Explosive legacy

There may be a ceasefire but not a week goes by without children and women dying from bombs scattered across Nepal.

On 25 June, the anti-landmine group Geneva Call organised a seminar in Kathmandu that brought together Maoists and the victims of their bombs.

On the podium was socket bomb victim 13-year-old Ashok Thapa Magar, sitting next to Maoist leaders Alman and Ekraj Bhandari (pictured, right). After hearing Ashok’s mother relate how her son was wounded, the audience demanded the Maoists with questions.

Used to getting their way with the gun, the comrades have not yet learnt to engage in public debate. Their response was: war is not a picnic, people are killed and injured. After we attain victory, there will be no more violence, etc.

But these answers didn’t seem to satisfy Ashok’s mother about why her son had to suffer.

Parallel government

Political transitions are a time of confusion. But the post-uprising interregnum is looking more and more bizarre.

The Maoists are no longer a rebel group, they are effectively a parallel government:
- Maoist people’s courts are dispensing summary justice even in the capital, side-by-side with government courts
- Maoists are issuing tenders for construction work sometimes for projects for which the government has also called for bids
- The government has a police force, the Maoists have their militia walking around openly
- The country has two armies: the Nepal Army and the ‘People’s Liberation Army’
- There are DDCs and ‘People’s District Governments’, VDCs and ‘Village People’s Governments’. Which is the real government?

Perhaps this is why parliament’s Law and Justice Committee on Thursday condemned the eight-point agreement and moved to get the full house to pass a resolution rejecting it. This is a direct challenge to the Maoists and their strategy to get into government by passing an interim constitution.

But a joint government will be delayed because the drafting of the interim constitution is itself delayed. The deadline was Friday, 30 June but the committee started work on it only on Tuesday.

The political momentum unleashed by the April uprising was dissipated by the eight-point agreement on 16 June in which the Maoists forced the government to agree to dissolve parliament. Since then, not a single piece of far-reaching new legislation has been passed.

Editorial

Turn down the volume

Nation

What’s the hurry? 

p2

parliamentary proclamations between 7-16 June to demote the king, delink him from the army and declare Nepal secular, everything has come to a grinding halt.

The political momentum unleashed by the April uprising was dissipated by the eight-point agreement on 16 June in which the Maoists forced the government to agree to dissolve parliament. Since then, not a single piece of far-reaching new legislation has been passed.
Turn down the volume

Conflict resolution is an art. It has to start with the political will for peace on both sides, a willingness to reconstitute a state of trust, confidence-building and trust. Only after that can a monitored ceasefire lead to demobilisation and democratisation of weapons that will be used to import a SUV.
TRUST
‘Mainstreaming the Maoists’ seems to be the buzzword these days and your editorialists are not immune. But what does it mean? Changes to Nepal’s political landscape require ownership by the Maoists, the political parties, civil society and the Nepali people-at-large, as victory in their own terms. It even requires recognition from Nepal’s right-of-centre that the attainment of lasting peace, is a win as well. As you note in ‘Why should we trust you?’ (Editorial, #303) concessions to the Maoists have to be tailored to meet their leadership’s challenge of assuaging the Maoist cadre-base. Similarly, what the Maoists offer in return must also qualify as substantive reciprocity to allay the concerns of political andapolitical actors in Nepal and abroad. This is why rhetoric requires responsible moderation. Writing off inflammatory language as necessary to allay the concerns of radicals, as you seem to imply in your leader, is akin to condoning the escalation of counter-rhetoric for the sake of equilibrium. It would be most unfortunate to equate the process of mainstreaming the Maoists with the act of defining the mainstream itself.

I agree that during the run up to the constituent assembly, it is very important for those who publicly resolve violence and educate their cadre on the generally accepted version of liberal democracy. This is just as paramount as it is for advocates of a liberal democratic set up in Nepal to extend flexibility to the Maoist leadership’s plight. The onus of rectifying the over-inflated expectations they set for their own cadre-base, is primarily the Maoists’. The idea here is to mainstream not just the Maoists leaders and a segment of sympathetic elements but the entire Maoist mass.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal. In the SPA-M democracy everyone except the army seems to get the right to express an opinion. It seems that the army can’t defend its image even when it is being singled out for attack. Prachanda had the right to give his opinion and the army had the right of reply. So why all the fuss? Our politicians are just hardwired to make a mountain out of a molehill every time.

Evans Shrestha, email

As usual, your editorial (‘Why should we trust you’) is balanced and persuasive. Just as the state needs to accept the notion of including the Maoists in the power apparatus, the Maoists also have to accept that their integration requires a behaviour shift. Negotiating with the government on one hand while trying to ‘talk tough’ to their cadre with unrealistic aspirations is not helpful to anyone. Issuing provocative statements against the state’s security forces that detract debate from substantive issues and drive a wedge amongst the seven party alliance is counterproductive. Soon, the Maoists will learn the consequences of making empty promises. It is as critical for the Maoist organisation to remain intact as it is for the seven party alliance to hold. This is in the best interests of all Nepalis. Civil society leaders who advocate the Maoist position and tolerate inflammatory rhetoric as a necessary evil must also realise the consequences.

