



# Waste management

While peaceniks are talking about arms management, there is an urgent need to sort out this mess.

Kathmandu municipality has started dumping garbage at the Open Theatre, the site of massive pro-democracy protests in April, after locals at Teku prevented the transfer station there from being used.

As garbage started piling up in neighbourhoods around the city, the municipality started using the open space in the city center next to Bir Hospital to dump it.

The stink from the rotten garbage now pervades the hospital and Ratna Park, and there is fear of the rubbish spreading disease. The municipality says it is trying to negotiate with Teku residents, but it may take a few days before the trash is cleared.



KIRAN PANDAY

The UN team is in town, but are we expecting too much from it?

# High hopes

SUMAN PRADHAN

The job of the high-level UN assessment team in town this week is two-fold: get the government and Maoists to first agree on setting weapons aside and then offer UN help for the task.

Getting an agreement on arms will be the tougher challenge for the team lead by Staffan de Mistura, who arrived in Kathmandu on Thursday.

"There is already a Nepali peace process and we are here to help," de Mistura told reporters. The Swedish diplomat has served as special UN representative in southern Lebanon and Iraq.

The government's public position is that Maoist arms should be 'managed' before the rebels join the government and constituent assembly polls are held.

"The Maoists will not be included in an interim government until they are free of arms," Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat told us, "the Nepal Army will subject itself to UN monitoring but it will also keep a watchful eye over the Maoists."

Maoist chief negotiator Krishna Bahadur Mahara says his party has accepted the UN's role in the peace process, but draws a distinction between 'monitoring' and 'management': "The UN can

only monitor arms, we will do the actual arms management."

It's not just semantics. The army doesn't want its weapons under the supervision of any group, and therein lies the UN's difficulty. The Maoist demand for the military to also place its arms under UN monitoring could be posturing ahead of tough negotiations.

The three-month Maoist ceasefire announced after the April uprising, scheduled to end Thursday, has been extended.

Despite bending over backwards to appease the generals, the government's hold over the army is still tenuous. Minister Mahat told us: "The Nepal Army is

fully under our control." But the only ones with leverage over the military are said to be India, the United States and, because of lucrative peace-keeping duties, the UN.

Despite its sorry experiences in Rwanda and Kosovo, the prospect of the UN playing an active role in Nepal's peace process has raised hopes here.

"Yes, I am concerned by high expectations," de Mistura said. "The UN has substantial experience in these areas, but it will only succeed if all sides want success."

The UN team is expected to meet government officials, Maoists and MPs. Its presence in Kathmandu this week coincides with a flurry of visits to Kathmandu by Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Tawei and the Japanese Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Yasuhisa Shiozaki. ●

Editorial p2  
Super parliament

Times

Weekly Internet Poll # 308

Q. What do you think of the pace at which the SPA government is moving?

Total votes: 3,360

Fast 34%

Adequate 16%

Slow 78%

Don't know/care 12%

Weekly Internet Poll # 308. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

Q. How hopeful are you that the UN mission will be successful in overseeing arms management?

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editors@nepalitimes.com,  
www.nepalitimes.com

Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit  
Desk Editor: Marty Logan  
Design: Kiran Maharjan Web: Bhushan Shilpakar  
Vicepresident Corporate Affairs: Sneh Sayami  
Advertising: Sambhu Guragain advertising@himalmedia.com  
Subscription: subscription@himalmedia.com  
Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur  
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu Tel: 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013  
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018



# Prithbi Narayan's message

## 'If citizens are empowered, the nation is strong'

### SUPER PARLIAMENT

The national mood tends to swing from euphoria to hopelessness. We are swayed by media headlines that magnify the messy indecision of the seven party alliance government and chronic Maoist sabre-rattling.

The media can't seem to get enough of Maoist talking heads and gives their fiery rhetoric wide play. Much of it is posturing or meant for internal consumption, but the press is hardwired to cover only quarrels. Thus, it spreads the perception in the public that the peace process is always on the verge of collapse.

It isn't. After coming this far, the comrades aren't about to go back to the jungle. Why should they, their soft landing has after all gone much better than they expected. Their rejection of any suggestion of renouncing violence is no surprise because they worry about being chased out of villages when the fear of the gun is gone. A premature laying down of arms could prompt a hardline faction to splinter off. Hence their allergy to the word 'decommissioning'.

But the Grey Shirts know as well as anyone else that ultimately there can be no participation in an interim government and elections without effective demobilisation—call it 'arms management' or whatever you like.

Even so, the prevalent paranoia that the Maoists are ready to go back to war after the monsoon is misplaced. Those who think the Maoists have been handed concessions on a platter must bear in mind the alternative: a return to brutal conflict that was killing 40 plus Nepalis a week. Peace is about compromise, and offering the armed protagonists (however misguided they may be) an honourable exit to a parliamentary path.

The Godavari Summit this month saw an interim parliament as a compromise between those who want to keep the house and those who want to scrap it. This is a feasible path to an eight-party government to prepare for constituent assembly elections. There will be haggling over numbers, but the proposal to set up a 'super parliament' with 42 additional seats for the Maoists seems feasible.

The Maoists want civil society activists included in an expanded parliament, and a section of our self-proclaimed civil society has responded by giving the Maoists unquestioning support. How could activists who were so right about the king be so wrong about the Maoists, and so forgiving of their methods? In fact, it is only the NGOs (and not civil socialites) who are raising issues of transitional justice and human rights.

