rachanda appears as Pushpa Kamal Dahal the politician in a lengthy tv interview. Girija Prasad Koirala says we need a ceremonial king. The UML central committee lays down the party line for a democratic republic.

If all this sounds like an election campaign, that is exactly what it is. The first salvos were fired this week in the battle for constituent assembly elections to be held within a year. Political forces, including the Maoists, are now jostling for space in an election that looks set to be a referendum on the monarchy.

Parliament’s radical moves last month to defang the monarchy had begun to worry the Maoists who suddenly saw themselves sidelined. They insisted on dissolution of the house and speeding up the peace process. The Maoists can’t afford to keep their fighters mobilised indefinitely and need to finalise an entry into multiparty politics.

Home Minister Krishna Sitaula understands why the comrades are in a hurry (See interview, p 6) so he responded this week by scrapping TADO, setting Maoist detainees free and suspending parliament. We don’t know what the government got in return but it looks like a compromise on an interim constitution.

The negotiating teams met formally Thursday for a second round to iron out details for a planned summit between Dahal and Koirala before the prime minister leaves Saturday for his postponed checkup in Bangkok. The two will agree on a sequence of events in the coming weeks:

- Interim constitution
  The Maoists want an interim constitution scrapping the 1990 statute and ending the revived house, which some of the seven parties oppose.
- Interim government
  Maoists will be offered cabinet posts, including deputy prime ministership. But the government, parties and the international community will insist they first renounce violence and agree on a timetable for decommissioning arms.
- Constituent assembly
  An eight-party interim government will decide on dates for an election to a constituent assembly set by November latest by April 2007.

The road ahead is fraught with dangers because of entrenched positions and potential for derailment. The Maoists are having doubts about an ethnic based autonomous federal structure because it would open a can of worms. The issue of Nepali citizenship for over three million people in the tarai is already a political hot potato.

And how is the interim constitution going to tackle the monarchy? Who is currently Nepal’s head of state? That question is perhaps answered by the new South Korean and Thai ambassadors belatedly presenting credentials at the palace on Friday to King Gyanendra. It will be interesting to see if caretaker foreign minister and deputy prime minister Amik Sherchan will be present at the event.

KUNDA DIXIT
Diplomacy for dummies

With such a poor talent pool it will be difficult to find a new breed of ambassadors.

E
stablished in 1947, Nepal Council of World Affairs is perhaps the oldest foreign policy institute in the region. The Council consists of a highly prescriptive individuals with decisive influence in foreign policy. Subarna Shansher, Suya Prasad Upadhyay and Sambhu Guragain are the leading foreign policy thinkers. The Nepal Council will address the Council’s website.

STATE OF THE STATE

C L K

In its address, the council must now consider every head of state and government visiting Nepal. Shital Nibas is analysing nepal’s indigenous groups to be important in addressing the Council’s website.

The Nepali media has earned well-deserved praise for protecting and upholding democracy and its freedom during direct royal reign since 2002. The Nepali media has been able to attempt to satisfy its message and confusion of some colleagues with authoritative forces, the media will withstand pressure from the left and right. Nepali newspapers, magazines, radio, television and even blogs defied controls, courageously defending freedom of expression not just for themselves, but to defend the rights of citizens to information. It is doing this, even though in 1990 to enhance professionalism in print, production values on tv and the spread of community radio. Indeed, Nepal’s progressive legislation to democratise the FM band is far beyond realising that the envy of broadcasters in the region.

Which is why we have to use the triumph of people power to now again allow the misuse of government media for shameless propaganda. It is not just the royal regime that is guilty of this: successive democratic governments in the 1990s treated NTV, Radio Nepal and Gorkhapatra as party mouthpieces. State ownership of media doesn’t mean state control. It is anarchistic in a democracy for elected governments to own and operate a propaganda arm. The boards of these organs must now be made autonomous and brought under purview of parliament, not the government of the day. The freedom and independence expected by state media under the current interregnum must be institutionalised, otherwise they will once more return to who politicians know no better.

Nowhere is this independence and credibility more critical than in Radio Nepal, the medium with the widest reach. The pro-democracy warriors who were propelled to power by the April Uprising must make sure democracy in future will be best defended by participation of all citizens, and there is no participation without communication. Free radio will empower people with information, and foster communication as a tool for social change and development.

Unshackling state media will must hand in hand with building on the success of community radio by streamlining the application and registration process and reducing the fees of non-profit grassroots FM stations.

As for the rest of it, it is time for introspection. Somewhere along the line we have somehow lost the line between activism and journalism professionalism. Are we not repeating the mistakes of the 1990s when we encouraged a flawed deracinated media (one that unnecessarily spread cynicism about politicians and tarnished democracy itself?). We need to be alert: the danger of politics is not just a quill that makes headlines. It is about ensuring accountability and transparency, it means putting the urgent task of raising living standards of all citizens.

W
ill the high-minded notion of ‘permanent opposition’ and the seven parties and civil society only lead us to fools’ gold? What about ‘total democracy’ and ‘unconditional constituent assembly’? Are these ideals to motivate us, or dangerous delusions that might make us motivated or dangerous

GUEST COLUMN

Pravin Rana

delusions that might make us more vulnerable to those malicious intent like the Maoists.

In the euphoria of Jana-andolan II, of course, the ‘people’ are being saluted internationally and civil society activists are putting themselves on the back, questioning these notions borders on heresy. War journalist Robert Fisk cautions against this, 20 December 2005) [www.thesundaytimes.co.uk]

F
or the last eight years and adds that a...
UNSECULAR
I disagree with your editorial! 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 régime (‘Theocracy to democracy’, #300). The 1990 constitution simply took over the religious fanaticism imposed by King Mahendra when he declared Nepal a Hindu state in 1960. From 1962 many Nepali Christian leaders found themselves in prison for no other reason than their faith in Jesus Christ. One in Ohaldunga succumbed to police torture, and is the first known Nepali Christian martyr. When Nepal became democratic in 1990 two British MPs, David Alton and David Atkinson agreed with KP Bhattarai’s interim government for the release of 60 Christians behind bars. One elderly pastor in Dharan has been in and out of jail 14 times. Although such imprisonment ceased after 1990, no Christian organisation has succeeded in getting legal registration as an NGO without declaring terms like ‘Christian’ or ‘Bible’ from application forms or guidelines. Churches never even had the option.