Devi Sharma, email

Keeping in view the present electricity and fluidity of politics, as an ordinary citizen allow me to pose the following challenge: The prime minister, ministers and deputy prime ministers should replace their soldier bodyguards with Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s weaponless henchmen. Will the concerned authorities take up the challenge?

J Basnyat, email

I don’t agree with your editorial (#303) that we should ignore Maoist rhetoric because they are taking tough to placate their cadre. Concessions from all political actors can only happen in an atmosphere of moderate rhetoric, which by way of public record will define the mainstream going into constituent assembly elections.

A peace process means compromise. An equitable and sustainable political solution depends as much on including Maoist demands as it does on ensuring that every voice in Nepal has adequate political representation. This includes the right-of-centre (without royal liability), the centre, the left-of-centre, the Maoist army (or militia) and members of the state’s security forces. A peace agenda that is premised on meeting unconditional demands from one party runs the risk of undermining the entire process. While the exhibition of willingness on the part of the Maoists to enter the mainstream is a realistic pre-condition to peace, it is also a concession that serves their legitimisation just as much as it serves the national interest.

Name withheld, email

Re: Guest Column by Dipta Shah (‘Why, when and how?’, #303) How exactly did ranting such as this one even get the exclusive op-ed space on Nepali Times? I have never read such an appalling article in your paper. Am I out of the loop or was it just plain bad writing?

Sabeena Shree Rana, email

A DOG’S LIFE
Andrew Steelie (#303) misses the point, which is a NIMBY (not in my back yard) attitude. By all means, shoot street dogs in the head, at least they would die quickly, unlike now. But just who is going to organise this? The effectiveness of dog sterilisation has, of course, been proven by various programs throughout the world, including the one in Jaipur. ‘Lobbing a rock or two’ is merely an effective and cruel way to move them to someone else’s back yard. Great! Yes, there are always more pressing things to deal with—what is your community doing about these?

Helen Palmer, Kathmandu

GOALS
I’m a New Zealander living in Nepal, and I read with empathy Kundu Dixit’s dismay at the appallingly low scores of the current round of soccer matches (Under My Hat, ’Moving the goalposts’, #303). Excluding his points 3, 4 and 8, might I suggest that his final 8-point agreement with Sepp Blatter beautifully describes a game called rugby. In rugby, you have 30 huffing and heaving men (in dreads or crew-cuts) sloggin it out for 80 minutes. High scores are usually evident when the New Zealand team (the All Blacks) step onto the field to thrash their opponents senseless. All good, mindless fun, with no sissy-boys prancing around after scoring goals. If at all possible, do you think that the cable tv producers could perhaps extend their reach beyond Myanmar and further into Australia or New Zealand to steal air time for some of the major rugby games? I’ll pay an extra Rs 5 per month as my share.

Maurice Lee, 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. Email: letters@nepalitimes.com Fax: 977-1-5521013 Mail: Letters, Nepali Times, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Including the excluded
Janjati leaders say that sharing powers will fortify Nepal

F or more than a decade Sitaram Tamang and his colleagues have discussed how they would revive their ancestral lands: Tamangland. Now they believe the time has come.

In the wake of the people’s movement, Nepal’s indigenous people finally believe they will have proportional representation in their country’s governance.

That means “in 10 years we will have the majority of seats in parliament,” predicts Tamang of the Nepal Tamang Gheudung, “but we have no time—we have to join with Dalits, Madhesi and women to pressure the government.”

While almost all agree it’s time to restructure Nepal so that Janjatis and other “disadvantaged” groups need a larger say in running the state, there’s no consensus on how to achieve that.

Conservative voices argue that political parties themselves should first start having members from excluded groups. Once they are elected, this logic goes, these individuals will make decisions that favour their own. “The parties should ensure representation within themselves,” KB Gurung, NC general secretary told us. “Janjatis must be provided their language, religion and traditions. That must be given by the government and parties.”

Many outspoken, senior leaders of Janjatis and other excluded sectors argue that the time has passed when their people should depend on the largesse of the ruling ‘upper’ caste elite. Not only do they want to mould the country into a federal state with a central government and provinces, they say that smaller units should be based on ethnicity/language and should be autonomous. The Maoists go even a step further, saying that autonomous regions should have the right to become independent countries (see interview). “The whole nation is talking about a new constitution...it is the proper time to discuss all the national problems, of the ethnic people, the tariu people,” says rights activist Padma Ratra Tuladhar. “Ethnic groups want their own regions so they can have their own language, education in their mother tongue, their own culture.”

But Tuladhar says even the Maoists don’t understand this. Among the tens of thousands of posters that the party printed to advertise its recent giant rally in Kathmandu, none was in Newari, he points out.

Academics like Krishna Bhattachan argue that Nepal wasn’t so much unified by Kings Prithibi Narayan Shah but various regions were given autonomy under a federal state that addresses, ethnicity, geography and development issues,” he adds.

But Sitaram Tamang is matter-of-fact: “We don’t want to take over, we’re demanding only our fair share. We think that’s democracy.”

“From feudalism to federalism”

The Maoists shocked the nation when they redrew the map of Nepal in 2004 basing it mainly on ethnicity. Their senior leader Deb Gurung talked to us about exactly how these autonomous regions would function.

