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LANDING

KUNDA DIXIT

Prachanda 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 earliest 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. ●



AIR DYNASTY: Babu Ram Bhattarai and Pushpa Kamal Dahal in Chitwan last week before taking a helicopter to Siklis. Dahal is expected in Kathmandu for talks with Prime Minister Koirala on Friday.

Times nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 302

Q. Should parliament be dissolved as the Maoists want?

Total votes: 5,842

Yes	46%
No	54%

Weekly Internet Poll # 303. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Describe how you feel about the current political situation.

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Chasing utopia

... and planning for the worst

RADIO FREE NEPAL

The Nepali media has earned well-deserved praise for protecting and upholding democracy and its own freedom during direct royal reign since 2002.

Notwithstanding attempts to sully its message and collusion of some colleagues with authoritarian forces, the media withstood pressure from extremists of the left and right. Nepali newspapers, magazines, radio stations, television and even blogs defied controls, courageously defending freedom of expression not just for themselves, but to defend the rights of citizens to information.

In doing so, they built on gains since 1990 to enhance professionalism in print, production values on tv and the spread of community radio. Indeed, Nepal's progressive legislation to deregulate the FM band is far ahead of our neighbours and is the envy of broadcasters in the region.

Which is why we have to use the triumph of people power to never 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.

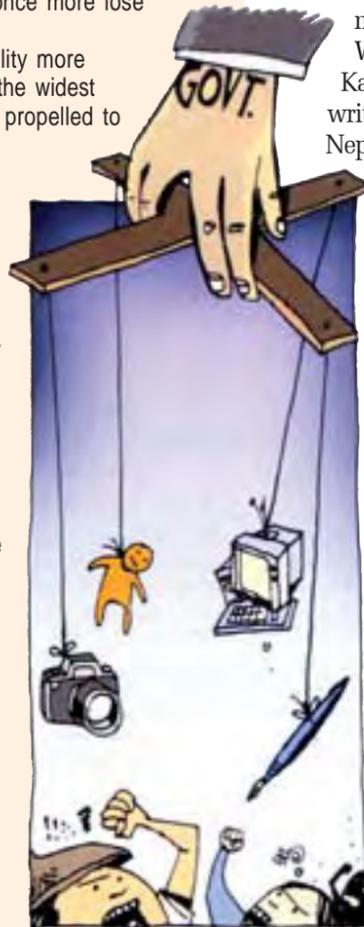
State ownership of media doesn't mean state control. It is anachronistic in a democracy for elected governments to own and operate a propaganda arm. The governing boards of the three official organs must now be made autonomous and brought under purview of parliament, not the government of the day. The freedom and independence enjoyed by state media during the current interregnum must be institutionalised, otherwise they will once more lose them to politicians who 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 realise that democracy in future will be best defended by participation of all citizens, and there is no participation without communication. A free radio will empower people with information, and foster communication as a tool for social change and development.

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

As for the rest of us, it is time for introspection. Somewhere along the way have we crossed the line between activism and journalistic professionalism? Are we now repeating the mistakes of the 1990s when we confused freedom with free-for-all journalism that unnecessarily spread cynicism about politicians and tarnished democracy itself?

We need to look at the larger picture: politics is not just a quarrel that makes headlines. It is about ensuring accountability and efficiency so governments remain focussed on the urgent task of raising living standards of all citizens.



MANIX ABRERA

Will the high-minded notion of 'permanent peace' advocated by the seven parties and civil society only lead us to fool's gold? What about 'total democracy' and 'unconditional constituent assembly'? Are these ideals to motivate us, or dangerous

GUEST COLUMN
Pravin Rana



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

In the euphoria of Jana-Andolan II, of course, when the 'people' are being saluted internationally and civil society activists are patting themselves on the back, questioning these notions borders on heresy.

War journalist Robert Kaplan who has also written on Nepal ('Who lost Nepal?', *Wall Street Journal*, 20 December 2005) cautions us against placing too much hope on democracy and the blind pursuit of peace.

In *The Coming Anarchy*, a collection of essays on topics ranging from peace, democracy, idealism, Kaplan points out that 'peace, as a primary goal, is dangerous because it implies that you will sacrifice any principle for the sake of it'.

Removals of the terrorist tag, red corner notices, and release of all Maoist prisoners in the face of increasing extortion, allowing political space to Maoist cadre even while the seven parties

can't campaign locally look too much like appeasement. Are these dangerous craven actions by the government, or components of an elaborate strategy to convince the Maoists to join modern democratic practices? Preferably the latter but one hopes that leaders understand that the Maoists will sing any tune to attain complete control of the state.

Then there is the phrase 'total democracy'. It implies some utopian end-point and we Nepalis have the inside track. Sustainable democracy, however, is often the final layer in society's social, cultural, and economic evolution. Fareed Zakaria, in the *Future of Freedom, Illiberal Democracies Here and Abroad* offers some sobering numbers: countries with per capita incomes of less than \$1,500 have a democratic life expectancy of just eight years and adds that a country's wealth has to be 'earned'. That is, prospects are grim for countries that rely heavily on natural resources (or foreign aid).

Processes such as elections, parliament, or in our case a constituent assembly (which will require elections) have not resulted in sustainable democracy. In particular, many third world countries have held elections only to have dictators legitimise autocratic power or governments unravel amidst bickering, corruption, and mismanagement. Others have fared even worse, descending into anarchy or civil war.

Consider the most recent casualty, East Timor, poster-child of United Nations nation-building success and touted by Kofi Annan as "a glowing example to the world community". Almost a year after the UN

peacekeeping mission departed, security has unravelled, and the country is in chaos. It is our very own Ian Martin who has been dispatched there like a human rights version of James Bond.