After the historic 18 May declaration of Nepal as a secular state, Nepal Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains feel they too are now first class citizens of their own country. Before, advocates of other religions too had very little to make use of Hindu means for progress, as the anthropologist Prayag Raj Sharma so aptly states. This could not have happened without your editorial opinion the executive, legislature, and the judiciary promised Hindukush with state mechanism and finance.

Ramesh Khatry, Arubari

It is absolutely outrageous to see the kind of publicity the Maoists are getting in the local media. Each Prachanda statement is greeted by the leading Nepali media houses with front page space accompanied by his picture leading. The Maoists have nowhere to recuperate. The situation could change if the will, determination and interest for one’s community were present in all. Basic kernels cost little, and they don’t take up much room. Once released onto the streets all these animals need is a good meal a day and the occasional strike. They will respond to this with total loyalty and devotion.

The terrible cruelty we have witnessed towards dogs such as poisoning, kicking, beating with sledgehammer, brick throwing and even setting dogs alight is not only cruel and cowardly but offers no solution at all. How much better it would be to proactive, intelligent to work out kind solution together and to be responsible—rather than to inflict suffering to pretend that it is somebody else’s problem. Every individual on this earth has the power to do something however small to change things for the better and not just for themselves. Why not try?

Helen Palmer, Kathmandu

I agree Kunda Dixit (‘Getting along like a house on fire’, #301). The transformations parliament is making in the name of political decisions are both good and bad. Many would be good if they would be implemented. Others are just plain absurd. One wonders if the government is just making radical proclamations just to be radical, and if so that is there are a lot of logos to be changed. Now that we’re secular how about changing NT’s logo as well?

S Anwasi, 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 name and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be sent in text format with a cover note stating ‘letter to the editor’ in the subject line.

Email: letters@nepaltimes.com
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Mail: Letters, Nepal Times, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Cash and brain drain
Nepali students pack up their dreams, and dollars, to study abroad

MALLIKA ARYAL and ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

It's been over a year since Abhishek Thapa, 24, finished his BA in Arts in political science from Calcutta. Abhishek now plans to get a postgraduate degree from Australia.

"It is not just the education. Foreign cultures and their ways of life are something I've long wanted to explore," he says, "my first choice was the US but the application and immigration procedures were much more complicated."

Instability at home, lack of job opportunities, an uncertain future and dreams of a better life are driving more Nepali students to North America, Europe, Southeast Asia and even Cyprus. Although the US remains popular, complex admission procedures, standardised tests and the huge cost of getting a US degree are driving more and more Nepali students to opt for other countries.

A prospective student could always deal with a university directly but not knowing where and how to start draws them to the 300 or so consulting firms in the capital with names like Interface, Unisearch, Universal, Orbit and PAC Asia Services.

"Students who wish to go abroad for further studies get a reality check when they start applying for a visa. Our job is simply to make the process easier by helping them choose a university, advising them on the necessary documents and forwarding them to the visa consular section," says Subash Gauchan of PAC Asia which says it sends 200 students a year to Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the Philippines.

Most students pay their own way, at least for the first year, sometimes as much as Rs 1 million that includes tuition, exam charges and living expenses. While there are more scholarships and loans available in US schools other countries let students earn by working part-time. The 20 hours per week permitted in Australia is an incentive for many like Abhishek to go down under. "My parents will be sponsoring the first two semesters and then I am on my own," he says with a hint of hope. In Australia the minimum hourly wage is AUS $16, while Canada offers 15 working hours for a minimum CDN $ 11 an hour.

This is a relief to parents and also reduces the amount of money that goes out of the country year to pay for Nepalis studying abroad. "I understand the concern that money is going out of the country but the majority of them finish their education, get jobs and send money back which is much more than their initial expenses," says Uddab Khadka of Mentor Institute, which places students in Singapore, Ireland and Denmark.

Universal’s Uttam Panta is a little more sceptical. "It may be true that those who do well academically repatriate sizeable sums," he says, "but most others don’t remit much." At least one expert believes that the trend of Nepalis venturing abroad to study will not stop soon. "You cannot blame students or their parents for being sceptical about the quality of education in Nepal," says Dilli Ram Dahal, professor of sociology and anthropology at Tribhuvan University.

Dahal adds that the real issue is creating opportunities for Nepalis studying abroad to apply their skills back at home. He says: "If their skills are not being used in Nepal, we have to admit that we have been a total failure."

There is no way currently to keep count of exactly how many Nepalis are studying abroad. The Ministry of Education estimates that up to 12,000 go abroad annually, excluding to India. About 40 students come to the ministry every day for recommendation letters for visas. According to the Institute of International Education, a US-based organisation that monitors international students, 4,861 Nepalis were studying in US universities and colleges in 2004-2005. International students deliver $13.3 billion to the US every year. Our estimates show that, India aside, Nepali students take out Rs 10 billion a year out of the country in hard currency to pay for their studies.

EAGER TO FLY: Students seek academic counselling at an education centre in Kathmandu.

Rs 10 billion a year

HEAD OVER HEELS: World Cup action at Saolte Crowne Plaza.
Dealing with disputes

Nepalis aren’t quarrelsome by nature, but we lack institutions to resolve them

Since democracy allows people to have differences without having to kill one another, quarrels are bound to happen. As such, we should welcome them as openings to air differences. But once they are aired, we need to have institutions in place to deal with them. One solution is to develop alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as arbitration and give such processes a legal authority to address quarrels.

One result of all this is that we will have fewer quarrels. That’s in case of disputes, we will know what to do to resolve them speedily, inexpensively and with respect for our social, cultural and legal norms. After all, it’s in the interest of our larger democracy to see all sorts of quarrels as problems in search of solutions, if only we are creative and persistent enough.

Democracy and disputes

Dealing with disputes

The Canadian Embassy in Delhi offers these tips for students planning to study in Canada. Some could be followed for other countries as well:

- Verify if the university or college is a member of one of these two recognised bodies: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), www.aucc.ca
- Use the Government of Canada website: www.livelsandalucoed.gc.ca
- Apply to the college/university directly whenever possible
- Speak to Canadian colleges/universities that recruit directly at education fairs or at home
- Use the services of recognised Canadian recruiting agents, such as the University of Windsor representative in Delhi.

Another way to get into the act is to verify if the college or university is a member of the Canadian College of Business & Travel (CCBC) or the Canadian College of Business & Technology (CCBT). Both these bodies have accreditation bodies: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), www.aucc.ca

Another two years so that all those with claims have a chance to apply. Finally, to get a portion or all of their deposits back, students would have to obtain a judgment from an Ontario small claims court.