Nepal Times: Under the autonomy that you propose would each region be allocated complete political powers or would it be like a federal system where the regions get some powers and the centre other ones?

Deb Gurung: We have practised both systems in our own way. The autonomous regions have a constitution, judiciary and other state organs. Foreign affairs, national defence and money matters are vested in the federal government. Other powers, like schools, language, culture, natural resources and many other things are vested in the autonomous regions.

Then how do federal and autonomous systems differ?

We have guaranteed the right of secession to the autonomous regions. If they feel oppressed they can detach themselves from the central government.

So it’s possible that the country could split apart?

They have the right to secession but nowadays the trend of globalisation is that strength is found in unity.

Where would the resources come from for each region to run its own affairs, particularly in the west, the poorest part of the country?

The main resources are people’s capability and hard work. But Nepal’s feudal economic system has made the society dependent on others. Due to the misuse of local resources by the centre, local production has not developed nor have markets. Proper management of those resources would solve this problem.

Although your party has now agreed to participate in multi-party politics, your ultimate aim is a socialist or Marxist state, which is a centralised one. How can you reconcile that vision with autonomy?

In our evaluation of the history of states, including Vietnam, China and Cuba, we have observed certain problems they had, concerning state power, the army and other entities. Prachandapath, or democracy of the 21st century, is the outcome of this deep study with a view to matching form with content. Only on the basis of full democracy do you produce a unified state, not on the basis of dictatorship.

Many Janajatis and other oppressed peoples died for your vision of liberation via an armed struggle. Now you are telling them to put the gun aside and use the political process to achieve liberation. When the people’s war started that was also a political process, war is a continuation of politics through other means. The Nepali people are ready to participate no matter what form of struggle we choose.
How we can make it to the World Cup

ANFA must recast its role to invest on three critical priorities

A n article in the latest issue of Himal Khabarpatrika asks: If the war-torn African nation Angola could be a contender in this year’s World Cup soccer tournament in Germany, why not Nepal? But what no one is mentioning is how Angola became a contender in the first place. Angolan national football squad members have been playing professionally for clubs in countries such as Kuwait, Spain and the UK. Last year, Angola gathered their talented but internationally scattered players, and trained a team which played successfully in the qualifying matches. Indeed, in any narrative to make money from playing football, ANFA’s emphasis must be on promoting football. There are no photos of players or matches. Nor are there web links to the sites related to the present World Cup. Instead, ANFA’s emphases are on spending years on erecting half-finished buildings (hostels, office complexes, etc.) and sustaining its own committee-swollen bureaucracy.

That leaves room open for any Nepali football fan to worry that the road to mastering World Cup-caliber confidence starts with playing with, for and against international clubs and coaches in and out of Nepal, it’ll be difficult for our players to gain the physical, technical, tactical and psychological strengths that the game demands in the global arena. After all, scoring goals only at the Dashrat Stadium — sans international exposure — will continue to consign our players to the dustbin of global mediocrity.

Lead the talents: ANFA’s core business of promoting football has many interlocking elements. Putting politics and quarrels aside, it needs to start providing credible public leadership on matters related to football. It can do that by reordering its priorities, reaching out to partners, getting the right people on board (instead of old sportsmen who know little about working effectively with differently-skilled professionals) and completing activities one by one. Doing so consistently well for a number of years will help take Nepal closer to the goal of playing and winning qualifying matches in 2014 and 2018 before, who knows, bringing home the World Cup trophy in 2022—100 years after this beautiful game was first played in this country.

New Products

YAMAHA GLADIATOR: is the latest 125 cc bike from Yamaha. Morang Auto Works (MAW), the authorized distributor unveils the 5-speed ‘next generation fun bike’. Developed as a next generation fun bike, Gladiator brings with it better performance, new styling, greater handling and comfort. Morang has a promo price of Rs 109,900 for Gladiator manual and Rs 120,900 for Gladiator DX.
Interview with Baburam Bhattarai, chairman of the Maoist United Revolutionary Peoples Council, Radio Sagarmatha Ajaka Kura, 17 June

Radio Sagarmatha: Is it now confirmed that your party will be joining the interim government?
Baburam Bhattarai: This is more about the interim constitution rather than just about joining the interim government. We will join the interim government, but other things need to happen: date for the constituent assembly elections, dissolving parliament.

Can we expect a tussle about who will join the government?

The interim government will be a division of powers that will take us to the constituent assembly? It should not be taken as a division of power. The movement has given its mandate to the political and organised powers, those who were active during the movement including civil society. We should move forward using these powers. Instead of calling it a division of power it should be better understood as a provisional administration.

Thirteen thousand people have died, how will there be a republic?
The people’s movement which happened based on the support of the peoples’ war and with the support of the 12-point agreement, brought the country towards a republic. Had the political parties not given in to pressure from the king and foreign powers we would have had a republic by now. Still, instead of heading directly into a republic we will go through an interim system. There is no way to stop the republic now. Ninety percent of the people are for a republic. If you can’t even accept that, then there is no use calling yourself a democrat.

Will your cadres accept this bourgeois republic? Or is there dissatisfaction within the ranks?
That is our program. There is no question of not accepting it. That is the constitution of our party and the revolution. Our constitution and programs are clear: that the bourgeois republic will be formed under the leadership and participation of the proletariat.