Kaplan suggests that in many societies, an enlightened dictator or a hybrid government may be preferable or at least inevitable: Chile built much of its democratic infrastructure under an autocracy followed by what now appears to be a solidly anchored democracy. Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew created a prosperous society from a backwater state through a contract with Singaporeans that placed security, order, and economic growth over many rights taken for granted in other liberal societies.

Of course, the very thought of an enlightened leader in the mould of Lee Kwan Yew is unlikely to survive Nepali politics. Wild opposition, civil society and activist anguish, lack of strong hegemonic support and the need to deliver results quickly would undermine such a leader.

Without throwing cold water on prospects for democracy, the intellectual elite, media, activists, and politicians are predictably engaging in group-think about a utopian vision of democracy and peace for the masses even while knowing (or ignoring) that most Nepalis' needs are elemental, and sustainable democracy a difficult challenge. Then we have the Maoists who continue to affect the economy, education, security, and liberties.

We must hope that politics, as promised, will transform our society. We must, as a matter of prudence, keep our feet firmly on the ground. ●

Diplomacy for dummies

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

Established in 1947, Nepal Council of World Affairs is perhaps the oldest foreign policy institute in the region. 'The Council' has been led in the past by prescriptive individuals with decisive influence in foreign policy: Subarna Shamsheer, Surya Prasad Upadhyay and

Basudeb Chandra Malla. In its heydays

addressing the council was mandatory for every head of state and government visiting Nepal. Shital Nibas often used this 'independent' forum to raise issues considered too sensitive to be voiced directly by the government. But all that is in the past tense. The 59th anniversary of the council this week was lacklustre and uninspiring. The rituals were dominated by grouse and gossip of retirees. Age seems to have taken its toll on this septuagenarian body.

The other foreign policy institute can be

taken even less seriously. The Institute of Foreign Affairs was established in 1993 to train our rookie dips and became a semi-autonomous think-tank only seven years ago. If senility afflicts the council, the IFA is never grew out of adolescence. It seems to have been set up to groom Nischal Nath Pandey, scion of royalist foreign minister Ramesh Nath. Pandey Jr has been with the institute from its inception first as its deputy and then chief.

With both institutions decayed the dissection of Nepal's foreign policy has fallen into the hands of officials. The foreign ministry is a direct descendent of the Rana-era *Jainsi Kotha* where clerks diligently translated messages from the palace to the British resident.

Out of 12 royal ambassadors recalled last month four are retired generals, five are palace loyalists, three had a career in diplomacy, and the lone academic on the list hasn't published anything for a long time.

With such a poor talent pool, our new democratic leaders will be as hard-pressed to find new ambassadors: a distant nephew here, a party loyalist there and turncoats of the previous era. In any case, shuffling appointments can change the form but not the substance of diplomacy. The government will be forced to pick someone from the administrative cadre as its foreign secretary. And whosoever that person may happen to be, he is extremely unlikely to steer the foreign policy of Nepal away from its subservient track to proactive diplomacy.

Aspiring ambassadors in business suits are already queuing up at the Balkhu Palace to promote economic diplomacy. The cultural diplomacy wallahs come in labeda-suruwals and are fluent in Marxist jargon.

Non-alignment is passé, globalisation is the flavour of the century is the refrain. So, they argue that non-reciprocity with the southern neighbour and dependability of the northern neighbour are our two

imperatives. A few others point out the magnanimity of the EU and the generosity of Japan while others are sold on the sole hyperpower.

Uncertainty is the only certainty in politics and diplomacy, but few indicators towards the future are discernable. The media will play a far greater role in international relations. The importance of coercive diplomacy will diminish as interdependence between countries increase.

Pomp is past, formalism is on its way out and the future belongs to a generation of diplomats willing to break the barriers of protocol and reach out directly to the people rather than through its rulers. We have to move from the traditional craft of dummy diplomacy practiced by royal nominees in the past to suave multi-disciplinary envoys of a new Nepal. The Council itself will need to re-energise itself with younger members to remain relevant and freed from the clutches of the foreign ministry. ●

STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal



LETTERS

UNSECLAR

I disagree with the statement in 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 regime' ('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 Okhaldunga 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 pleaded 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 jails 14 times. Although such imprisonment ceased after 1990, no Christian organisation has succeeded in getting legal registration as an NGO without deleting 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, Nepali Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains feel they too are now first class citizens of their own country. Before, advocates of other religions had to make use of Hindu means for progress, as the anthropologist Prayag Raj Sharma so aptly states. Thus contrary to your editorial opinion the executive, legislature, and the judiciary promoted Hinduism with state mechanism and finance.

Ramesh Khatri, 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 which I am sure makes the surviving families of the 13,000 people killed in the past decade awfully sick to their stomach. Merely repeating their rhetoric that the current change in Nepal was their doing doesn't absolve them of the crimes that they have committed and are still committing. For all the flip-flopping we have witnessed on their part, the Maoists yet don't deserve any benefit of doubt. They have intensified their tax and donation collections using severe coercion. Let the Maoists come

out first and explain to us properly what they mean by the new political and economic order that they want to create in Nepal, let them give up their arms, let them stop their intimidating tactics, let them tell us categorically that the resulting situation will mean more rights for people and not less. Until that happens, please don't publish pictures, life histories and propaganda of the Maoists.

And please don't let them fool the people that they are on the side of peace. Going to war can never be a means of establishing lasting peace anywhere. Of course, we will all rejoice when there is this lasting peace in the country that every one is looking forward to but please don't torture us in the interim by glorifying a group of terrorists who are yet to prove that they mean business for the ordinary people of Nepal.