Last month, the Star reported that CCBC owes 60 students at least $227,000. Former Canadian Ambassador in Delhi, Lucie Edwards, told us in a recent interview she was worried that so many students who want to study in Canada pay agents to complete their paperwork when they could do it themselves. But in the CCBC case, the Star said it was a blessing that it acted quickly.

Anecdotes suggest that we have much to learn about our societies: when it comes to resolving our inevitable disputes, we don’t make sense. NIDC exists, presumably, to help companies do not make sense. NIDC exists, presumably, to help companies

From 1999 to 2003, more than 500,000 cases were filed in the Supreme Court, appeals to the High Court, and district courts. By types, almost 300,000 were about just three issues: land, family and business disputes. Given the constraints of time and resources, it’s safe to predict that the courts will never address the majority of cases, and even in cases where courts render decisions (as in NIDC vs. Yak & Yeti) many of these remain unresolved. Disputing parties continue to engage in fights instead of accepting decisions, cutting losses and moving to solutions.

It’s that in case of disputes, we will know what to do to resolve them speedily, inexpensively and with respect for our social, cultural and legal norms. After all, it’s in the interest of our larger democracy to see all sorts of quarrels as problems in search of solutions, if only we are creative and persistent enough.

MARTYN LOGAN

Study the risks

Nepali students among dozens who were duped by a Canadian college

MARTYN LOGAN

A sheh Khanal has a cheque for $4,000 that he can’t cash but he has lost his money, he has also lost almost all hope of ever studying abroad.

The Chitwan native wired the money to the Canadian College of Business & Technology in Toronto in May 2005 which confirmed his admission in its email. But the Canadian Embassy in Delhi rejected his application for a study visa and when after some months CCBC sent him a partial refund cheque dated 16 December his bank here told him there was no money in the account. Khanal has since made numerous trips to the bank each time to find the account dried up.

“Recently they sent five or six cheques (to various students) they have all bounced,” he says with a worried look. Six trips to the bank-each time to find the account dried up.

That information, at least, seems to kill one another, quarrels are bound to happen. As such, we should welcome them as openings to air differences. But once they are aired, we need to have institutions in place to deal with them. One solution is to develop alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as arbitration and give such processes a legal authority to address quarrels.

The prizes are part of New Era’s Customer Focus Year 2006 project, Concern were recently honoured with ‘Excellence in Customer Service’ awards from The New Era Career Development Institute. The prizes are part of The New Era’s Career Development Institute. For the last several months, the Nepal Industrial Development Corporation (NIDC) and Yak & Yeti Hotel have been at loggerheads over the use of the land.

NIDC was in February 2006 project, which aims to help the 110 participating organisations identify drawbacks to providing customer service, project a more positive image and maintain long-term customer relations.

Crickets owned

Surya Nepal. John Player facilitated the Nepali winners of the ACC under-15 cricket championship by presenting the team with Rs 100,000 at a function on Saturday. The champions beat UAE in the finals in Kuala Lumpur.

Gift of life

Everest Bank organised a blood donor camp on Wednesday to coincide with World Blood Donation Day. Stressing the need for more blood voluntarily, the bank gathered about 100 donors.

Taste of products

FUEL EFFICIENT: The Indica V2 Xeta Petrol is the latest offering from Tata Motors. Distributor Sipradi Trading says the Xeta delivers fuel efficiency of 14 km per litre and is available in five colours. The Xeta is priced from Rs 945,000 to Rs 1,246,000.

NEW PRODUCTS

The college sent MMC a certificate of pre-employment opportunities. Any student eager for Canadian credentials returned now.”

Kamalpokhari. MMC owner Prasad Rai answering an ad placed in a local paper by six or seven cheques (to various students) they have all bounced,” he says with a worried look. Six trips to the bank-each time to find the account dried up.

CCBC had appealed the suspension of its registration after a letter signed by the ministry that said it was incorrect. In May, Khanal (pictured) received a letter signed by the ministry that said it was incorrect. In May, Khanal (pictured) received an email. In an April 2006 email, Kannuthurai wrote to one of the cheated Nepali students: “All of the students are complaining to me,” says Rai sitting behind his desk in the small MMC office where prospective overseas students and workers sit on couches waiting to discuss their plans with him. “They want 75 percent of their deposits returned now.”

It appears that CCBC did operate as a college after it was founded by Shelan Kannuthurai in 1995 but it’s difficult to know if it was a legitimate business as it hit hard times or was set up to swindle overseas students eager for Canadian credentials and a chance to get established in North America. Almost all its students were from South Asia, Africa or Iran, according to the Toronto Star newspaper. In an April 2006 email, Kannuthurai wrote to one of the cheated Nepali students: “We require confirmation until the end of April. In the event you are unable to accept our request we recommend that you contact the ministry directly to request a refund under the security bond that CCBC deposited. Please note that this process will take at least 2-3 years to complete.”

That information, at least, seems correct. In May, Khanal (pictured) received a letter signed by the ministry that said CCBC had appealed the suspension of its registration. That means the ministry will first have to hear the appeal and then decide if the college’s bond should be forfeited. If it decides yes, it may delay another two years so that all those with claims have a chance to apply. Finally, to get a portion or all of their deposits back, students would have to obtain a judgment from an Ontario small claims court.

Yeti Hotel have been at loggerheads over the use of the land.

The municipality lacks representation from this sector and is absolutely unable to build effective and efficient rules, regulations and mechanism for online media.

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Strictly business

Ashtosh Tiwari

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Home Minister Krishna P Sitaula in HIMAL KHABARPATRIKA, 14 June

HIMAL: When will the talks resume? Krishna P Sitaula: Informally, it is already happening. We want to hold formal talks between the prime minister and Chairman Prachanda by Thursday or Friday.

What will be the main points on the agenda? The constituent assembly will be the main point. There will also be discussions about modalities to go about it. Crucial issues include arms management, fixing dates for an interim government and constituent assembly elections. It will be the first time top leaders will sit for formal talks and it will send the message at both national and international levels about commitments from both Maoists and us about institutionalising loktantra. We will definitely reach a decision once Girija babu and Prachanda sit face to face.

What about constituent assembly? By October this year at the earliest or April 2007 at the latest.

What did Prachanda tell you in Siklis during your meeting? The chairman said that we should move as per the 12-point understanding and that there has been a delay in going for constituent assembly despite mutual consent. He also felt parliament should have consulted his party while making decisions. It is natural for him to say those things and the meeting removed such confusions. We will ensure that both the armies are monitored by a reliable organisation.