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That is our program. There is no question of not accepting it. That is the constitution of our party and the revolution. Our constitution and programs are clear: that the bourgeois republic will be formed under the leadership and participation of the proletariat. It couldn’t have worked with the 1990 constitution?
You have to understand that a democratic republic is not a parliamentary republic. Our understanding is that a democratic republic is an interim provision slightly above a parliamentary republic but which has not reached the level of people’s republic. This could not happen through the 1990 constitution. It will be brought
by the present struggle and movement for formation of new laws from the constituent assembly.

There is a rumour that your party will be excluded from communist organisations like RIM and COMPOSA if you join the government? No. RIM and COMPOSA are our participatory organisations so there is no question of being excluded from them. Different parties have their own programs and differences in opinion will exist. We are in various committees of RIM and COMPOSA and no one can take us out of them.

What is the nature of your democratic republic?

In a democratic republic there will be no monarchy and the people will have complete power. Second, the army which has been loyal to the monarchy for 237 years, must be democratised, restructured and a new force raised. Third, the present form of government is feudalistic and Brahminised. A government that represents everyone, the exploited, the ethnic castes, various regions will be formed. Basic democratic norms such as competitive state system, rule of law and human rights will be an integral part of this system. The rights of women, Dalits and basic rights to education, health and employment will be secured. In the economic front revolutionary land reforms will take place. For a long time, Indian investments in Nepal have been under a semi-colonial monopoly. This will end and, Nepal will be developed as an independent democratic republic.

You say you are against personality cults, yet you glorify Prachandapath.

It’s not about not keeping Prachandapath. I was the one who proposed Prachandapath. It was natural for us to name the ideology after the chairman of the party. I have never been against Prachanda’s leadership or Prachandapath itself.

Selected Material Translated Every Week from the Nepali Press

Bhutani refugees

Editorial in Samaya, 30 June

World Refugee Day came and went this week, and it was just a formality. For the 100,000 plus Bhutani refugees who have been living in camps for the past 14 years in Jhapa and Morang there is no hope of any positive developments from this.

The UNHCR which has been trying to get the refugees repatriated to Bhutan or assimilated in the host country Nepal is now also working on third country resettlement. For the refugees, this can be a good option but not the best one. The UNHCR blames mainly Nepal for opposing resettlement in third countries. Nepal’s position is that Bhutan needs to take back some of its people as per the bilateral agreement. The Bhutani refugee leadership agrees with this.

Obviously, the issue of refugees is closely linked to the protection of human rights and democracy in Bhutan. A royal dictatorship can perhaps heap injustices on a minority for some time. But ultimately the people will be victorious, and this has been proven by the recent events in the refugees’ host country.

Unfortunately, the lack of an organised pro-democracy movement has bolstered the hand of the Bhutanese government. Neighbouring democratic country India and the UN have been indirectly helping the anti-human rights and anti-democratic crackdowns by the Bhutanese government against its own people.

It may appear to be in the short-term interest of some of the refugees, especially women and children, to be resettled in third countries. But to be forever torn apart from their country, communities, culture and families can only be a last resort. It is important to restart the bilateral ministerial-level talks between Nepal and Bhutan to resolve the issue. Nepal must also remind New Delhi that its neutrality has helped the Bhutan king to continue with his activities against the refugees. Such repressive behaviour will be a challenge to acceptable international standards in South Asia. It is also a test for King Gyanendra who seems to want to devolve his power and solve in democracy. He must remember that democracy isn’t possible by violating the basic human rights of his minority population. That will just set back democracy.
Most people find shelters for senior citizens depressing and avoid visiting them. But working on this photo feature at the Pashupati Bridhashram over the past six months, I have been inexplicably uplifted. I forget the stress of living in Kathmandu and my homesickness for my native Bangladesh. I feel fortunate that I have a family, as many of the senior citizens once had. But what gives me hope is that even though they have lost families and possessions, they still care. They care for each other and they retain a deep sense of humanity. The story of how they landed up here are fascinating.

GREETING: "Namaste, aram?" That is how Sankule Lati, 77, greets strangers with a namaste and a quick tilt to her head.

LAUGHING: Til Kumari Khatri, 71, and Yadongba Tamang, 70, laugh and play like children. Til Kumari has been here since 1998. Her daughter-in-law brought her to the shelter one day and left saying: "I'll be back soon." She never came back.

BATHING: Dhana Kumari Ranabhat, 99, takes a bath with the help of her husband Dil Bahadhur Ranabhat, 90. The couple is lucky, few here still have their spouses. Dhana Kumari was forced here after her husband died but married Dil Bahadhur, a retired soldier.

EATING: Bishnumaya Lati, 72, takes her evening meal with her two favourite dogs in attendance. She lives here with her husband.

COOKING: Kanchi Khatri cooks food in the shelter. She was the maid servant at the home of an astrologer and when she was no longer able to work nine years ago, her employer brought her here.

PRAYING: Laxmi Thapa, 68, prays to a wall full of pictures of the god she was married very young. Laxmi worked as a domestic all her life and when her employer abandoned her so she came here. Now she prays there is no one to help her.