Civil society stalwarts did well to keep out of the interim government even when offered portfolios as a reward for their role in the April Uprising. They must also keep out of the provisional legislature. When civil society joins the executive, judiciary or legislative arms of the state, it is no longer civil society.

Every day for the past two months, the country's new democratic wave washes up yet another protest at the statue of Prithbi Narayan Shah at the Singha Darbar intersection.

If it's not women activists seeking greater say in decision-making, it is janajatis or dalits demanding participation, or labour unions who want a minimum wage, or kamaiyas



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Bharat Basnet**

demanding land promised them by successive governments.

They all appear at the foot of Prithbi Narayan Shah, the country's great unifier whose vandalised figure is wrapped in a fading red shroud. There is a certain irony that excluded Nepalis gather below the king of Gorkha seeking justice. Even before Nepal existed, the Gorkha kingdom was renowned for its righteousness. They used to say: "If you seek justice, go to Gorkha."

But after 237 years, instead of nation-building we Nepalis are busy running down a king who built the nation. Nepal is the oldest nation state in South Asia, and

one that was coveted but never conquered by the

colonial power in the region.

The descendents of Ram Shah must have realised early on that their small hilltop principality overlooking the Marsyangdi would not survive if it stayed small. If young Prithbi hadn't taken it upon himself to begin the Gorkha expansion, Nepal as a nation would not exist today.

The warrior king was driven by ambition and the vision of a country woven together from its ethnic, linguistic, religious and gender diversity. Prithbi Narayan Shah celebrated Nepal's plurality and preached inclusiveness centuries before it became a buzzword. He wasn't after conquest, but unification. His standing instructions were not to vanquish but incorporate, not to impose Gorkha culture but to preserve local customs. He didn't force the kingdoms and principalities he overran to assimilate, but assimilated Gorkha into an emerging Nepal. An example of this is how he grafted Gorkha into Kathmandu Valley's Newar kingdoms, preserved the local culture and festivals and integrated himself into the social fabric.

The figure inside that red shroud represents a king who was ahead of his time. He sought not just to unite Nepal but to have a prosperous, self-sufficient and strong country. Before he died, Prithbi Narayan passed on his mission statement to successors in the famous work, *Dibyopadesh* in which he laid out the basics of a governance structure that was representative, inclusive and participatory.

He imagined Nepal as a

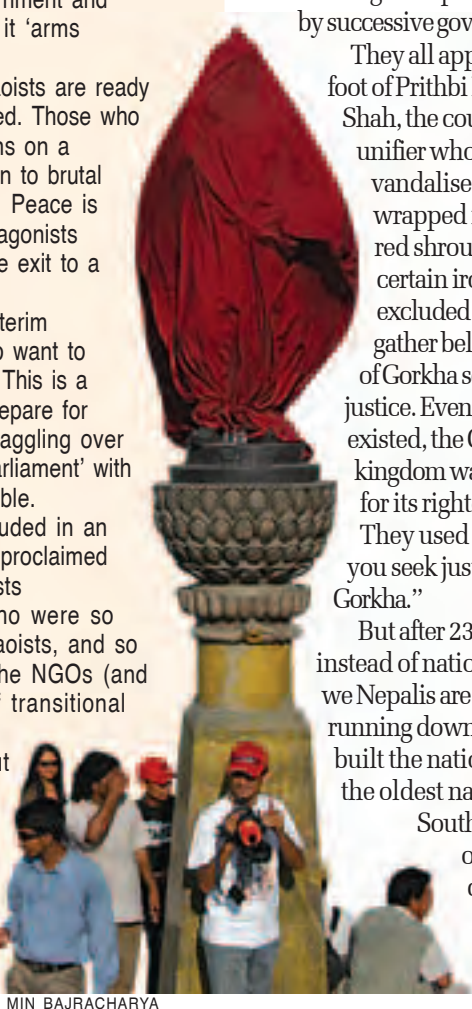
garden of all religions and ethnicities blooming side by side. He thought a stable and prosperous country would ensure Nepal's survival at a time when it was threatened by expanding empires in the neighbourhood. And the wise king knew this was only possible if all the people had a say in the governance process and were treated equally.

"If citizens are empowered, the nation is strong," he wrote in *Dibyopadesh*. If only his successive rulers of Nepal acted on this simple yet important message. Nearly two and half centuries ago, King Prithbi Narayan left instructions to carry out the very tasks that the placards at demonstrations below his statue today demand: 'inclusive democracy', 'national capital development', 'justice for all'. He understood the geopolitics of being sandwiched between two giant neighbours and sought to maximise its benefit for the national interest.

So why do we treat this great king as if he is to blame for what came later? Why do we fault a statesman who had the wisdom to see that citizens and king should be alert about abuse of power by the other?

Perhaps that is why the statue was erected at the gates of the government secretariat, to remind Nepal's rulers what the nation's founding king had said long ago. Why are we destroying the memory of the very person who made us Nepalis who we are? So we can hold our heads high? ●

Bharat Basnet is an environmental activist and tourism entrepreneur



MIN BAJRACHARYA

# 100 days of vicissitudes

## The UN can use its clout to make parliament and insurgents see reason

Two conflicting letters from the government and the insurgents means the UN team led by Staffan de Mistura that arrived in Kathmandu this week has an unenviable task at hand. Contestations are fierce as the 100 day honeymoon period of the restored house nears.