Sunil Sharma, Teku

● Ref: Pravin Rana's article, 'Loving to hate the NA' (Guest Column, #300) and response-letters to it (#301). Any time issues of 'militarisation' comes up, it is invariably the national army that is held up to blame. It is easily forgotten that the 40,000-strong (R)NA soldiers were happy enough doing their morning and evening drills inside their barracks and disaster-relief work outside until the Maoists drew them to battle in 2001. It is the Maoists who put guns into the hands of common Nepalis, many of them teenagers. They were abducted and indoctrinated with extreme left ideology that exalts armed rebellion. Why is it the NA still bears the prime guilt for 'militarisation'? Even more ridiculous is the charge about 'unprofessionalism'. Any organisation is clearly limited in its aim (to be as 'professional' as possible) by the pool it recruits from and the training it can provide to these recruits. Can we look around our poorly developed nation and find it teeming with other 'professional' institutions which the NA would do well to emulate? As an institution, the NA clearly aims to respect human rights and minimise civilian casualties. But the fact that even the world's most advanced army, in the most advanced democracy, still falls short should help provide a sense of perspective when judging these issues.

No intention to condone the NA's mistakes here. But war, by its very nature, is an ugly business. Given that war was thrust upon the Nepal Army, Mr Rana makes a valid point. The Nepali military is different from militaries in action anywhere else in the world (and he has the numbers to prove it). But the continuous harangue the NA faces from

the very people enjoying the security it provides is probably unrivalled anywhere on earth. The psychological effects of such demoralising and hostile reaction upon those giving up their lives to prevent war from engulfing the whole nation needs to be taken into account when analysing incidents such as Nuwakot and Belbari.

Abhishek Basnyat, email

CHILD LABOUR

I was shocked to read that there are 22,000 children working as domestic help in Kathmandu alone. As we know domestic helpers are one of the most vulnerable groups—they are overworked, underpaid and in most cases abused in various forms. Most of us are aware of the abuses these children go through but are silent witness while it is going on in the very society we live. If the Nepal government is serious about tackling child labour the public should be made aware of the legal age of domestic workers and carry out spot checks to monitor it. Let Nepali children live as children.

Usha Moktan, email

DOG'S LIFE

I fully agree with the letter by S Shrestha that 'there is something wrong with our psyche that puts self-interest before common welfare' (Letters, #300). This is nowhere more obvious than within the neighbourhood as it deals with its stray dogs. Bricks and stones are regularly thrown at dogs simply to move them on to somebody else's street so that they become someone else's problem. The street dog problem is not insurmountable, but there is no evidence of people trying to find a logical solution or of talking things through with their neighbours in an intelligent manner, then acting collectively for the common good.

If, for example, everyone in a neighbourhood donated a small amount of cash there would be enough to have the female sterilised, which would over time gradually reduce thousands of stray dogs all over the city. It would take years but it would work. There is one organization having tremendous impact by doing just this, but it is not enough. Vets we have spoken to have said they would be willing

and able to operate but they have nowhere for the dogs to recuperate. The situation could change if the will, determination and interest and care for one's community were present in all. Basic kennels cost little, and they don't take up much room. Once released onto the streets all these animals need is one good meal a day and the occasional stroke. They will repay such kindness 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 be proactive, intelligent, to work out with 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 that is so there are a lot of logos to be changed. Now that we're secular how about changing NTV's logo as well?

S Awasthi, email

LETTERS

Nepali 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.

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Cash and brain drain

MALLIKA ARYAL and
ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Nepali students pack up their dreams, and dollars, to study abroad

It's been over a year since Abhisek Thapa, 24, finished his BA in Arts in political science from Calcutta. Abhisek 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



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

KIRAN PANDY

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, airfare, 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 Abhisek 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." ●

Rs 10 billion a year

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.



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DE LUXE WHISKY

Internet media excluded

Online, or internet media, must be given the same recognition as traditional print and electronic media, argues the Online Media Association Nepal (OMAN). "When media law is being developed to govern media as a whole, it is very important to have representation from all sectors," added the body in a press release. The organisation is demanding a seat on the Media Council formed by the previous government. "Dozens of online magazines are providing the same services as mainstream media. However, the Media Council lacks representation from this sector and is absolutely unable to build effective and efficient rules, regulations and mechanism for online media."

Caring for customers

Vijay Motors, Tiny Town Day Care Centre, Healthy Smiles and Photo Concern were recently honoured with 'Excellence in Customer Service' awards from The New Era Career Development Institute. The prizes are part of New Era's Customer Focus Year 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.

Cricketers crowned

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 Nepalis to donate voluntarily, the bank gathered about 100 donors.



NEW PRODUCTS

SPICY: Tulasi Spice and Food Products has introduced its new line of spices called 'TSF Deluxe Masala'. The spices are available in stores all over Kathmandu.



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.

Dealing with disputes

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

- A federation of Dalit activists splintered into factions early this week.

- Disgruntled employees of Kathmandu University (KU) are battling it out in the letters pages of the papers

- For the last several months, the Nepal Industrial Development Corporation (NIDC) and Yak & Yeti Hotel have been at loggerheads over the use of an access road.

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



On one level, these quarrels do not make sense. NIDC exists, presumably, to help companies including hotels. KU must have procedures in place to address employee grievances. And you'd think Dalit leaders would cast differences aside to maintain unity for the far more important goal of fighting to end discrimination.