CHATTING: Tirtha Maya Thapa, 75 and Man Kumari Thapa, 75, sit and chat. Tirtha Maya was so busy taking care of her parents, she never married. But after they died, her relatives evicted her from her house. Man Kumari’s long lost son came and took her home a few months ago.

PHOTOS and TEXT by

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In my old age

Shanti Tuladhar

My sons have grown up
Huts have turned into high-rises
They’re adding floors one by one
For me, there is just the pyre left

As the house grew taller
We were pushed lower
Lower than the staircase dark and dank
My son has grown up but what has he done?
I became a burden and he brought me here.
My family is foreign forever,
These strangers are family now.

In their old age they became a burden on their families who dumped them at Pashupati. For the elderly, it’s sometimes a relief that they are in such a holy place and don’t have to bear the taunts of a home where they are no longer welcome. None of them came here willingly and no one has anywhere to go. The Pashupati Bridhashram is run by the government so its budget is limited, it is congested, short-staffed and shows signs of mismanagement. There are 230 residents, 140 of them women.
**Why the hurry?**

Even ministers are unhappy at the haste with which the government and Maoists are drafting an interim constitution

**NARESH NEWAR**

The Maoists felt left out and demanded the dissolution of parliament on 16 June, but this last brake flick from the seven-party alliance.

Leaders of the SPA are getting increasingly frustrated with Maoist stubbornness and are saying so openly. The level of mistrust and scepticism is growing and the parties blame the Maoists’ unwillingness to surrender and will imperil other minority communities in similar situations elsewhere.

To let Thimphu scot free by resettling them in third countries. As Tek Nath Rijal, the indomitable Bhutanese freedom fighter rightly insists, much more than the modalities of a constituent assembly election, there has been little homework (see box). Women’s groups are demanding that there are no women in the committee made up to draft an interim constitution. Party leaders, even within the cabinet, have started to criticise both the government and the Maoists for rushing to dissolve parliament and go for the interim constitution.

**South African model**

So far, the South African model for a constituent assembly seems to fit the Nepali situation best. Seats in this type of assembly are elected by a system of proportional representation and allocated on the basis of the percentage of votes that each party gets. Each party appearing on the ballot will submit a ranked-order list of candidates.

The assembly will then replace the parliament and have the dual role of framing a new constitution and governing the country until a government is formed.

“We have to decide on three crucial things: methods of representation, electoral areas to be determined and methods of election,” explains Bhimraraaj Achariya, a constitutional lawyer working on proposals for the best model of a constituent assembly.

“If we go by general parliamentary election style, there will definitely be a tussle for power,” explains Achariya.

So far, the parties and the Maoists are reported to be positive about the South African model and indigenous groups are also said to be unbothered. “There should be proportional representation by 50 percent women candidates and 30 percent divisible representation, electoral areas to be determined and methods of election agreed in Gokarna last month to tone down the rhetoric, party leaders say.”

The Maoists, meanwhile, are on a public relations offensive meeting party leaders and Kathmandu-based diplomats.

“We hope that the Maoists will live up to their commitments, which we reminded their leaders again recently,” explained Koirala, who met Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai on Tuesday in the capital.

The Maoists have not returned property they seized and have refused to allow party workers back to their villages.

“In several places, our cadres have been constantly bullied and threatened by local Maoist cadres who are also not ready to return the property looted in the past even of poor people,” said Pradeep Nepal of the UML, who has been sharply critical of Maoist behaviour.

But citizens groups claim that the situation is not so dire as to jeopardise the understanding between the parties and the Maoists.

“There is no misunderstanding at all but merely an internal competition between the eight parties,” said political analyst Krishna Khanal.

Both the parties and Maoists are disseminating their own propaganda and naturally there are differences in opinions.

In addition, the party cadres are not really going to the people in the remote villages so it is a false claim that the Maoists are posing a threat to them.

Maoist leaders say the peace process is moving too slowly and the government is dragging its feet on the setting up of an interim government but the parties say the pace is more than expected. At a time when both sides are supposed to focus on the key issue of making a clear road map and finalising the modalities of a constituent assembly election, there has been little homework (see box).

**KIRAN PANDAY**

I n the late 1980s, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck decreed that Gross National Happiness (GNH) was more important to his country than Gross National Product (GNP).

He then promptly started evicting Nepalese-speaking Lhot赶赴 refugees in a relentless campaign that can only be described as ethnic cleansing. So far, because of complicit India and the international community, the government is preventing all contact with it.

He has used every trick in the book of predatory diplomacy to detract international attention from the very existence of the refugees—more than 110,000 of its citizens in makeshift camps in eastern Nepal. This glossy bhutan national human development report 2005 (lower case from the original) pretends the refugees don’t even exist. Which is quite convenient because if you reduce your population by one-sixth, obviously your per capita parameters suddenly look much rosier.

Like its celebrated postage-stamps, publications of the Royal Government of Bhutan are meant for display. This report is not an exception. It is crafted, designed, and produced in blood-chilled carbonated paper to impress. The test bruises with contemporary catch phrases: environmental sustainability, good governance, cultural heritage. But like all political states, the more the regime tries to convince readers that the government is doing great, the more you doubt its real intentions.