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
**C K Lal**

To establish its credibility, the UN team must succeed in convincing parties to the conflict that a just peace will have adequate space for everyone. The state, however, has a natural advantage over the insurgents. The legality of the eight-point agreement signed on 16 June is no different from the 12-point understanding reached between the Maoists and the seven party alliance in November 2005. Both are promises to act together. Their political significance is obvious, but neither documents have official sanction. While it would be prudent for the

government to honour all commitments made by its leaders in their political capacity, they aren't bound by its provisions in any way.

In legal terms, Pushpa Kamal Dahal's letter of 24 July to Kofi Annan is *ultra vires*—it's beyond Dahal's power or authority to write to any international body without the concurrence or endorsement of the government. What the letter does, however, is draw the attention of the world towards the fragility of the peace process in Nepal. The deceptive calm in the country barely hides the simmering discontent. The seven party bigwigs have appropriated all the gains of the April Uprising while the others are left with nothing.

When King Gyanendra capitulated and restored parliament on 24 April it was assumed that the obsolete parliament would make way for a new compact of the people. The house confirmed the premise with a voice vote when it adopted a resolution on 30 April to conduct the constituent assembly polls as soon as possible. The Magna Carta declaration of 18

May was ridiculed by the Maoists, but the people at large accepted it in a positive spirit. Parliamentarians were hailed for their courage. But it didn't take long for them to lose public esteem. Now they are being seen as blockers rather than facilitators of the peace process.

Newly-empowered MPs have slowly begun to vacillate as parliament becomes a forum to undermine the importance of the constituent assembly, the main objective of its resurrection. Its rejuvenated members seem to believe that there is no law that can check them anymore. Such an attitude is sure to invite an equal and opposite reaction from a group that has never acquiesced to parliamentary supremacy: the Maoists.

Despite the fresh oath of the Commander-in-Chief on the floor of the house, it's quite unlikely that the army will easily accept the invincibility of a legislature that has already lost its constitutional basis and is on the verge of throwing away its political utility. In their hurry to make heads of constitutional

bodies bow, parliamentarians chose to ignore the fundamental premise of all promises: oaths taken under duress are legally untenable and morally abhorrent. Violating clear instructions of the government, Nepal Army celebrated the birthday of the king in traditional manner.

Unlike the eight-point agreement, the 25-point Ceasefire Code of Conduct of 26 May has some official standing as it has been signed by both the Maoists and the government. This documents needs to be the basis of the UN Mission's exploratory works. Effective implementation of the Code of Conduct will at least secure the fundamental rights of all citizens, an important precondition for future peace negotiations.

The peace train has made halting progress since anti-king protests began to gather steam from 6 April 2006. The challenge now is to keep it on track and maintain confidence among its co-passengers. This is where the UN can use its clout to make parliamentarians and insurgents see reason. ●



## LETTERS

## GREED AND NEED

This year's budget is for the greedy, paid for by the needy ('Mirage', #306). From past experience we know that most provisions will never be implemented. Generally, up to half the government expenditure went down the drain. The health of our economy will not improve until we inject the S factor in our physical laws: make them sane, simple and stable. After the Jana Andolan II we wanted a leader, a healer and a pilot to weather the storm. We wanted a leader to hold the country together and bring back self-confidence, a healer to treat the political as well as the economic wounds which have been inflicted on the country, and a pilot guiding the country onward to its tryst with destiny.

**Badri Das Shrestha, email**

## PEACE PROCESS

I am astonished by the immaturity and lack of understanding the current political leaders are showing. They are damning the morale of the Nepal Army by forcing them to disarm without making the Maoists disarm as well. Who will protect the army if peace talks fail? The Maoists are an illegal force and should be asked to disarm. Our only protection from the Maoists is the Nepal Army so we cannot afford to demoralise them and lose their support.

**Abhisek Bhandari, email**

- Although the way the government's letter to UN was sent raises suspicions in the minds of the Maoists, all is not lost. There were statements of confessions and admissions from the seven party alliance and similar heartening expressions from the Maoists. Fortunately there doesn't seem to be danger of negotiations breaking down. May the leaders be sincere and serious about creating a new *lokatantrik* Nepal based on equality and justice. The royals may join in the creation. If the royals make their property public and start investing in Nepal, imagine the difference it would make to the lifestyle of Nepalis.

**Ishwari Pradhan, email**

- There will be no permanent peace unless the Maoists disarm or decommission their weapons. It is not viable to retain arms and pursue peace; they can't keep a foot in each boat. If Maoists have any trace of a democratic credential, they have to pursue a peace deal with utmost sincerity. There can be no two ways to break this stalemate, and

nation is not going to wait forever to settle this deadlock. Either the parties or the Maoists take the nation towards peace and democracy, or the people of this nation, who have suffered 10 years of abuse, will look for different avenues. The government has to make a formal commitment to the people and the international community, stating that the Maoists will be brought into the mainstream and that there will be rehabilitation of all who joined the Maoists by securing them jobs. What is the point of holding constitutional assembly elections if the Maoists won't honour the verdict of people and go back to the activities which they are best at? The wanton remarks by Maoist leaders will be counterproductive to the peace process. They have to show much more maturity and sincerity than they have so far.