But these and other quarrels that spill into our public domain do conform to an observation about our societies: when it comes to finding ways to end conflicts, our social, political and legal institutions routinely fail us. While few see Nepalis as quarrelsome people, when faced with quarrels, we lack institutions to help us end conflicts as speedily and

amicably as possible so that we can pick up the pieces and get on with our lives.

As a result, we often see no choice but to either drag the quarrels on for a long time, even through generations, in some cases, or apply fistfight-equivalent tactics to get quick justice. In either case, the damages in terms of hurt emotions, dented reputations, strained relationships and lost businesses are bigger than any putative short-term gains.

Isn't it time we looked for ways to see what can be done to better resolve our inevitable disputes faster? Take our courts, for instance. They make up a bulk of our formal dispute-resolution process. But they are overwhelmed by an avalanche of cases.

From 1999 to 2003, more than 500,000 cases were filed in the Supreme Court, appeals and district courts. By types, almost 300,000 were about just three issues: land, family and business transactions. Given the constraints of time and resources, it's safe to predict that the courts will never address the majority of those cases. And even in cases where courts render decisions (as in *NIDC vs. Yak & Yeti*) enforcement of verdicts remains an issue. Disputing parties continue to engage in fights instead of accepting decisions,

cutting losses and moving to solutions.

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.

Anecdotes suggest that we have informal arbitration processes in some communities. But the challenge is to formalise them so that arbitration with regard to land, labour, contract and family disputes becomes a respected alternative to going to courts. Such respect will have three good effects: the load on courts will be lighter, more quarrels will be resolved and many interested Nepalis will grow up to be arbitrators.

One result of all this is not that we will have fewer quarrels. 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. ●

Study the risks

Nepali students among dozens who were duped by a Canadian college

MARTY LOGAN

Ashesh Khanal has a cheque for \$4,000 that he can't cash but he has not just 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 & Computers in Toronto in March 2005 which confirmed his admission in August. 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.

"They already sent five or six cheques (to various students) they have all bounced," he says with a worried look. Six other students sent \$4,000 to CCBC after answering an ad placed in a local paper by Mission Mark Consultancy in Kamalpokhari. MMC owner Prasad Rai says he was approached to go into partnership with CCBC by an unsolicited email.

The college sent MMC a certificate of partnership, provided a mailing address in Toronto and even had a website. It couldn't have looked more legitimate, say Rai and Khanal. But Canadian newspapers reported that the college fled its offices months ago without paying its rent. And on 19 January, the Province of Ontario's Ministry of

Training College and Universities suspended CCBC's registration after numerous complaints about missing refunds and poor quality instruction.

"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 Shelvan Kannuthurai in 1995 but it's difficult to know if it was a legitimate business that 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 2006. 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 must 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.

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 cheat was a Canadian college. "What bothers me most is that an advanced country like Canada allows schools like this to operate. They weren't held to any standards. It's shameful," said the brother of one of the cheated students. ●



MARTY LOGAN

Deal directly

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 or Association of Community Colleges of Canada (ACCC), www.accc.ca
- Use the Government of Canada website: www.livelearnandsucceed.gc.ca
- Apply to the college/university directly whenever possible
- Speak to Canadian colleges/universities that recruit directly at education fairs or at your school. Using an agent is not required.
- Use the services of the Canadian Education Centre based in Delhi
- Use the services of recognised Canadian recruiting agents, such as the University of Windsor representative in Delhi.

“The Maoists should not be suspected, and they shouldn’t suspect us.”

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.

So, when will the interim government that includes the Maoists be formed?

We are preparing for July or August.

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.

And how about his stance on arms management?

Very positive. There was no beating around the bush. Demobilisation of the PLA will happen before the Maoists join the interim government.



KIRAN PANDAY

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?

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.

But the Maoists are saying that they will keep their army in demarcated zones?

That is 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 arms will not be taken up.

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

Jana Aastha, 14 June

Colonel Raju 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 abducting 49 Maoists, killing and burying them in the Shivapuri jungles last year. An ad hoc board of inquiry under Brigadier Sharad Neupane of the Army Staff College had recommended his arrest and detention. Sources said Basnet was transferred from the Mid-western 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 disappearances 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 JB 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 curbs 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

Drishti, 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 barrack, or store weapons and use fighters in political work. The rebels would like the UN to oversee decommissioning and demobilization 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,



FACING THE MUSIC: A member of the Maoists' cultural troupe performs a dance sequence at Tundikhel during the rebel mass meeting two weeks ago. She was performing to the music of a ballad that went: 'When people are hungry, where there is injustice, the volcano erupts...'

Akhanda Jyoti, *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-29 June



Shed: Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)
“...or else, the talks will fail”
“Preparation for second round of talks is going on.”

Abin Shrestha in *Samaya*, 15 June

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 26 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 decentralised.

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.

VACANCY Business Manager

HIMAL SOUTHASIAN

COMPANY PROFILE:
Himal Southasia is Southasia's first and only regional magazine. It is a review magazine published from Kathmandu. Through its print and online editions (www.himalmag.com), Himal provides in-depth analysis and commentary on key issues of Southasia, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tibet.

KEY RESPONSIBILITY:

- Sales & Marketing for Himal Southasian in Nepal as well as Southasia
- Business Development to expand the reach of HSA by increasing subscriptions in places other than Southasia
- Expand distribution of HSA outside of Nepal, either through direct distribution or subscription
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- Manage day-to-day activities of the office

DESIRED PROFILE:

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- Good communication skills
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Coffee, tea

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

DANIEL HABER in KABHRE

Nepali 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 climactic 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 Nepali 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 Bhusan Subba is team leader of the Tea & Coffee Global Development Alliance-Smallholder Mobilization through Improved Governance with its unwieldy acronym, TCGDA-SMIG.