So, when will the interim government that includes the Maoists be formed? We are preparing for July or August.

How about the army and police? As per the 12-point understanding, the army will be confined to the barracks. Police will have to work towards peace and security.

The Maoists say they will still mobilise their militia. They will work as activists, this is not a big concern. The main problem is managing the Maoist army and disarming them. This is a very sensitive and significant issue. We will ensure that both the armies are monitored by a reliable organisation.

In that case, there will be two armies under the Maoists when they join the interim government? No, there is no need to fear that because the Maoists will join the government only after demobilising their own army. The important thing is that the army should not go out during assembly elections. The Maoists are saying that they will keep their army in demarcated zones. True, and we have to see about that. There are various modalities for that as well.

Do you trust the Maoists when they say they will not take up arms no matter what the results of the assembly elections? We have that firm belief that the Maoists will not take up arms.

This means the problem can be solved? I am very optimistic. We reached the 12-point agreement even at a time when the political antagonism between us was intense. The problems in the present situation are just relatively minor. But we have to be cautious about some forces trying to jeopardise our efforts.

Then, why the delay for the constituent assembly? We can no longer afford to plague our country with indecisiveness, suspicion and fear. The Maoists should not be suspected anymore and they should also not suspect us. We were the ones who put a price on their heads and declared state of emergency in protest. They are also the same Maoists who had killed many of our cadres and rendered many of us homeless. But both have corrected their mistakes by reaching the 12-point agreement. We have to put our past behind us.

Bhairabnath
June 14th, 2006

Colonel Raja Basnet of the Nepal Army who has been accused of sexual abuse and the brutal murder of 49 suspected Maoists at the Bhairabnath Battalion was suddenly arrested on Tuesday. Basnet is accused of deducting 49 Maoists, killing and burying them in the Shivapuri jungles last year. An ad hoc board of inquiry under Brigadier Shankar Dev Prasad of the Army Staff College had recommended his arrest and detention. Sources said Basnet was transferred from the Midwestern Division to Kathmandu for his prosecution for being involved in the actual slayings.

The colonel is said to have been seeking revenge after Maoists killed his brother Colonel Kiran Basnet at his home. The UN’s Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights had issued a report on the Bhairabnath massacre last week which increased pressure on the army to bring the guilty to book. Colonel Basnet is under ‘line arrest’ but no legal proceedings have been started.

Also implicated in the disappearances of the 49 is the former commanding officer of the No. 10 Battalion, Toran Bhadur Singh currently posted at the royal palace. Meanwhile, the US government has blacklisted members of the Bhairabnath Battalion from taking part in military training. Three members of the Battalion who were supposed to leave on training have had their visits cancelled and members of the battalion already in the US are expected to be recalled. Besides the immediate cuffs on captains and majors from the battalion, the US decision is expected to have far-reaching impact on non-guilty officers as well. That is why there is now a backlash in the army not against the black-listing, but against colleagues who violated human rights and brought the US reaction. This has intensified calls for punishment of the guilty from within the ranks.

Decommissioning
Dhulikhel, 13 June

The Maoists, who have refused to lay down arms until the constituent assembly elections are held, have now put forward three new proposals for decommissioning. According to sources, the proposals include: storing weapons and troops in a designated area, locate Maoist weapons and warriors in a temporary barracks, or store weapons and use fighters in political work. The rebels would like the UN to oversee decommissioning and demobilisation in all three of these options and the seven parties and government are said to have agreed with the proposals. The proposals come after the prime minister’s recent visit to India during which India is said to have agreed to a future UN role in monitoring weapons decommissioning and demobilisation of the Maoists preceding a constituent assembly election in Nepal. Other than this, the

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Look here, PM, I’m committed. I’m not hiding anywhere or leaving the country. I’m staying here.”

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala to senior Indian politicians quoting what King Gyanendra told him at a meeting at the palace on 20 May.
the Maoists and the seven parties agree that there is no need for outside mediation in the peace negotiations.

The Maoists had felt a bit left out after parliament started passing far-reaching political resolutions on state restructuring and this had delayed peace talks. But this logjam has now been removed after Home Minister Krishna Sitaula’s meeting with Prachanda in Kaski after which the seven parties agreed to focus on peace negotiations and suspend parliament. The rebels have welcomed the suspension of parliament. The stand of the seven parties not to dissolve parliament is commendable because this would have created a vacuum.

Budget

Editorial in Abhiyan, 12-18 June

This is a government that gets its mandate from people power and has been varying out a revolutionary transformation in the state structure. That is why the forthcoming budget should also be revolutionary. Firstly, all government decisions and actions should be transparent, this is a value system that comes from democracy.

Second, the traditional priorities in the budget must be done away with. Priorities are set by learning from past mistakes and by scientific evaluation. The new budget can’t keep giving priorities to areas that have never benefited from the priority. For instance, the priority on agriculture has made little difference to production. The time has come to prioritise non-farm sectors for investment and employment creation as well as attract joint ventures into agriculture.

Third, there has to be a big leap forward in revenue policy. Nepal has notoriously low revenue collection and the reason for that is tax evasion and that, in turn, is caused by the high tax rate. The current revenue policy punishes those who produce more. This actually undermines poverty reduction by dampening wealth creation. A more progressive tax structure would help correct this. Elsewhere in the world a flat tax rate of 10-15 percent has been successful in reducing the tax evasion and higher revenue collection. This policy could be combined with a high ‘after-death tax’ which taxes property and assets that are transferred to those who inherit them. We must break the tradition that those who inherit property get it for free. In addition, revenue collection must be decentralized.

Fourth, government spending must be decentralized to the village and district level. The argument that local bodies can’t handle such decisions smacks of a colonial mentality. At a time when state structure is moving towards a federalist and inclusive democracy, we must decentralize and do it now.
COFFEE & TEA

Next time you have coffee in Starbucks, there’s a good chance the beans were grown in Nepal

Nealea tea may be making its mark in the world market, but coffee isn’t far behind. Unlike the British in Darjeeling or Ceylon, Nepal never had colonial companies planting tea or coffee. Legend has it that coffee plants were introduced to Nepal only in 1938 by a certain yogi named Hari Giri who was fond of the caffeinated beverage, and brought seeds from Burma to cultivate coffee for his own use. Commercial production, however, didn’t start till 1976 with the import of Arabica coffee from South India. Nepali coffee is grown commercially in a scattering of over 17 districts in the midhills from 800-1,600m where the soil and climatic conditions are favourable. Nepal is going for highland Arabica for the specialty coffee export niche market. Through private companies such as the Highland Coffee Promotion Company Ltd (HCPCL), Everest, Plantec, Gulmi Cooperative, Nepal coffee is now exporting processed green coffee beans for major coffee markets including the US, Japan and some European countries.