**Pratt Rana, email**

- If the finances of the monarch and the activities of the ministers of the royal regime are scrutinised in detail wouldn't it also be fair to look into the finances of the Maoists and where they get their money from? How about looking at Prachanda's assets and activities while he was living in India? While politicians and self-styled student leaders scream for a republic, it is time for the citizens of Nepal to ask who is really going to benefit from a republic? Basically, the answer is easy: the main benefactors will be the same politicians and agitators who scream the loudest.

**G Lars, email**

- I have been watching the activities of the high level commission investigating alleged excesses during *Janaandolan-2* with very keen interest. Initially I had no prejudices against the commissioners but they seem to be resorting to investigative excesses. The members have forgotten that they need to be apolitical investigators, operating in the shadows away from media glamour. Also, just look at those summoned left, right and centre to depose before the commission. From the Acting IGP to the ex-Speaker of the HoR to the ex-CJ, nobody is spared. Should the commission now call KP Bhattarai, Marichman Singh, Surya Bahadur Thapa, Lokendra Bahadur Chand and Pashupati Shumsher to find out what they talked to the king about before his final speech? It must also then dare to summon India's emissary Karna Singh, and why leave out Moriarty and the EU diplomats, who pressured SPA leaders to accept the king's first offer. Let's now bring the tainted king to book instead of putting him under a barrage of humiliation. Enough is

enough, commissioners. Don't serve your political masters in order to earn prestigious future appointments. Wind up and submit your report. And let us Nepalis close this ugly chapter of our history with a 'censure motion' against the unpopular royal regime.

**Pradeepta Sharma, Mumbai**

## GIRIJA

Your recent editorial ('Beyond Koirala,' #305) is both timely and of vital importance to the nation. Nepalis have never been fans of GP Koirala. To be truly honest, if he were to pass on, it would make way for a new generation of leaders. That said, in the current context, most Nepalis are praying for his good health and speedy recovery. Without Koirala's political stature and his ability to hold together the seven party alliance all hell could break loose. However, in the interest of the nation, Koirala needs to designate a successor, otherwise there will be a tussle within the NC, the SPA and SPA+M governments. It is not necessary for us to replicate the Nehru clan of India by keeping the political leadership in the Koirala family. If we are going to be a true democracy, then anyone with the right abilities should be able to lead a party and the nation regardless of their background.

**SN Singh, email**

- It is high time for Girijaji to retire. What is happening now does not augur well for the future. Already there are reports of money transactions and irregularities in appointments to lucrative posts, and unauthorised use of a government vehicle by a minister's son. It is now time for the people to turn against these shameless politicians.

**Name withheld, email**

## GNLF AND MAOISTS

There is an eerie resemblance between the Maoists and the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) in Darjeeling. Agreed, it was at a different time, a different place with a different set of demands and at a different scale of things, etc. But it did involve us Nepalis or Gorkhalis as they prefer to call themselves. Whilst Supremo Subash Ghising and his top brass were trying to put their best foot forward and playing to the gallery, the soldiers of the Gorkha Voluntary Cell (GVC) were busy playing judge and jury.

Providing quick fix and mostly violent solutions to all problems ranging from land disputes to adulterous husbands, levying taxes, extortion, extra judicial executions and more. Down below lurked the game of cloak and dagger, as soldiers muscled

into each other's territory, personal grudges were hammered out in the guise of political differences, disillusionment felt, counter-revolution plans hatched and groups regrouped along ethnic lines. Never mind the scavenging pseudo GVCs at the sidelines. All it took was a disgruntled trigger-happy revolutionary in the form of Chatrey Subba to march straight back to the jungle to start things all over again. Anything different happening here? Join the dots.

**Yadav Bantawa, email**

## SITA AND ANJANA

Your page one picture ('Jumping the gun,' #307) of Comrade Sita, who said she was 18 years old on sentry duty, is tearfully emotional. The picture speaks for itself. I asked myself: are her hands old enough to carry such a heavy gun? If she were privileged enough like Anjana Rajbanshi, she would not raise the gun. I agree with CK Lal (State of the State, 'Anjana Rajbanshi's Journey' #307) that, although Rajbanshi is janajati and attended an ill-equipped private school, she is among a privileged Nepali because she has access to national resources. If we compare Sita and Anjana, it makes one think about the issue of special reservation for women.

**Prakash Pangen, email**

- CK Lal's columns often provide mild entertainment for those of us amused by rants. But in his nitpicky unpacking of the 'real meaning' of a smart young woman's achievement (State of the State, 'Anjana Rajbanshi's Journey', #307), he hits a mean-spirited, sour note. Mr Lal, could you *try* to be gracious about the fact that while this SLC topper might not win the Olympics of the Suffering Life, she worked hard and used her brains to get where she is. Why diminish that?

**Geena Lantana, 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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# The country's future is dark



KUNDA DIXIT

It is simple demand and supply: Nepal's electricity demand is increasing at 60 MW a year and no new major hydropower unit is coming onstream in the foreseeable future to cover the shortfall.

The coming winter and winters till 2013 will see power cuts lasting 8-10 hours a day even if new projects are undertaken right away. Still, at the Ministry of Water Resources and the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) it is difficult to detect a sense of urgency. The government is preoccupied with politics and the NEA has taken three months just to appoint a political crony with an irrigation background as chief and it still doesn't have a board of directors.