Subba and his colleague Ratna Bhuban 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 Dhulikhel 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 wizened 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." ●



With help from Helvetas

The Swiss aid agency Helvetas has also been helping Nepal with training of Nepali coffee farmers, setting up demonstration farms, marketing campaigns in Europe and elsewhere as well as training in processing of beans.

But experts say a lot more needs to be done to promote Nepali 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 Himalaya and protects the environment.

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.

Tea and we



Promoting Nepali tea through tourism

KC, manager of Ilam Tea Producers in Sri Antu says tourists coming to watch the sunrise from the Sri Antu Hill are now sold on tea drinking.

"French and Japanese visitors come to us every year. They live in the staff quarters, roam the gardens, drink tea and return with a most wonderful experience," says KC.

It will take time before Ilam catches up with Darjeeling which has a head start in mixing tea with tourism. But importers from Germany, Japan and the US have started showing interest. Nepal could also get visitors from Darjeeling when the Pashupatinagar checkpoint has an immigration office.

Tourists can also choose to visit the CTC (Cut Tear and Curl) tea gardens in Jhapa and then journey to breathe the fresh mountain air in the Guranse Tea Estate in Dhankuta which at 7,300ft is the highest garden in Nepal.

While Darjeeling produces 10 million kg of premium tea a year, Nepal's annual yield is about 1.6 million kg. Ninety-three percent of the orthodox tea grown in Dhankuta and Ilam is exported. Annual world demand is about 50 million kg and Nepali orthodox tea is now making a mark in the Japan, Germany and US markets. Guranse Tea Estate has already earned a ISO 9001-2000n certificate.

Experts say that if properly marketed Nepal can sell as much premium tea as it can produce, and they think promoting tea tourism is a good way to market Nepali tea. Some of the estates are now developing hotels and lodges inside the gardens like in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. Visitors there can roam the hills at their leisure and return with various flavours of tea as souvenirs. Guranse's manager Santosh KC is optimistic: "If we create the proper atmosphere, we can make five Darjeelings in Dhankuta and attract buyers and tourists at the same time." ●



PESHAL POKHREL in DHANKUTA

Mount a crest in the carpeted green slopes of the Kanyam Tea Estate and you will be atop '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 a bud, growing at 3,000-7,300ft.

All of this produces a unique blend for tasters and tourists alike. "Our tea is virgin, 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 Chapagain, 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 tipping, 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.

Tea has transformed the lives of farmers in eastern Nepal in the past decade with more than 7,000 families benefiting. Kumar



PESHAL POKHREL

Top climbers pitch Nepal tea

Nepali tea growers have realised that they need to create a brand image in the global market and have united under the slogan: 'Nepal Tea: Quality from the Himalayas'.

For this, they have enlisted the support of famous mountaineers. Tyrolean climber and former member of the European Parliament, Reinhold Messner, who has climbed all eight peaks in Nepal above 8,000m, is Nepal's tea brand ambassador. Guranse Tea Estates has named Jamling Tenzing Norgay, Brent Bishop (son of American climber Barry C Bishop) and Peter Hillary (son of Sir Ed) as 'brand promoters'.

Groups associated with the Nepal Tea Alliance are also uniting to promote the brand and boost

exports, leading to today's price of Rs 10,000 per kg for Nepali premium tea. The Private Sector Program under German development agency GTZ is also playing a major role in promoting Nepali orthodox tea internationally.

"German investors are keen to visit Nepali gardens and more than a dozen of them will be visiting Ilam this October to examine the potential of Nepali tea. "They are not only interested in tea tourism but also want to provide cutting edge facilities to Ilam's old gardens," says Arun Rana, a consultant for GTZ/PSP, "If our tea growers can also focus on the international code of conduct for tea production Nepali tea has limitless potential."



PESHAL POKHREL

Fighting bloodsuckers in

Leeches are the main enemy of Maoist guerrillas during the ceasefire



PICS: BIBI FUNYAL

BIBI FUNYAL in LAMJUNG

After 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 175-member platoon fought every inch of the way against an invasion of leeches. At the clearing, Comrade Yoddha takes

off his socks and peels off a fattened leech from his right foot with his left hand.

"They are like the feudals we are fighting," he says, "both are bloodsuckers." Others in the group don't see it quite in such stark ideological terms. A leech is a nuisance, part of the hardships of a conflict in which they have to be on the move all the time.

The ceasefire means no danger of confrontation for now and

even the sentries guarding the clearing are more relaxed than they used to be. But the 'People's Liberation Army' still has to move, and the guerrillas walk up to 20km a day up and down the mountains carrying their arms. They need to move because they depend on the local villages for food and don't want to burden a particular area by staying in one place.

Yoddha (the nom de guerre means 'warrior') is carrying a

Belgian belt-ammo 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 Paribartan Memorial Brigade are carrying vintage .303s but in the front row are M-16s, 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'd all like 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. ●

GUNS AND LEECHES: Decommissioning of Maoist weapons like these under UN supervision will be one of the items on the agenda of a planned summit between Prachanda and Prime Minister Koirala.



Paying more attention to women's wages

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

NARESH NEWAR

Men work harder and produce more, women are weaker and take longer to do anything. So pay the woman less.

These are prevailing beliefs that shape the reality of millions of female Nepali workers, who have always been paid less than their male counterparts for the same amount and quality of work.

"This will change now and we won't stop until justice is served," says Kailali activist Sapana Bhandari who with dozens of other female wage labourers travelled to Kathmandu to file a case at the Supreme Court on Thursday.