Last year, HCPCL shipped 23 tons of coffee to Holland Coffee in the United States which is a major supplier to the Starbucks chain. Production is still miniscule in proportion to the demand and Nepal’s total exports of coffee beans in 2005 were only 65 tons but this set to grow with new marketing efforts. Besides Gulmi in central Nepal, Kabhre is one of the major coffee-producing areas where Winrock International along with USAID and other partners are helping small farmers with market-led cash crops. Chandra Bhushan Subba is team leader of the Tea & Coffee Global Development Alliance-Smallholder Mobilization through Improved Governance with its unwieldy acronym, TCDA-SMIG. Subba and his colleague Ratna Bhuvan Shrestha recently brought back coffee seeds from Sumatra for planting in Kabhre. Winrock also got coffee experts from El Salvador with Tekisic, Pacas and Pacamara seeds which are now available in Nepal through government-subsidised and private nurseries. In contrast to monoculture tea gardens in India, coffee in Nepal is usually grown in combination with other crops, particularly under a canopy of fruit trees. Just outside Dhalalhet Chola Nath Timilsina grows coffee on his terrace farms where he earlier raised corn. He even roasts some of his own coffee beans and sells them by the highway alongside women offering tomatoes and plump cauliflowers. The winner 64-year-old farmer points out his coffee bushes set amidst guava, mango, macadamia nut seedlings. “I now earn about 15,000 rupees more a year from coffee,” says Timilsina who is among 12,000 household farms who have benefited from this market-based approach to cash crops. Winrock plans to expand the program to 6,000 households in the next two years so that in a decade 700,000 farmers across Nepal will benefit from tea and coffee production.

Says Winrock’s Luke Colavito: “This will provide strong examples of commercial markets benefiting poor small farmers, and helping Nepal in a period of crisis.”

Coffee farming is attractive to farmers because the beans fetch a good price and also because it can grow in combination with fruit trees and other crops. The other challenge is to convince domestic consumers to switch from imported refined instant coffee to Nepali-grown beans. In 2005, 34 tons of coffee (about one-third of the total production) was consumed within Nepal. This demand grows and falls with the number of tourist arrivals—indicating that it is mostly foreigners in Nepal who drink the stuff. However, all this may be changing as the Nepali taste for coffee gets more sophisticated and new cafes serving brewed coffee spring up in Kathmandu and other cities.

Since Helvetas has also been helping Nepal with training of Nepal coffee farmers, setting up demonstration farms, marketing campaigns in Europe and elsewhere, as well as training in processing of beans. Out experts say a lot more needs to be done to promote Nepal coffee. The ‘Nepal’ brand may not yet be very well known for coffee, but it is gaining recognition among connoisseurs for its organic content. In addition, Nepal could benefit from ‘Fair Trade’ and ‘Organic’ labels in Europe and the United States if consumers there know that the coffee they drink directly benefits farmers in the Himalayas and protects the environment.

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PESHAL POKHREL in DHANKUTA

Mount a crest in the carpeted green slopes of the Kanyam Tea Estate and you will be at ‘Shooting Hill’. It is so named because of the countless Nepali film song and dance sequences and music videos that have been shot here. When there is no one shooting, picnickers flock the area to romp and sing their favourite movie songs.

From up here at 5,500ft you can see the entire Ilam region, even Darjeeling and Kurseong across the border. The cool climate, emerald greenery and the songs of the tea pickers all blend to produce a particular Nepali tea culture, one that growers think is ripe for tourism.

“This is proof that even the gardens can pull people,” says Punya Dhakal, manager of Kanyam, one of the area’s largest growers of orthodox tea, and a fervent believer that tea tourism has a great future here.

Known for ginger, milk, jute, potato and its blistering hot chilli eastern Nepal’s Ilam, Panchthar, Dhankuta, Tehrathum and Sankhuwasabha has now added tea to its list of assets. Eighty percent of tea grown in Nepal today comes from Ilam. Most of the gardens are less than 15 years old and the leaves are hand-picked from young bushes that have two leaves and a bud, growing at 3,000–7,300ft.

All of this produces a unique blend for tasters and tourists alike. “Our tea is virginal, free of pesticide. The weather is very similar to Darjeeling and the culture of this region is equally unique.”

The geographically distinct eastern hills form the only hill region in Nepal whose weather is right for growing tea. And they are well situated for those who wish to escape the heat of the tarai. “We have seen a lot of potential for internal as well as international tourism promotion here as there is direct contact with nature and the warm hospitality within the gardens to add to it,” says Uday Chaugai, chairman of Himal Tea Producers Cooperative.

Tea growers here say tourists will not just enjoy themselves but also warm up to the art of producing tea—from picking, plucking and drying, through withering, rolling, fermenting, drying and sorting and finally to tea tasting, all the while learning about the lives and cultures of the growers and pickers.

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Women from western Nepal bring their equal pay for equal work struggle to the capital

M ANY female workers in both urban and rural areas have failed to get compensation after filing complaints in district courts. In Kailali, Bhandari had for many years approached the CDO, LDO, and other officials to raise the issue with the central government. They even went to trade unions and local party leaders but nobody paid much attention. A case filed by a female construction worker in Kailali two months ago is gathering dust in the CDO office.

“We are not asking that we should have every right as men but this is such gross discrimination,” says activist Bishnu Maya Pandel from Chitwan.

For the activists this is not merely an issue of daily wage labourers, but will open doors to address issues of female workers in every sector—construction, farming, factories, stone quarries, brick kilns, domestic work and others. “Male workers are now fully backing us in our struggle,” says Bhandari who has fought for equal pay for four years often battling apathy.

At a time when the parties and Maoists are preparing for summit talks and all sectors of society are discussing a constituent assembly, the women activists say this is the right time to raise their voices. In late May, parliament ended discrimination against women in granting citizenship and pledged to reserve 33 percent of civil service jobs for females.

Says activist Gehna Acharya from Kailali’s Women’s Advocacy Group: “We must strike when the iron is hot.”