Besides political lethargy, the reason for the energy emergency is that Nepal's hydropower units generate surplus electricity during the wet season but have a deficit during the dry months. This means there will be a 150MW shortfall during peak hours in the dry season.

Experts say that the only alternative to power cuts in the short-term is a campaign to reduce demand. But in the medium and long term, Nepal needs to immediately begin work on new hydropower plants for

domestic consumption and export.

Loss from the grid due to pilferage and technical reasons is 24 percent, one of the highest in the world. Reducing this by half would be equivalent to installing a new 60MW powerplant. A campaign to get consumers to switch from incandescent to compact fluorescent lamps could reduce nationwide energy demand by another 40MW.

Implementing seasonal tariffs for industries would earn NEA Rs 2 billion a year selling flood energy that would otherwise be wasted and time-of-day pricing would reduce peak demand by another 20MW. Even on the generation side, the situation needn't be so precarious. A dozen determined private Nepali investors are already adding about 30MW a year with local financing.

Keeping policies stable and predictable despite changes in government, streamlining rules and reducing hassles for license-holders would encourage more Nepali investors to turn to hydropower.

"The government should make it easy for Nepali investors to make money off the power market," says former water resources minister Dipak Gyawali. "The laws should be made Nepali-friendly and if there are

Even if the right decisions are taken today, we'll still have eight hours of winter power cuts daily till at least 2013

projects too big for domestic investors, outside partners should be asked to take part through competitive bidding."

Higher prices for peak power would encourage Nepali private investors to go for storage projects, Gyawali says, and the government could then concentrate on large dams to even out the seasonal energy gap.

The project that can come onstream earliest is the 309 MW Upper Tama Kosi that Norwegian power company Statkraft Nordfund Power Invest is interested in. An Indian and Chinese team have also expressed interest but the Norwegians are far ahead with preparations.

Statkraft has been talking to NEA about Upper Tama Kosi for over a year, but regime change in Kathmandu and slow decision-making within NEA have delayed action. The Norwegian company has also invested in a hydropower joint venture in India's Himachal Pradesh and wants to increase Upper Tama Kosi to 450 MW and export monsoon power to India.

Ratna Sansar Shrestha, a member of the board at Everest Bank, says Nepal needs a two-pronged approach in future to avoid power shortage: "NEA should offer

seasonal and time-of-day tariffs to attract domestic investors to generate peak power and promote projects like Upper Tama Kosi through a competitive bidding process."

NEA officials say privately that they want to carefully evaluate the Norwegian proposal so there is no repetition of the Khimti debacle in the early 1990s when a government that wanted to show its investor-friendliness gave away too many concessions, including dollar denomination and an escalation clause on high tariffs.

"We are in a desperate situation again, and we don't want foreign investors to take advantage," said one NEA official cautiously.

The Norwegians are sweetening their offer with a promise to build the 28km access to road from Khimti to Lamobagar, and to bear up to 20 percent of the cost of the Rs 30 billion project. The rest of the investment would come from Statkraft, NEA and a local consortium led by Butwal Power Company (BPC).

If the final decision on Upper Tama Kosi is taken at the end of this year and construction starts in 2007 it will still take five more years to come on line. "We have to be fast," says Gyanendra Lal Pradhan of BPC. "If we start today we may be able to stop load shedding in seven years. If we don't, we'll have power cuts till 2016."

The real attraction of Upper Tama Kosi, however, is that it has a perfect match with India: it has a lot of spill energy during the monsoon just when demand on the north Indian grid is at a peak.

A 220 kVa transmission line from Khimti to Dhalkebar is nearly complete and when extended to the border will allow export of flood energy to India and import of electricity from the southern neighbour in winter when India has a surplus and Nepal has a shortage. ●

THE SHORTFALL		
Year	Power Shortfall (in megawatts)	Powercut per day in winter (in hours)
2005	80	5
2006	120	8.5
2007	90*	5
2008	140	10
2009	200	12.5
2010	270	14
*70MW Middle Marsyangdi comes online		



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## 'Black gold' still buried

EDINBURGH—The three-month-old ceasefire has not persuaded the UK's Cairn Energy to resume its search for oil under the tarai. Two years after signing contracts giving it exclusive rights to explore a huge area of southern Nepal, Edinburgh-headquartered Cairn says it continues to monitor security developments in Nepal but has no plans to start digging. After being catapulted into the big time by a series of giant finds in India's Rajasthan, Cairn said it had high hopes of finding oil in Nepal, where it agreed on terms for exploration with the government in August 2004. But the company suspended early exploration activity amid deepening unrest last August before it had drilled any wells. Given the long lead times involved in turning finds into producing assets in the hit-or-miss exploration game, the continued delay means it could be years before any black gold is pumped from under the tarai. But Cairn says it wants to start field operations at 'the earliest opportunity' and chief executive Sir Bill Gammell, an old friend of US President George W Bush, may be encouraged to put his foot on the accelerator in Nepal within the next year.

Mark Williamson

### NEW PRODUCTS

**CHEVY AVEO:** The Chevrolet Aveo will soon be available in Nepal. The car features a 1.6 or 1.4l engine, a six-speaker music system and a two-year/40,000km standard warranty. Mileage is reportedly 14kmpl.