Bhutan has noted notable successes in rural development, hydropower, package tourism and public health. It is the only country so far to have become tuberculosis-free by government edict. Aid workers and journalists extol the virtues of this virgin land. Learning from their hosts, they love to say how great Bhutan is by pointing out what a mess Nepal is. The hypocrisy of New Delhi-based diplomats is breathtaking: they will not tolerate dictatorship, press curbs, ethnic cleansing or chauvinistic politics anywhere else in the world. But because Bhutan is so cute, it’s ok.

To get the true picture of Bhutan, you have to visit the camps in Japa or spend time with the refugees camped out last week at the UN in Kathmandu. Just as North Korea has the Juche idea, Bhutan has GNH. It comes out of the same dangerous ideology that sees itself as a superior and somewhat special race.

Compared to the dispirited diplomacy of poor democracies, dictators in the Third World manage to attract the best and brightest to push their agenda. Democracy is defined by private sector excellence and public sector mediocrity. It’s the other way round in well-entrenched autocracies where a combination of hope and fear keeps some outstanding professionals tied to the regime. The Bhutan government managed to project itself as the likely victim and has succeeded in hiding its crime against humanity of evicting over one-sixth of its population.

Instead of working for resettlement of the refugees, the regime tries to convince readers that the world will live up to its real intentions.

Why the hurry? In eastern Nepal. This glossy bhutan national human development report 2005 (lower case from the original) pretends the refugees don’t even exist. Which is quite convenient because if you reduce your population by one-sixth, obviously your per capita parameters suddenly look much rosier.
As the bus hurtled down the East-West Highway I tried desperately to apply some semblance of order to my racing thoughts. As we entered Rapti Zone and passed the barren landscape of the inner tarai, involuntary memories swarmed around my head. The scent of ripening mangos and the luminous green of the rice fields. Suddenly the name of the eldest daughter of the family that I lived with, a name I had been trying to remember ever since arriving again in Nepal, came back to me: Sumila. Images and feelings long dormant came back to life.

Dang is not the first place that comes to most people’s mind when they think of Nepal. It has been a Maoist stronghold and Ghorahi was the first place where the Maoists attacked the army in November 2001.

That was when I was here last, volunteering with Student Partnership Worldwide teaching English and environmental education. The people and culture of this part of the country would leave an indelible impression on me. The family that I lived with for five months and the school and community in which I worked, are what brought me back.

After three years of university and two years struggling in London as a freelance photographer, I've finally made it back to Dang. Back to the heat and the parched terrain, back to the vibrant colours and the most generous people on the planet.

I didn’t know what to expect as the bus pulled into Ghorahi. As I checked into my room at the Rapti Super Lodge, I was both relieved and a little disappointed to find it in the same state as when I used to stay here occasionally five years ago. My room is like a sauna, fully equipped with a painfully slow-moving fan whose motor generates more heat than the cooling power of the blades.

About 20 minutes out of Ghorahi is the Tharu community of Syari Ammapur. The Tharus are landless, and looked down upon by neighbouring communities. When I ask Geg Bahadur Thapa, the community leader, to tell me about the problems the families here face everyone laughs. “We have all the problems,” he says. “We have no water, no toilet, not enough food to eat, none to sell, we cannot clothe ourselves or our children and we cannot send them to school.”

The adults are uneducated but acutely aware of the need for education. The thought that their children will be no better off than something to do,” says 23-year-old Raju Panthi. “I don’t support everything that the Maoists say, but at least they are saying something,” he adds. Sankaip from Ghorahi refused to come with me to the rally and is far less enthusiastic. “I hate them,” he says, “they are terrorists. They have done nothing good for our people, only killed them.” I wish I could say that loktantra has brought new hope to the people of Dang. But I couldn’t see it. All the people I spoke to gave me a funny smile when I suggested that things now are really going to change. The young people especially seemed sceptical, with no faith in their politicians or the mechanics of democracy. Older businessmen also didn’t foresee things changing for the better. Everyone is focused on the here-and-now, deeply suspicious of anything the Maoists have to say.

Seeing the family I lived with again and visiting the school that I taught at after so many years brought back a whole string of highly charged feelings. The vibrancy, warmth and generosity of both the people and the place have stayed the same.

The mountains are what bring people to Nepal and I love the mountains. They are where my head belongs. But my heart? My heart belongs to Dang.
The German goalkeeper, Jens Lehmann, dismissed it as a ‘joke of the World Cup’. Ahead of the 2006 World Cup, observers were convinced that the Teamgeist design is kicking off with a silly + as a prefix and Adidas’s lofty claims that it was the smoothest, roundest and most accurate soccer ball ever, the Teamgeist seemed set to become the joke of the 2006 World Cup. Its prospects were not helped by the fact that many of the correspondents flocking to Germany remembered that Adidas made startlingly similar statements four years ago when it unveiled the Fevernova ball for the 2002 tournament.

How has the Teamgeist performed since the World Cup started? Is it living up to Adidas’s claims? Goalies are still grumbling but to the surprise of cynics, the new ball does seem to be levelling up the game. It’s always tempting to dismiss innovations in ball design as marketing hype but this one is creating more excitement,” said Jack Huckle, director of museum and archives at the National Soccer Hall of Fame in Oneonta, New York. “It can be shot from longer distances with greater impact and bent at greater speed. You see it exploding off the players’ feet. As a former goalkeeper, I understand why they don’t miss it.”