Fighting bloodsuckers in clearing, Comrade Yoddha takes invasion of leeches. At the inch of the way against an 175-member platoon fought every and it was a pitched battle as the finally reach their rest stop at a

Leeches are the main enemy of Maoist guerrillas during the ceasefire

BELGIAN belt-ummo Minimi machine-gun, one of the few of this type they have captured from the army. The rest of the No 1 Battalion of the Parisharan Memorial Brigade are carrying vintage .303s but in the front row are Ma-60, INSAS and SLRs as they conduct a photo-op for the benefit of visiting journalists.

Yoddha is 25-years-old and is from Jumla. He has been with the Maoist army for three years, taking part in some well-known battles like the one in Taulihawa in April where 100 Maoist prisoners were freed. That is where he captured the Minimi, with which he poses proudly wearing the ammunition belt.

“At the moment we are carrying our weapons but not using them,” he says, “we are a political force that employs armed struggle as a means. We don’t want unnecessary bloodshed.”

Yoddha and his comrades are optimistic about the outcome of the peace talks and if it does succeed they all plan to visit Kathmandu where they have never been.

But even in peacetime, duty calls. It’s time for Yoddha to take his sentry shift in a lookout on a nearby corn field.

A fter walking uphill all day through a cloud forest, Nepal’s mountain guerrillas finally reach their rest stop at a clearing.

The trail is steep and slippery and it was a pitched battle as the finally reach their rest stop at a

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(three per cent) of the female population. Activists say their struggle is about a basic need of all Nepali women.

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he deep drone of Tibetan horns reverberated across the Bhote Kosi valley and Lukla’s mist-covered pine forests as the gateway to Khumbu marked the start of its annual Dumjee festival last week.

Monks clad in reds and yellows danced in harmony to the sound of cymbals and drums at Kemgon Monastery—proving to all present that Lukla is more than just a place where trekkers wait for their plane.

Indeed, even for locals Lukla is a transit stop. Most people only pass through Lukla on their way up the valley to Namche, Tengboche and Everest Base Camp. It is only when you’re stuck in Lukla for a few days because the clouds close the airport that you get to explore and discover that it is more than just a runway.

Lukla is the Sherpa festival to drive away evil spirits. Music, dance, food and drinks coupled with sacred rituals, traditional and hilarious dances herald the beginning of the festival. Things start slowly as families gather and when the Nepalese Sherpa flies in from Kathmandu to preside over the fiesta the tempo of performances and rituals accelerates to reach a crescendo of sounds and sights on the last day.

Dumjee is the celebration of the birth anniversary of Guru Rimpoche Padmasambav. Dawa Phuti Sherpa of the Lukla monastery says his message is to pray for peace and order in the world, and given Nepal’s own problems, the festival has added significance.

The festival also serves to reinforce clan bonds and friendship ties between highland communities. Some trekked from villages a day’s walk away and the better off chartered helicopters to get into Lukla in time for the prayers. Some Kathmandu-based ambassadors were also on hand to witness the festivities.

Dumjee festivals are also observed in other places in the Khumbu such as Khumjung, Namche, Thame and Phortse. But it is Lukla and the Solu region where Dumjee has more significance. “Unlike other parts of the region, we in Lukla observe the festival a month before other places,” says AG Sherpa, chairperson of the festival organising committee. Lukla’s Dumjee was last week and the rest of the Khumbu celebrates it next month.

There are solo and group dances in the monastery courtyard in the course of the five-day fiesta depicting different deities in varying moods. Led by head priest Nawang Lopsang, the monks also performed a hom to keep evil spirits away.

Finally, the Rimpoche blesses the crowd indicating that the festival is drawing to a close for this year, and hopefully the evil spirits have heeded the warning.
The geo-

PASCAL BONIFACE

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Is there a relationship between football and a spirit of nationalism and militarism?

During the Middle Ages, sports were regularly forbidden in England because they came at the expense of military training. After France’s defeat by Bismarck’s Germany in the Franco-Prussian War, Baron Pierre de Coubertin (who re-launched the Olympic Games a few decades later) recommended a renewed national emphasis on sport, which by this point was seen as a form of military preparation.

The French Open revealed these lessons for singles players

Have a major weapon like Rafael Nadal

What makes Nadal so tough is his ability to dictate the pace of a match with his forehand. He has great preparation and by that I mean early shoulder turn and little adjusting steps. He coils his shoulders and hips and uses his strong lower body to generate tremendous racket head speed. The ball explodes off his strings. His heavy topspin shots give him the ability to fire from all angles of the court to keep his challengers on the run. Nadal has also learnt to take the ball early with his forehand, which creates havoc for his rivals who are left with very little reaction time. Build a forehand like Nadal’s and you will have a go-to shot that will spearhead your offensive game.

Rely on patterns like Martina Hingis

Martina Hingis is regarded as the smartest strategist to have ever played the women’s game. The thing that jumps out watching her is how she deploys her inside-out forehand to attack her opponent’s weaker backhand as well as move them around the court. When the ball finally arrives on her backhand, she cracks a devastating down the line shot that is wide open every time. This is Martina’s signature pattern, which she uses successfully time and again, even under pressure. Establish such a pattern and you will be on automatic pilot when the big points are there for the taking.

Develop an all-court game like Amelie Mauresmo

One of the reasons Mauresmo finally broke through in a major at this year’s Australian Open was because of her belief in her all-court game. The women’s tour is largely one-dimensional, with most players simply smashing the ball from the baseline as hard as they can. But Amelie has that rare ability to serve and volley, come in off an approach shot, slice, loop or bang the ball off the backhand side or use the drop shot when she is in an offensive position. Avoid being predictable like Mauresmo and you are going to frustrate your challenger set after set.

Mix it up like Roger Federer

Roger has the ability to hit a bullet past his opponent as well as change pace and slow things down. He knows the importance of keeping his adversary off balance. Watch him use backspin to keep the ball low. And when his opponent starts feeling comfortable and in a groove in baseline rallies, he is quick to apply pressure by coming in on his serve and approach shots. Federer also does not hesitate to use the drop shot to lure his opponent into unfamiliar territory. Find such ways to break the rhythm of your foe and you will be off to a flying start every time.

GAME POINT

Sujay Lama

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After watching two gruelling weeks of action at the French Open, aren’t you ready to get going on the tennis courts? No surprise that Rafael Nadal and Justin Henin were crowned champions—they both have a great balance of offence and defence but what separated them from the pack at Roland Garros was their guts and heart. There was plenty of great tennis and for us tennis junkies a great deal to learn. Here are four singles strategies to glean from the stars.

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In a football match, the...
politics of football

Is this a game between countries or a form of war?