The women from eight western districts want the court to order the government to introduce a special law providing equal wages for female workers. Activists say they need the law to fight legal battles against employers.

Bhandari and her colleagues are determined to put up a fight until the parliament acts. On Thursday, they led activists and workers from Kailali, Chitwan, Bardia, Banke, Kapilbastu, Nawalparasi and Surkhet in a protest near Singha Durbar, blocking traffic for 15 minutes to attract the attention of Kathmandu (see pic left).

The minimum wage for male labourers is Rs 100-150 but no more than Rs 80 for women, and the rate has been frozen for the last 10 years. The 1990 constitution has several laws that protect rights and promote gender equality but there is still no law that gives a female worker the right to approach the courts to demand equal pay.

Many 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 Pande 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 Goma Acharya from Kailali's Women's Advocacy Group: "We must strike when the iron is hot." ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Lamjung



New look at Lukla

Lukla is more than trekking lodges attached to an airstrip as this year's Dumjee festival showed

SAGUN S LAWOTI in LUKLA

The 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.

Luckily, our flight was cancelled two days in a row. Otherwise we'd never have seen the cultural side of the town that grew after Sir Edmund Hillary carved a sloping runway out of a mountainside at nearly 3,000m.

Dumjee 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 Nepte Rimpoche 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 Padmasambhav. Dawa Phuti Sherpa of the Lukla monastery says its 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. ●



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Star-struck

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.

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
Sujoy Lama



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 bashing 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.

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. You will definitely do a lot less running around.

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.

The geo-



PASCAL BONIFACE

In football defeat is never definitive, but it is always passionate. For football lovers, FIFA should have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize long ago. For others, exasperated by football and the emotions it stirs up, the sport is no longer a

game but a type of war that stokes the basest sort of nationalist emotions.

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.

In a football match, the

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politics of football

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



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 1930’s-

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.

What football really provides is a residual area of confrontation that allows for the controlled expression of animosity, leaving the most important areas of interaction between countries unaffected. France and Germany will soon have a common army—they already have a common currency—yet the survival of national teams channels lingering rivalry between the two countries.

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 even applauded in North Korea. Sport, indeed,

seems to be the best barometer of relations between the divided Korean people.

More than long speeches or international resolutions football can help induce progress towards peaceful solutions for military conflicts. After their qualification for this year’s World Cup, the Ivory Coast’s national team, including players from the north and south, addressed all of their fellow citizens, asking the warring factions to lay down their weapons and to put an end to the conflict that has shattered their country. After Haiti’s President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was overthrown a few years ago, Brazil’s football team acted as an

ambassador for the United Nations’ Brazilian-led peacekeeping forces. And, when conflict ends from Kosovo to Kabul football is the first sign of a society returning to normal.

The former president of the FIFA, Joao Havelange, often dreamed of a football match between Israelis and Palestinians. Perhaps one day it will take place. Certainly the Iran-United States football game in 1998 offered a moment of fraternisation between the two teams. Another Iran-US match might be helpful at this difficult time.

As the sociologist Norbert Elias put it: “The spectators of a football match can enjoy the

mythical excitement of battles taking place in the stadium and they know that neither the players nor they will suffer any harm.”

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.

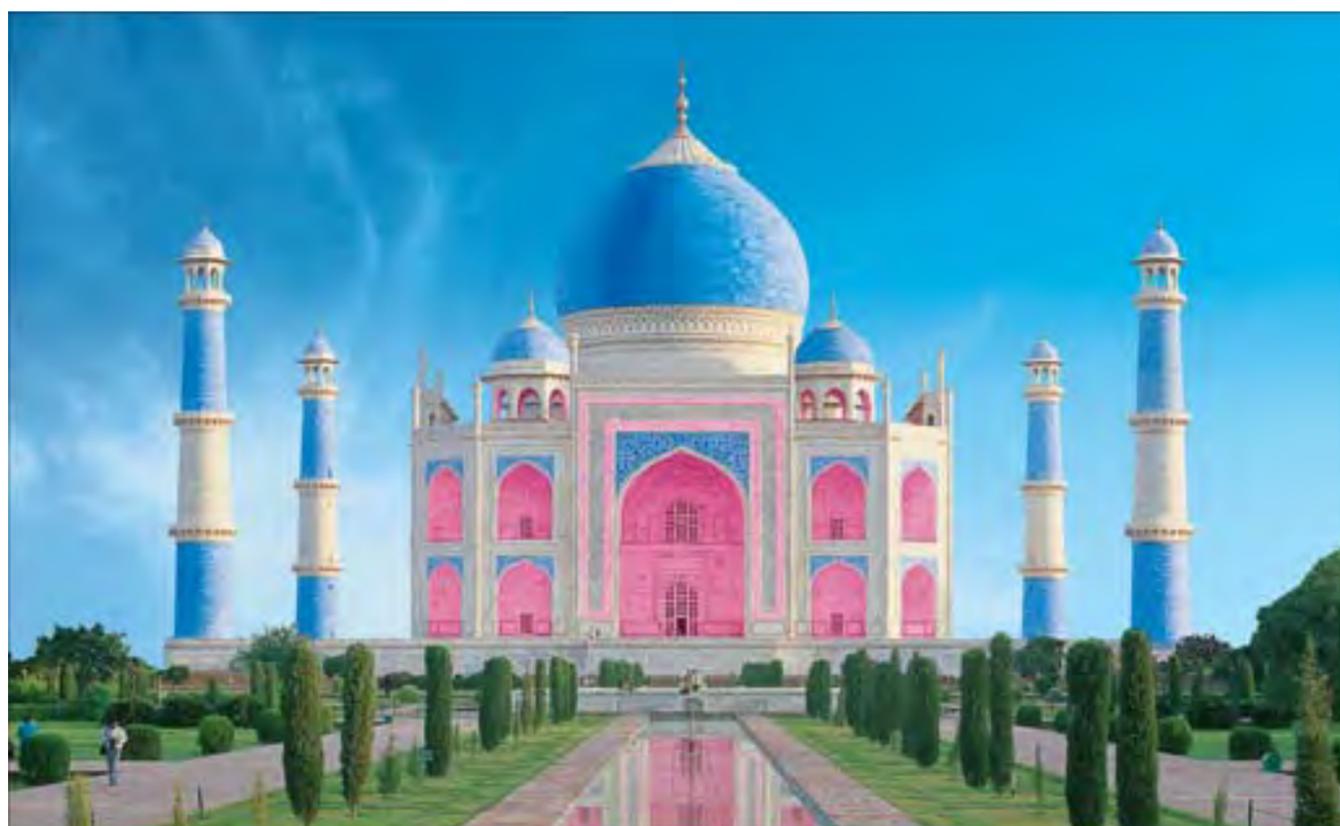
As a Frenchman, I cannot wait for the next World Cup match between France and Germany. But I want France to avenge its defeat at the last World Cup in Seville, not its defeat at Verdun. ●