The commercial importance of the World Cup ball to Adidas is obvious. Adidas pays millions of dollars to be the official ball supplier to the World Cup in the hope of creating a bestseller. Having sold a record six million of the Fevernova ball of 2002, it has even higher expectations of the Teamgeist. It is harder to understand why designing a soccer ball should be so daunting. After all, it is a ball. How hard can it be to design a round object of a specific size and weight? The challenge is to produce a ball in such a robust form that it endures, rather than inhibits, the quality of play by behaving in exactly the same way wherever and whenever it is kicked.

From the late 1800s to 1970, soccer balls consisted of 18 hand-stitched panels. During the 1966 World Cup, viewers complained they could not follow the ball on their black-and-white television screens, and FIFA commissioned Adidas to design a television-friendly alternative. The result was the Telstar with 32 leather panels – 12 black pentagons and 20 white hexagons. Launched at the 1970 World Cup in Mexico, it has been the default design for soccer balls ever since.

“After so many years of 32 panels, we decided to try something completely different for 2006, and chose a 14-panel structure,” said Hans-Peter Nürnberg, who led the Teamgeist design team for Adidas as senior development engineer.

The new ball has two layers, inner and outer, with a new thermal bonding technology used to create a seamless surface. Adidas’s rationale is that this makes the ball more consistent because the impact of the player’s foot will be the same wherever it strikes the surface. As there are no seams, the ball does not absorb moisture during the game and thereby stays the same weight.

Adidas subjected the Teamgeist to laboratory and field tests before putting the ball into production last July. Nürnberg said it exceeded expectations in the tests. But then, with my kicking by a robotic leg to replicate the 2,000 kicks it would endure in a typical World Cup match and rotating the ball 250 times under water. Even so, the toughest test for a soccer ball is its performance in a match. After the first stage of the World Cup, observers were concerned that the Teamgeist can be kicked more powerfully from longer distances. Similarly, the swerve of the ball is

World Cup watchers revolt

Citizens are finding innovative ways to bypass FIFA’s tv monopoly

AHMAD HUMEID
in JORDAN

The 2006 World Cup in Germany is the first time that people in the Arab world have felt the overwhelming power of FIFA and its absolute control of TV images from the world’s greatest sporting event.

Want to watch the World Cup? Then you’ll have to pay something like $200 to get a satellite dish and receiver from the Arab Radio and TV Network (ART). And you can’t just buy a month’s access to watch the games. You’ll have to get a full year of access to ART’s ‘bouquet’ of channels whether you want it or not.

In a country like Jordan, where many people are barely able to make ends meet, changing them to watch their favorite global sporting events has created a lot of bitterness. That’s why King Abdullah ordered the setting up of 30 public viewing screens across the country for people who cannot afford PayTV.

Those screens are not the only solution. Many Jordanians have become experts in satellite receiver hacking. Everyone, including the country’s top cartoonist Hajaj, is talking about breaking the codes for certain European satellite channels. Even with the codes changing daily, people are flocking to the internet where they find satellite hacker forums that provide the latest codes.

In Palestine, local TV channels are re-broadcasting the games on terrestrial waves. ART has assured these broadcasters that they will not be sued. Amongst all the negativity directed at ART, the company’s tolerance of the Palestinian TV stations’ ‘piracy’ of their broadcasts was a good PR move.

On the popular Arab news channel Al Arabiyah, only freeze frames of the games are being shown during sports news bulletins.

Normal people using the net to hack satellite feeds is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to what people can do to circumvent the monopolistic powers of mainstream media. User generated content in the form of pictures and videos shared on the web is starting to become a more visible media byproduct of the tournament.

I can easily imagine a situation in the near future where people in the stadium would be shooting the live event with their camera phones and ‘webcasting’ them to friends, family or even a wider audience. Of course such video streams would be no match for the ‘official’ professional, multi-angle, professionally directed video. But in an age where the organizers of major popular, global events are so aggressive in protecting their broadcasts, this form of citizen media might become a viable alternative.

Traditional media companies will not disappear overnight because of the power of people to generate content. But user-generated content is a factor that no one can afford to ignore anymore.

Excerpted from Ahmad Humeid’s weblog

having a ball at
accentuated as it bends to the left or right. "The bend is more dramatic," affirmed David James of Sheffield Hallam University’s sports engineering department. "This ball is great for players like David Beckham, at least it should be." Another factor, analyzed by his colleagues, is the +Teamgeist’s tendency to swerve from side to side before hitting the back of the net when it is kicked straight. "This ball is great for players like David Beckham, at least it should be." Another factor, analyzed by his colleagues, is the +Teamgeist’s tendency to swerve from side to side before hitting the back of the net when it is kicked straight. David Beckham, at least it should be.

All of this makes life tougher for goalkeepers, as they face the +Teamgeist without spin. The +Teamgeist also has a tendency to confuse goalies by wavering as it hurtles towards them. James attributes this to the aerodynamic complexity of its shape. "We’re at the cutting edge of science here because we understand more about the aerodynamics of airplanes and Formula One cars than of spheres," he said. "A perfect sphere moves through the air with considerable difficulty, which is why sports balls tend to have rough surfaces. The felt on tennis balls and dimples on golf balls improves their aerodynamics and helps them to move faster."