**SHOW ROOM:** Bentley has opened its glamour showroom at Durbar Marg. It features a wide range of jewellery, costume jewellery, leather goods, ladies bags, foot wear, sari suits and accessorises for women of all ages.



**INTERNET PC:** ATC Axim has introduced Fujitsu's Deskpower TX Home Internet PC system. With a 32in LCD screen and 600 gigabyte hard drive that can store 450 hours of video clips, it is priced at Rs 275,000.

**MORE-TWO WHEELERS:** TVS Motor Company launched the Apache, the GLX 125 and the Star City Apache, a 150cc, 13.5 BHP, five-gear model. GLX 125c has a New Dura Life engine swing arm and rectangular handlebar, Star City alloy wheels and 130mm fuel gauge. TVS aims to achieve 20 percent market share in Nepal this year.



**LIVE FOOTBALL:** Calsberg launched 'Win The Football Trip of A Lifetime', an all-expense paid contest award to a Liverpool vs Tottenham Hotspur match on 23 September in England. The campaign was conducted in selected Kathmandu outlets Kathmandu in June and July.

# The real media story

## Journalist slush funds and citizen-scribes

Two recent events have turned Nepali newsmen into news. The first is the admission by the royal cabinet's minister for information Tanka



**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
**Ashutosh Tiwari**

Dhakal that he distributed money to journalists "to prolong the royal government". The second concerns Online Media Association Nepal (OMAN)'s demand that online media be given the same recognition as traditional print and electronic media by the Media Council. Even if you shrug off the strange influence of the council long after the demise of its parent, the royal government, these items make it difficult to understand the progress that the business of Nepali journalism has made. **Royal largesse:** Thomas Jefferson famously said that he preferred newspapers without a government to a government without newspapers. But Nepali readers have never had such a luxury. For their survival, our media bodies have historically relied on getting handouts from the government to dodge the forces of the market.

As recently as October 2004, then communications minister Mohammed Mohsin unveiled an 11-point media policy—which boiled down to throwing millions

of rupees of public money at media bodies and private media houses. Tara Nath Dahal, chairman of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) put out a statement saying that "more need(ed) to be done for journalists' welfare by the government". Another beneficiary, Kantipur Publications, even ran an editorial in *Kantipur* thanking Mohsin for his generosity.

Against that backdrop, wasn't Dhakal merely continuing the royal and non-royal tradition of maintaining the patron-client relationship between the fourth estate and the government? If so, why is only he being slammed?

As a minister, Dhakal alienated the all-powerful FNJ, whose members are now returning the favour in full force. Besides, so long as the spotlight of villainy highlights only Dhakal, media bodies need not verify, much less report, which journalists (read: friends and peers) were on the royal regime's payroll. Or else, two weeks payment-for-favourable-news story aside, why is it that the public still has not seen the names of all the journalists who profited from that 80 lakh-rupee slush fund?

**Online media:** OMAN's demand makes you wonder why it even needs the government's blessings. Thanks to the falling costs of technology and content-

distribution, journalism, to paraphrase Glenn Reynolds of Instapundit.com, is becoming less of a profession and more of an activity that citizens do on the side (one example: yours truly).

Mainstream global media outlets already allow citizen-journalists to contribute views and shape the news. Moreover, analysts say that the broadcast model of TV, radio and newspapers—where the centre edits the news that peripheries receive—is under assault. The ease of the internet has made consumers bypass relatively costly intermediaries like newspapers and go straight to the aggregators of information such as blogs, web forums, podcasts and Google. Not surprisingly, a large chunk of the ad business has migrated to cyberspace too.

In this changing context, OMAN's demand is akin to computer programmers asking to be members of the All Nepal Typists' Association. It's one thing to ask for relevant ID papers to attend government press conferences. But when just about anyone can be a journalist online, it's foolish to think that those who post on the web should form their own society and then ask the government for special privileges. This is the sort of traditional thinking that goes against the very ethos of online journalism: sceptical of authorities, inclusive and accessible to all. ●

# Special uneconomic zone

## Every new budget reinvents the wheel with rehashed recycled programs

**BINIT SHARMA**

A budget that pleases all constituencies is a rare phenomenon. And pundits will tell you, like they told you last year and the year before, that this is a good budget if it can be implemented properly.

But implementation is doubly difficult this year. First, it is not clear that the ceasefire and the ongoing efforts to mainstream the Maoists are helping mitigate the difficulties of getting projects on the ground.

Secondly, even if one is to assume that Maoists behave (gleeful recipients of half of the doubled VDC grants, perhaps?) it is very likely that there will be too little money chasing too many projects unless all of the projected increase in foreign aid not only materialises but does so in the form of quick-disbursing budget support in cash.

In the euphoric four years following the 1990 movement, which presumably got the donors more excited than they are today, foreign aid grew at a modest average of 16 percent per year. The finance minister is projecting a 76 percent growth in foreign aid in this budget.

Is this a realistic expectation? We will not know until next year. But what we do know already is that Ram Sharan Mahat will probably not be around in the same capacity next year to share a critical appraisal on the performance of his budget. This is obviously an upshot of the political turbulence that has characterised this period but also reflects the culture of severe non-accountability that a short-horizon

nature of governments has engendered.