Project Syndicate

Pascal Boniface is Director of the Institute for International and Strategic Relations (IRIS) in Paris. His most recent book is *Football et Mondialisation*.

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Bye-bye Bahadur

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



NARESH NEWAR

NARESH NEWAR
in NEW DELHI

A uto-rickshaw driver Ram Hari gazes into the rear-view mirror trying to size up his Nepali passenger. "Aap Maobadi hai?" he asks while motoring toward the posh South Extension shopping area of India's capital city. "Your Prime Minister Koirala was here, right?" Ram Hari adds and then chatters for another 20 minutes about Nepal, the Maoists, the king and Jan Andolan.

It's not just Ram Hari. From taxi drivers to businessmen, housewives to journalists, shoppers to salesmen and

bartenders to socialites, New 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 from *Indian Express*.

"Wow, you Nepalis finally knocked him (the king) out. Congratulations to your new Nepal," a young reporter congratulates a visitor with a toast. "Out goes your king and in come the Maoists," jokes an inebriated female socialite at the plush QBar.

The Nepali clichés have yet to disappear—with reason. New Delhi remains a huge

EXPORTING LOKTANTRA: Nepali journalists Ajan Siwakoti from *Image Channel* and Surendra Phuyal of *Kathmandu Post* with Rahul Kanwal anchor of the Indian news channel *Aaj Tak* at a New Delhi watering hole last week.

destination for Nepali sex workers, who often end up in one of several brothels on the notorious GB Road. And almost every wealthy household employs a Nepali guard, often called *bahadur* and the underpaid young Nepalis who toil in cheap hotels are often known as *kanchas*.

But some locals say the image of Nepalis is slowly changing

after People's Movement II. Now Nepalis are looked upon as freedom fighters, or Maoists, especially outside of the capital's chattering classes.

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 the big spenders are eager to visit the Himalayan kingdom, most are under the impression that Nepal remains dangerous, full of gun-toting Maoist soldiers marching among fluttering red flags. "I'm dying to see Nepal. It's safer now, isn't it?" 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 barfly.

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 the primary source of assistance is a tribute to an extremely close, longstanding relationship," gushed an editorial in *The Hindu*.

'Nepal Calling' in *Hindustan Times*, 'Rebuild Nepal' and 'Fresh Beginning' in the *Times of India* and 'Friends and neighbours' in *The Tribune* were other examples of the forward looking, very positive voices in leading newspapers, a refreshing change from superpower poses and arrogant attitudes. ●

Editorials in the Indian media

Friends and neighbours
The Tribune, 12 June

Nepali Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's first visit abroad after he assumed office was appropriately enough to New Delhi. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh underscored that form is as important as substance on this state visit by breaking protocol to receive Mr Koirala at the airport.

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 priorities. India has waived the dues payable by Nepal for defence purchases and also exempted Nepal's exports to India from the four per cent additional customs duty. The number of scholarships for Nepali students in India has been doubled.

These are but a few of the high points of New Delhi's commitments to assist in reviving Nepal's economy. With the albatross that was the autocratic monarchy having been downsized to popular expectations, Nepal's defence spending should fall greatly, freeing resources for economic development. The Maoists, who were deeply involved in the restoration of democracy, need to march in step with the mainstream parties.

Helping a friend
The Hindu, 12 June

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

New Delhi might have faced 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 as the Koirala government and the Maoists move to the next stages of a challenging political transition.

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 as they arise. With the abolition of the 'king in parliament' concept, including his veto on laws, Nepal is on the fast track to becoming a republic. Republican India should have absolutely no problems with this

Fresh Beginning
Rajeev Dhavan in *Times of India*,
11 June

There is an inherent contradiction between an exalted constitutional monarchy, 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. Compromises are inevitable as long as they are principled and do not undermine democracy and justice. Nepal's constitution of 1990 was what the king gave, not what the people won or wanted.

We are now in a changed situation for which the people of Nepal have paid a tragic and traumatic price. But this is a beginning of a new process. India's Constitution took four years (1946-50), Pakistan's constitution took eight (1947-56) but collapsed two years later. Constitutions of South Asia suffer amendments, non-completion and abandonment.