Despite the goalies’ grumbles, the +Teamgeist has proved even more popular than Adidas expected, setting a new sales record of 15 million balls so far. Nürnberg’s design team is already working on its successor. "We need to erase the imperfections in its structure," he said. "Although we can’t expect to produce something as revolutionary as the +Teamgeist for every World Cup."
CRIMINALS ARE EXPLOITING FOOTBALL FANS IN THE MOST DESPIRABLE WAY AND WE URG...
A school for Kristi

On 22 August 2002, 19 people died when a Twin Otter flight from Jomsom with 16 German tourists on board crashed just before landing near Pokhara airport. Among the dead were Renate Rockstroh and her husband Rainer, both teachers and on their first trip to Nepal. Renate’s brother Marcos travelled here to take home the bodies and met Pokhara tourism entrepreneur Laxman Subedi. The two discussed ways to commemorate the deaths and lives of the Rockstrohs and thought of helping the local community in the village of Kristi where the crash took place.

Marcos went back to Germany and threw around some ideas with friends, including Rolf Schmelzer, a German journalist who has been visiting Nepal for the past 15 years. They decided to combine a memorial for the victims with a long-term project to help the village. Subedi contacted the villagers of Kristi to find out what they needed the most.

Although it is five km outside Pokhara with stunning views of the city below and the Annapurnas beyond, the road to Kristi is rough and it’s common to see locals pushing and pulling stuck vehicles out of giant potholes or from the river bed. Kristi’s 5,000 inhabitants are a self-sufficient lot with a relatively high standard of living because of cash crops like oranges. They willingly embrace new ideas and many have biogas to fuel their kitchens.

In the end, the villagers decided what they needed was a primary school so their children would no longer have to make a two hour roundtrip every day. The Social English School opened in 2002 with 15 students and now counts 111 pupils up to Class 3.

One of its buildings is the Gunter Hauser Memorial School Building, supported by Dentists Without Limits and German journalists led by Schmelzer who visit Kristi every year.

“The people are very happy with the school and with the help they get from the Germans every year,” says Subedi. “They never expected that sometimes such a good thing come out of such a horrible tragedy.”

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Min Bajracharya
Given the rapid pace of renovation and beautification taking place in the nation’s capital these days, we can be fairly certain that Nepal can make a successful bid to host the 2050 Football World Cup.

One of the most important criteria that FIFA attaches to cities applying to organise the games is whether or not the host metropolis is self-sufficient in crazy hats. And as the world’s major supplier of lunatic hats for the last three World Cups, the city has assured FIFA’s Site Selection Committee that there is no danger of Kathmandu running out of headgear in the run-up to the 2050 games. There is, however, one small problem: Nepal may cease to exist by then. But we’ll cross that bridge when we get to it.

So that just leaves us with the knotty question of ensuring that the multi-billion rupee Tinkune Intersection Reconstruction Project will see completion by January 2050. The Transportation Sub-Committee of the World Cup Organising Central Committee (Unified Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist) is optimistic that this should be possible, given the breakneck speed at which the Metropolitan Authorities are turning the intersection into a lake during this current monsoon season. It should be able to accumulate enough water by 2050, it is hoped.

Similarly, Rani Pokhari, Ratna Park and the Khula Munch are being unified into a single park-cum-parking lot to accommodate World Cup fans. Since pedestrians have refused to use both the overhead walkway and the underground passageway at Asan intersection, Kathmandu Metropolitan City will put up a booby-trapped barbed wire fence so no pedestrian from Bag Bajar can cross the road to Asan and vice versa. The work is expected to be completed in the next 44 years.

According to a timetable made available to mediapersons this week, potholes of diameter 1m and more along Sat Dabato, Balkhu, Lajimpat, Jorpati and Bhaisepati are scheduled for repairs by 2010. All zebra crossings will be repainted by 2023, field trials and simulation exercises to untangle gridlocks at major bottlenecks are expected to be completed in late 2032 and the traffic light synchronisation will go into effect by 2049 in time for the big event.

Asked if Nepal had enough stadiums for the qualifying and knockout rounds of the 2050 games the Organising Committee said: “Ummm, hadn’t thought of that. But we’ll have plenty of pubs and they’ll be allowed to remain open after 10PM.”

Kathmandu and Patan have traditionally had healthy competition ever since the Malla period when the two kingdoms fought vicious wars over which one had tastier buff momos. Today, this competition is manifested in the way in which the Patan Sub-Municipality has made sure that not a single halogen street lamp installed during the 2000 SAARC Summit is in working condition. And once Kathmandu Metropolitan City found out that Patan streets were dark, it decided to be one up by switching off all street lights between Babar Mahal and Min Bhaban until further notice.

This sense of camaraderie and healthy competition will be carried into the World Cup when Patan co-hosts the 2050 games by which time, the mayor’s office has assured us, tree stumps along Pulchok will be finally removed and replaced with hoarding boards. Going by the speed of past reconstruction, we have no reason to doubt that the work will be completed in time.