In such an environment, there is little incentive to learn from past experience, let alone build on the progress of the predecessor. Every new budget ends up reinventing the wheel and offering programs and projects that are rehashed, recycled, reproduced and most likely based on economics that is outdated.

Take the case of the proposal to build a Special Economic Zone. The idea made its debut in a budget speech as early as at least 2000/01 when Mahesh Acharya earmarked Rs 60 million for the establishment of these facilities in three locations: Bhairawa, Birganj and Biratnagar. In 2001/02 Ram Sharan Mahat gave continuity to this effort by allotting an additional Rs 60 million for the same project in the three locations. The only budget

speech Deuba ever made, in 2002/03, promised another Rs 30 million for the establishment of this facility in Bhairawa (for some reason, the two others were dropped that year).

Obviously dissatisfied with the progress on this front, the Lohani budget of 2003/04 allocated another Rs 42.5 million for the 'speedy completion' of the SEZ. In 2004/05, Madhukar SJB Rana's budget did not make any monetary allocation for this cause but chose to keep the discerning historian interested by clarifying that "a downward adjustment in the present income tax rates" would be made in these special zones.

This year's budget offers a far more elaborate tax relief package that includes customs and VAT exemptions on import of raw materials augmented by a Special Economic Zone Act that will codify a

schedule of income tax exemption for industries set up in these zones. All this is only after the 'Special Economic Zone under construction in Bhairawa ... [comes] into operation in the next fiscal year'.

At least six years have elapsed and Rs 2 billion spent since its budgetary debut. Yet, even Bhairawa among the three facilities that were initially supposed to be built simultaneously is still under construction. How long does it take to construct these facilities? How much does it cost? What are the factors that have caused the delay in the construction? Why is a feasibility study still being conducted for a project that was already initiated, budgeted for, and presumably expensed for at least two consecutive years five years ago? Neither the budget speech nor the accompanying economic survey has answers.

Part of the blame lies with us, the so-called 'analysts', who are often more interested in what exciting things the new guy has to offer than lessons from the failure of the person before him. Until appropriate mechanisms to incorporate historical learning into the budget-making process are institutionalised, the elusive 'implementation difficulties' will remain convenient excuses for non-performance.

We may not be able to change incentives and get finance ministers to take a long view on things without broader political reforms but we can certainly pressure them to defend the bearings of their projects, plans and programs in the context of earlier efforts on the same front. For now, we can all start by monitoring the progress this government makes on the two promises made on the Special Economic Zone front this year. ●

## The SEZ saga

Since 2001, Rs2 billion has been set aside for Special Economic Zones in Bhairawa, Birganj and Biratnagar that were never built. This year's budget promises to reduce taxes on imported raw materials at SEZs that have yet to be completed. A glimpse at past budgets:

Fiscal year	Finance Minister	Amount (In millions)
2000/01	Mahesh Acharya	Rs 60
2001/02	Ram Sharan Mahat	Rs 60
2002/03	Sher Bahadur Deuba	Rs 30
2003/04	Prakash C Lohani	Rs 42.5



KIRAN PANDAY



# Torture trauma

Himal Khabarpartika, 17-31 July

Ramu Malla of Rupandehi Debdaha (*see pic*) has been so badly traumatised after being subject to of a ‘people’s court’ ‘action’ that he is in now in Bhairahawa Medical College Hospital. Malla, charged with polygamy by the Maoists last month, was locked up for three days and beaten regularly. “They took me to the middle of the forest and beat me up, then they kept me for three days and threatened to kill me if I talked,” Malla said, showing us his bruised body. His mother Bishnu Kumari said that the Maoists have threatened to kill the entire family if Malla’s story appeared in local newspaper or on radio. When a group of journalists reached the hospital later that month, she hid herself in the wards.

Ramu is suffering from what looks like post-traumatic stress disorder. He faints at the mention of home and mumbles all day, “I am not going home because they will kill me there.” The doctors suggested taking him to Kathmandu for treatment because his mental condition was deteriorating day by day but the family doesn’t



have the money for the trip.

On the people’s court’s allegations: Malla married Batti Kumari of Nawalparasi Harkataki six years ago. He married again this past May to a woman from Rupandehi. Ramu says he was separated from his first wife and had promised her half his property, as per Nepali law. The Maoists deny that they have a people’s court in the region and that they abducted and tortured Malla. Rupandehi’s Maoist secretary, Madhab Sharma, says that other forces disguised as Maoists are responsible. “If you give us the names of those who tortured Ramu Malla, we will conduct the necessary investigation and charge them,” he said.

The so-called people’s court has started taking in more people in the area, and the local Nepali Congress has requested the Maoists to desist. The NC district office says that it is losing Morchabar area party workers because of the court’s charges and ‘actions’. Asuraina VDC’s former vice chairman Raj Kumar Singh and Gyan Prasad Mishra of Rayapur VDC, among others, have fled to India to avoid the court.

