reached Pokhara. The existing pressure patterns have formed in such a way that they ensure a robust monsoon with a good distribution of precipitation across the mountains and tarai, and from eastern to western Nepal.
SWINGING JERRY: Jazz outfit Stupa performed at the J-Bar on Wednesday evening as part of the Surya Classic Encounters, along with Caribbean Jerry, seen here belting out reggae numbers.

MOUNTAIN MEMORIES: Pakistani Ambassador to Nepal Sohail Amin poses next to the Dudh Koshi on the Namche-Lukla trek last week.

GREEN WITH BEAUTY: Miss Nepal Sugarika KC, conservation ambassador for WWF Nepal, speaks at New Padampur, Chitwan to mark World Environment Day on 5 June.

LUCKY BREAK: An electricity pole was the only serious casualty when this school bus left the downhill section of the road at Hatiban on Wednesday.

PRAGYA SHRESTHA

Bhim Kumari Biswokarma is 21 and came from Rolpa to work at a brick kiln in Palan five years ago. There are many like her from the war-torn midwest among the 63,000 seasonal workers in the Valley’s 150 brick kilns.

They earn just enough to support their families and Bhim Kumari used to have to work and look after her three-year-old daughter simultaneously. Now, some brick kiln owners have started child care centres so babies of their workers can play in a safe environment while their mothers work.

Some of these brick factory owners had recently converted to less-polluting technology with help from Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and they were open to the suggestion that they also open creches.

“We convinced the entrepreneurs about the importance of corporate social responsibility and both parties benefitted. It is a win-win situation,” says Usha Manandhar of SDC.

The cost of the child care centres is borne by the owners and workers. Each worker contributes Rs 5 per day per child and the brick company provides child caretakers and the building.

Mangal Maharjan, manager of the Satyanarayan brick kiln in Imadol, has calculated that with his Rs 160,000 upfront investment he has 60 percent more productivity when the children are in daycare. Maharjan is now proud to present himself as a socially responsible entrepreneur and is happy that he and his employees benefit when children are better taken care of.

Others like Maharjan now want to start schools when the children grow up.

It is no coincidence that the brick kilns where management was most concerned about emissions and converted to less-polluting technology are also the ones that have invested in child care centres. There are an estimated 10,000 children aged below 10 at the brick kilns in the Valley. “The challenge now is to expand the program to the other brick factories,” says Manandhar.

The kilns bake Rs 2.5 billion worth of bricks to meet the demand of Nepal’s burgeoning construction industry. Says Bhim Kumari: “It is hard back-breaking work but at least now I don’t have to worry about my daughter injuring herself while I’m busy.”

Pragya Shrestha
Getting along like a House on fire

At the rate our all-powerful parliament is transmogrifying Nepal’s socio-political landscape, it is only a question of time before it declares Nepal a superstition-free zone, re-legalizes marijuana and legislates in favour of same sex marriage.

This is the beauty of living in a restored democracy, parliament can make any proclamation it wants as long as it doesn’t have to actually implement it in practice. So, as we make this dramatic transition from the Tantrik Kingdom of Nepal to a Loktantrik Republic, we good citizens can sit back and let the good times roll. Drinks are on the House.

But while fully applauding the audacious decisions undertaken by the august house lately, we do have some creeping doubts about whether the honourable members aren’t slacking off a bit. They seem to be resting on their laurels, basking in reflected glory and refusing to bring the House down.

It took off ‘His Majesty’ and ‘Royal’ from signboards and government stationery, but left it at that. We will not be satisfied with such token gestures, there are still lots of vestiges of the old regime that have to be abolished.

It has been brought to my attention that Kathmandu’s casinos still serve decks of cards at the roulette that have kings, queens and a joker. These should immediately be replaced by royal-free packs.

There are still some bee hives at the Proletarian Botanical Gardens in Godavari that have vestiges of a feudal governance structure and are ruled by queen bees. The Comrade Drones need to declare themselves republican hives forthwith. And expeditions desirous of climbing Mt Everest will no longer have to pay $65,000 ‘royalty’, hereinafter the fee will be a ‘voluntary donation’.

And we take strong umbrage over the fact that the prime minister’s official entourage to New Delhi did not include any representatives from the All-Nepal Federation of Martial Arts Societies (R), the Bar, FNJ and Association of Gobar Gas User Groups. How can we call ourselves an inclusive people’s democracy if the marginalised are left out? But we’d like to give credit where it’s due: it’s a good thing a country that owes Rs 3 billion to Indian Oil Corporation included in its delegation prominent wilful defaulters. They could teach us a few tricks of the trade.

And when is parliament going to get around to changing our flag so it is more inclusive? It’s a sacrilege that the banner of the old regime yet waves. Time we moved from double triangle to multi-triangle.

How come we’re still using the HMG coat of arms in government stationery, let’s immediately start using this new one:

How long do we have to wait for bank notes to represent the new symbols of a people’s republic?