Yet there is no running away from the fact that Nepal has called upon itself not just to make cosmetic changes in its present constitution but to create a new one. This is going to require wisdom and grit because it entails the people of Nepal reviewing not just their basic law but also their immediate and past history. The writer is a senior Supreme Court advocate.



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In her grandfather's footsteps

MALLIKA ARYAL

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 realised 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

HEIGHTS OF HAPPINESS: Serena Brocklebank on Chomolungma last month and her grandfather in Tibet in 1933.



mountain in the storm.

But Chomolungma was never out of Serena's mind. "If something gets under your skin, it's 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 acclimatised 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 4AM, 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." ●



SURYA NEPAL

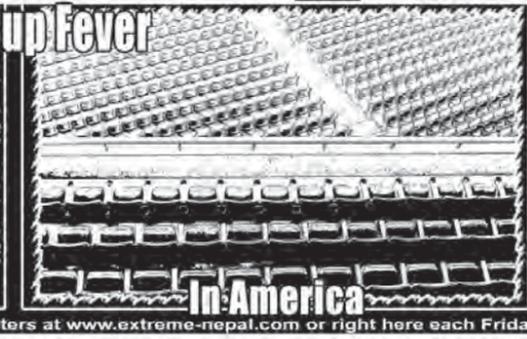


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The Washington Times
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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Watercolours from Nepal** annual exhibition of watercolour society till 18 June.
- ❖ **10 Days Atelier** group exhibition of paintings from art workshop at Nepal Art Council till 22 June. 4220735
- ❖ **People's Power 1990-2006** by Ragini Upadhyay Grela at NAFA, Naxal, 9-25 June, 10AM-5PM. 411729

EVENTS

- ❖ **Walk With Wave IX:** The Bungamati Walk, Saturday 17 June, 8.30 AM, in front of Patan Hospital.
- ❖ **War Photographer** a film about the American photographer James Nachtwey, free screening at the Bakery Café, Sundhara, 12PM, 16 June.
- ❖ **Role of Music in Transformation** discussion at Martin Chautari 16 June, 3PM
- ❖ **Fashion Fusion** featuring Nepali designers at Hyatt Regency, 16 June, 7.30 PM
- ❖ **Creative Yoga Retreat** with Sannyasi Yogatara and Swami Kriyavidya Saraswati, 17 June, 7.30 AM at HBMC. Pre-registration required. 4414843
- ❖ **8th Gokarna Open** annual golf tournament at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, 17 June.
- ❖ **Postmodernism** with Arun Gupto of TU, 17 June, Martin Chautari, 4PM.
- ❖ **Bagmati River Fest** concert with Robin and the New Revolution and Abhaya & the Steam Injuns at Bambooze, Thamel, 17 June. 7.30 PM, Rs 100.
- ❖ **International Music Day** free concert with Alliance Française, Kathmandu, 21 June at Basantapur, Shiva Parbati Dabali. 4241163
- ❖ **Communication and leadership program** with Toastmasters, meeting every Tuesday at IEM building, Tripureswor. 9841307447
- ❖ **World Cup Action** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Rodi bar 9 June - 9 July. 4273999
- ❖ **Wave Kick Off Cup** media vs celebrities 24 June 2-4PM, Dasrath Stadium, exclusive all stars party post match at Himalmedia Hattiban 7PM.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM at Upstairs.
- ❖ **Live Music** at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- ❖ **Uncork the good times** with Ciney and Par-e-jat playing every Friday from 7PM o at Fusion bar at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479448
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622

DINING

- ❖ **Pizza and Pasta Extravaganza** at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, till 18 June.
- ❖ **Floats and Fantasies** mocktails and desserts at Juneli Bar till 24 June.
- ❖ **Brunch from the east** weekend brunch till 29 July.
- ❖ **The Fun Café** for set buffet breakfast, lunch or dinner, Olive Bar & Bistro, Radisson Hotel. 4411818
- ❖ **World Cup at K-too!** games available with meal and free Irish Coffee. 4470043
- ❖ **Hi Spirit** serving 350 ml liquor on a higher side at Juneli Bar, Hotel De L' Annapurna till 2 June. 4221711
- ❖ **Mezza and Margarita** at Dwarika's Fusion Bar every Wednesday, Rs 555
- ❖ **Vineyard Gallery Lounge** for wines and cocktails at Babar Mahal Revisited.
- ❖ **Mango Masti** at all restaurants in Soaltee Crowne Plaza.
- ❖ **Beat the heat** with milkshakes and smoothies at Hyatt Regency.
- ❖ **Momo & Sekuwa Revolution** every Saturday at Tea-House Inn.
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NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED

Sometimes we weather forecasters get it dead wrong. That happened last week. The monsoon was chugging along, and suddenly it was stopped dead in its tracks by a high pressure system that sucked in unusually hot and dry air from the southwest. Not only did it stop the monsoon, but it chased it back to eastern Nepal where it remains in this Meteosat image taken on Thursday morning. After five days of uncharacteristic cloudless skies we are getting some local cloud generated from convection. But this is far from a real monsoon pulse, which has been pushed back a week. Expect localised showers, hot and humid days.

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नेपाल सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग



KIRAN PANDAY

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



KIRAN PANDAY

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



KIRAN PANDAY

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.



KIRAN PANDAY

WE GOT THE CUP: A giant replica of the FIFA World Cup outside the newly opened Sports Bar in Kamaladi.

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, Teheran, 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

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whitening

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Close Up gives you strong, white, shiny teeth and fresher breath. So go ahead, get the confidence to laugh out loud.

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

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



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 envelopmental 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 Supremo 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 grunted, "So we can't exclude anyone from having a go at it."

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