The rituals—the flag waving, the national anthems, the collective chants—and the language employed ‘shooting goals’, ‘launching missiles’ reinforce the perception of war by other means. And, in fact, real war has actually broken out over football. In 1969, Honduras and El Salvador clashed after a qualification game for the World Cup. Football matches can revive national rivalries and conjure the ghosts of past wars. During the 2004 Asia Nations Cup final, which pitted China against Japan, Chinese supporters wore 1930s-style Japanese military uniforms to express their hostility to the Japanese team. Other Chinese fans brandished placards with the number ‘300,000’ written on it, a reference to the number of Chinese murdered by the Japanese army in 1937.

But can one really say that football is responsible for the currently bad diplomatic relations between China and Japan? Of course not. Hostility on the football pitch merely reflects the existing tense relations between the two countries, which carry the weight of a painful history.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the dramatic semi-final between France and Germany in Seville in 1982 produced no political ripples, either for diplomatic relations between the two countries or for relations between the two peoples. Antagonism was confined to the stadium and ended when the match did.

Football can also be the occasion of positive gestures. The joint organisation of the 2002 World Cup by Japan and South Korea helped accelerate bilateral reconciliation. The performance of the South Korean players was especially praised in North Korea. Sport, indeed, seems to be the best barometer of relations between the divided Korean people.

In 1998, the Iran–United States football game in Seoul offered a moment of fraternisation between the two teams. Another Iran-US match might be helpful at this difficult time.

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As in real life, fans can be torn between their hopes for victory and their fear of defeat. But in football, the elimination of an adversary is always temporary. A return match is always possible. As a Frenchman, I cannot wait for the next World Cup match between France and Germany. But I want France to avenge its defeat at the last World Cup in Seville, not its defeat at Verdun.

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NARESH NEWAR

in NEW DELHI

A utotickshaw driver Ram Hari gaves into the rear-view mirror trying to size up his Nepali passenger. “Aap Maobadi shoppers to salesmen and housewives to journalists, the Maoists, the king and Jan another 20 minutes about Nepal, Hari adds and then chatters for hai?” he asks while motoring

Nepalis are starting to get respect in Delhi after ousting the king

It’s not just Ram Hari. From mirror trying to size up his

Delhites are keen to know what’s happening in the new Nepal. “I bet there are Maoists walking openly in the capital with guns. I heard it’s very risky to come as a tourist,” says a young reporter with

And judging from the many questions a visitor receives, Prime Minister Koirala’s entourage missed one big opportunity during its vaunted visit here last week: a tourism package. While

he asks a 30-year-old female youth worker.

I still don’t believe you. How come the Indian media is still not writing about tourists being safe and unharmed in your country?” asks another young bardly.

The Indian media too has gradually started to write positively about Nepal. Editorials in leading dailies have been reporting regularly on our peace efforts and urging the government to help their northern neighbour.

“That Mr. Koirala chose India as destination for Nepali sex workers, who often end up in one of several brothels on the motorised Gill Road. And almost every wealthy household

But this is a beginning of a new concept, including his veto on laws, Nepal is on the fast track to becoming a republic. Republican India should assist in reviving Nepal’s economy.

The Maoists move to the next stages of a challenging political transition. The Koirala government and the Maoists must move to the next stages of a challenging political transition. The Koirala government and

Maoists are starting to get respect in Delhi after ousting the king

Constitution of South Asia suffer abandonment. Amendments, non-completion and capitulation entail the people of Nepal reviewing

Beginning in the Times of India, which claims special privileges and autocratic power, and a people-based constitution. A new constitution needs to ensure that it is “We, the people, who give unto ourselves the new constitution”. The process of constitution making is arduous and complicated.

We are now in a changed situation for the people of Nepal have paid a tragic and traumatic price. The Maoist government and the king gave, not what the people needed.

A new constitution needs to ensure that it is “We, the people, who give unto ourselves the new constitution”. The process of constitution making is arduous and complicated. Compromises are inevitable as long as they are principled and do not undermine democracy and justice.

India may have to strike a delicate balance between its traditional opposition to intervention by extra-regional forces in Nepal’s affairs and the need to address the practical issues they face. But the abolition of the king in parliament concept, which was rejected by the people of Nepal on the last track to becoming a republic, is not a new concept.

The promise that it will not try to intervene in Nepal’s internal affairs.

The Maoists have long held few problems in deciding on its response to Kathmandu’s requests for financial assistance. It needs now, more than ever, to display sensitivity and a sure touch in the relation.

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In announcing the Rs 1,000-crore package to enable Nepal to overcome its pressing economic problems, New Delhi has shown a deep appreciation of the neighbour’s needs as well as its pressing economic problems, New Delhi has extended its support.

Implicit in India’s ‘no-strings’ offer is the promise that it will not try to influence the process of change. The Mahamhan Singh government would also do well to oppose any external intervention in Nepal’s internal affairs.

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When Serena Brocklebank, 39, was growing up, she heard stories about her grandfather Tom Brocklebank’s 1933 attempt to climb Mount Everest. She had no interest at that time to climb Everest or any other mountain. However, some years as a climbing instructor and after some serious high-altitude training in Latin America, Serena was hooked.

“The idea to attempt Everest came to me in 1999 when I was reading my grandfather’s book and realized I was unusually obsessed with Everest,” says Serena. Her grandfather was 24 when he was a member of the 1933 Everest expedition from the north side. The team reached within 300m of the summit before being turned back by storms.

In 2004, Serena followed her father’s footsteps on Chomolungma from the north side. And just like in 1933, her team was stopped by storms. The expedition was called off and it was only later she learnt that seven people from other expeditions had died on the mountain in the storm.

But Chomolungma was never out of Serena’s mind. “If something gets under your skin, its hard to let go,” she says with a twinkle in her eyes. In 2005, Serena was posted to the British Embassy in Kathmandu and she started planning her second attempt, this time from the south side. “Having followed Tom Brocklebank on the north, I knew that Tenzing Norgay and Hillary were on to something on the south side,” she says.

In April, while Kathmandu was in the throes of pro-democracy protests, Serena was at base camp on the Khumbu Glacier and after initial problems acclimatized well. She started from the South Col at 9:20 PM on 17 May with Pasang Nuru Sherpa of Pangboche. They made such good progress that by 3.30 AM they were already on the South Summit despite deep snow. “In fact, we had to slow down because they didn’t want to be on top while it was still dark,” Serena recalls.

When she reached the Hillary Step at 4 AM, the batteries in Serena’s torch went out. But they kept going up, grabbing a whole bunch of ropes from previous expeditions for guidance and safety. Dawn was breaking when Serena and Pasang Nuru stepped on the summit at 5.08 AM, and from the top they looked out at the curvature of the earth and the silhouette of Makalu.

“I was overwhelmed, deeply thrilled in a 8,848m kind of way,” says Serena, who credits Pasang Nuru for helping her get up so fast. “The odds are always against you, but in my case it was the power of disbelief that motivated me to not give up,” Serena says, explaining how she was aware of the possibility that they might not make it all the way up.

The descent was slow because they were both very tired. They had been on their feet for 12 hours when they got back down to the South Col. The weather turned nasty soon after and four of her teammates had frostbite and had to be evacuated by helicopter.

Serena has another two years to go in her diplomatic assignment in Kathmandu. Can there be anything after Chomolungma? Yes, Serena’s eyes are now set on Ama Dablam, the elegant mountain that stands like a sentinel above Tengboche. She adds: “I would like my mountaineering interest to be not all about Everest.”

MALLIKA ARYAL

HEIGHTS OF HAPPINESS: Serena Brocklebank on Chomolungma last month and her grandfather in Tibet in 1933.
Round the world in 66 days

“We have no time to think about football,” said Ulf Mühlbacher who with his son Matthias left Germany two weeks ago and made a stopover in Kathmandu on Monday during their 35,000 km around the world flight in a single-engine Piper Malibu. While the world’s attention is focused on Germany, the attention of the Mühlbachers is focused on the world. The father-and-son flew from Bremen to Istanbul, Tehran, Dubai and from New Delhi to Kathmandu. They flew out on Wednesday non-stop to Mandalay from where they will go on to Vietnam, Osaka, Alaska, across Canada to Newfoundland for a hop across the Atlantic to Reykjavik and then back home to Germany, which they hope to reach on 5 August.

“We have always wanted to come to Nepal,” says Ulf, “and it has been a spectacular flight up from the plains of India to Kathmandu, the weather was glorious and we could see the Himalayan peaks very clearly.”

Their plane has been fitted with a special tank to extend its range to 2,500km, and the crew took special training in sea survival in case they have to ditch in the water. The plane is pressurised, can fly to 27,000ft and has a global positioning system for navigation.

As members of the Rotary Club, the two are received by the global network wherever they go. In Nepal, they were hosted at Dwarika’s Hotel and visited Rotary sponsored health programs in the Valley.

Matthias just finished high school and is the co-pilot while in the air and spends the long hours maintaining the logbook and the project’s website, www.worldflight2006.de

He and his Dad love Nepal, but add: “We just wish Kathmandu airport was less bureaucratic.”

Min Bajracharya

Min Bajracharya

SMILES ALL ROUND: Members of the government and Maoist talks team look happy for photographers before getting down to the business of second round of talks at Hotel Himalaya on Thursday.

OFFICIAL ADDRESS: The CPN (Maoist) attracted a crowd of people and flags, as it opened its Kathmandu office in Kupondole on Tuesday.

ACHTUNG: Popular Nepali rock band 1974AD left for a three week tour of Germany on Wednesday at the invitation of resident Nepalis there. Yes, the lucky guys will also be watching the World Cup games.

WE GOT THE CUP: A giant replica of the FIFA World Cup outside the newly opened Sports Bar in Kamaladi.
No news is bad news

With so much happening these days it is natural for some earth-shattering bits of news to fall between the cracks. That is why from time to time it is the duty and responsibility for us in the know-it-all media to find the items that didn’t make the headlines and bring them to the attention of our valued customers so that they are a matter of public record.

Non-working Journalists on Warpath
SELF-SERVICE MEDIA

Outraged journalists who did not receive handouts from His Erstwhile Majesty’s Government (HEMG) have decided to stage a relay hunger strike and sit-in outside the Ministry of Infotainment from today demanding to be included on the list.

The Struggle Committee of the All-Nepal Non-Working Journalists’ Confederation said the list was discriminatory and not responsive to the spirit of the Jana Andolan II. They issued a 39-point demand asking for transparency and an immediate resumption of envelopemental journalism. They also brandished placards that read: ‘Some Journos Are More Equal Than Others’ and ‘Give Us Some Moolah Too’.

“The handouts helped journalists living from hand to mouth and also gave us a cash incentive to make things up as we went along,” said a hack who got Rs 1 million from the royal regime to alleviate his poverty.

Other journalists who made it to the list for receiving Rs 5,000 or less also joined the sit-in but for a different reason. “What do they think, that we are so cheap to settle for just five grand?” asked one irate editor, “this is an insult and a slap in the face for all self-respecting journalists. I got much more than that.” He was brandishing a placard that read: ‘Pay Peanuts, Get Monkeys’.

Smoking Banned On Trekking Trails
BY OUR PULMONARY CORRESPONDENT

Nepal’s activist judiciary is stepping in with public interest litigation, the latest proof being the new law banning smoking in public places including the Annapurna Circuit.

“We can’t allow Nepalis and trekkers to gamble with their lives because of the hazards of passive smoking on the trails,” said a member of the two-judge bench, adding, “anyone have a light?”

The Supreme Court made the ruling after reviewing scientific evidence that walking for one hour on Kathmandu streets was the equivalent of smoking four packs of cigarettes because of pollution caused by adulterated fuel. Inhalation of cigarette exhaust would exacerbate health hazards, the study concluded.

“We had to ban smoking on overhead bridges because it is impossible to control fumes from cars,” the justice said, “but our next step will be to ban breathing in all public places. We take citizens’ health very seriously.”

Research has shown that many Kathmandu residents can now hold their breath for up to half an hour at a stretch while walking along the Bagmati at Teku without any untoward side-effects.

50 More Deputy Prime Ministers
BY OUR SUSPENDED PARLIAMENTARY CORRESPONDENT

The government will soon expand the cabinet by 50 more deputy prime ministers when the Maoists join the interim government, bringing the total of deputy prime ministers to 52 and the cabinet strength to 165.

“Just having two deputy prime ministers was inadequate and there was some disgruntlement among those who were left out,” said the government spokesman, “We are now looking at conducting meetings of the new interim cabinet at the Great Hall of the People at the BICC.”

Constitutional experts said there are no statutory limits to the number of deputy prime ministers and the number can easily be expanded until everyone is deputy prime minister. “We are now in an inclusive democracy,” the spokesman granted, “so we can’t exclude anyone from having a go at it.”