## Nigerian watch

Nepal, 30 July

नेपाल

Many Nigerians travelling as tourists have been arriving in Nepal and getting involved in illegal activities, including narcotics. The police say several of them have set up the drug operations in rented houses. Last year, police arrested 11 Nigerians with drugs, including four women, after raiding a rented house in Bisalnagar. Dozens of Nigerians have also been staying in rented flats in Bhotahiti, Thamel and in Shankamul. Police say they are now more vigilant about Nigerians living in residential areas but they are hampered because Nepalis themselves are helping to arrange their stays. Dealing in drugs is just one of their alleged illegal activities. Recently, four Nigerians swindled Rs 25,000 from Hotel La Meridian in Gokarna. In another incident, a group of Nigerians tried to cheat a popular restaurant by paying with fake dollar bills. Every night, Nigerians are seen in large numbers in Thamel’s inner areas and they frequent Funky Buddha, Tom and Jerry, Full Moon, Sam’s, Fire Club, JBar and dozens of other pubs. Around 30 Nigerians are said to be entering Nepal monthly and their numbers have already reached 500 in Kathmandu alone. Immigration officials now say they will take action against Nigerian tourists

who are trying to stay illegally in the country and they have already sent letters to hotel associations, municipalities, ward offices and trekking agencies to be on the lookout for suspicious Nigerian tourists. The Home Ministry has also said that it will take tough measures against the growing illegal activities of the Nigerians.

## Palace generals

Jana Aastha, 26 July

राष्ट्रिय

Parliament has been making one declaration after the other to earn cheap popularity and show up the Maoists but isn’t taking any serious steps to implement decisions. Parliament’s disease has now infected the Nepal government as well. Cabinet’s move to scrap the military secretariat at Naryanhiti was made without doing any homework. As a result, the military secretary at the palace, Major General Gajendra Limbu, and other army officials continue to go to the palace everyday as they did before. The government’s challenge is to actually implement this decision announced through a declaration of parliament two months ago. If this can’t be done, it will be clear that the palace has defeated the People’s Movement II, and the victory of the people will remain a myth.

The palace is seen to be slowly regaining power, even as the government is unable to

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institutionalise the achievements of the people’s movement and speed up dialogue with the Maoists. The parties are inadvertently getting closer to the palace with the excuse that the Maoists are still armed. This sort of behaviour from the seven parties and the government has not only caused dissatisfaction among the Maoists but also among civil society, which organised a country wide sit-in to protest the delays in implementing the 12-point and eight-point agreements and the slow move towards a constituent assembly. The sit-in, held in Ratna Park, even included a few leaders and workers from the NC and the CPN-UML. This shows that the government’s poor performance in the four months following the movement has left the people and party workers dissatisfied. Larger parties, like the NC and the UML, who came back to power saying that they would not repeat their past mistakes, are not being taken seriously any more, not even by the palace.

School soars  
.....  
Nepal Samacharpatra, July 24

MORANG—Five years ago, Sharada Community School in Karsiya village was virtually empty even though teachers personally appealed to parents to enrol their children. Most parents preferred private schools for their children. That’s changed, though, and now students from the entire community are moving from private schools to Sharada. School Principal Rabi Rajbanshi says that so many have switched that the school has run out of classrooms and is planning to expand.

Khukhar Rajbanshi, president of the school construction committee, says that faith has grown in the community school because of English medium instruction, low admission fees and no monthly charges. The parents visit the school daily to monitor the performance of the teachers and school administration. There is a sense of ownership among the community, which actively participates in the school’s financial, educational and infrastructural development. Nearly 550 families have enrolled 650 children here, twice the number of five years ago. Classes must be held in two shifts, and even more children are expected



NARESH NEWAR

to enrol in coming years. Despite the good news, around 15 percent of school-going age children in this village still can’t attend school due to poverty and the fact that they work in either teashops or brick factories. The school plans to operate mobile schools for these children if they are unable to leave their workplaces. Principal Rajbanshi says that even more could be done “if the government clarifies many issues about community schools and guarantees facilities to the teachers.”

Maoist crimes  
.....  
Budhabar, 26 July

The CPN-UML has accused the Maoists of violating their agreement with the government. The party expressed grave concern over the kidnapping and torture by the Maoists of a UML party worker. On Tuesday, the Maoists abducted the chairman of the UML’s Sindhuli-Kathmandu contact forum, Harikrishna Thakuri, from Thali in Kathmandu and severely beat him. Thakuri, who works in a carpet factory, was taken by a group of 15 Maoists to their office in Bauddha to account for a minor argument he had with a colleague, then threatened and beaten to near death.

Another UML worker, Ramkhelwan Mandal from Dhanusha Bisarbhora VDC, was abducted from his home on Monday night, pressured to switch alliances and tortured. Mandal was released the following morning, says UML Janakpur secretary Shankamath Sharma Adhikari.

At a midweek meeting, the UML’s permanent committee agreed that the Maoists were breaching the code of conduct agreed on at the central level by continuing monetary and food extortion, displaying weapons, and engaging in abduction and torture, despite claiming that the people’s courts have been dismantled. The UML urged respect for the code of conduct and demanded action against those responsible for beating up Thakuri. UML central secretariat secretary Amrit Kumar Bohara has asked the Maoist leadership to be more serious and show commitment to strengthening trust between the people and the political parties at a time when the country is moving towards democratic change.

Forgotten Sushila



SURAJ KUNWAR

Bedprakash Timalsina in Kantipur, 27 July

“Sushila Jaisi’s case is complicated. Send one person to hospital to keep watch. Journalists shouldn’t find out about it.” This order was overheard being given by the then police chief of Accham, Dhanbahadur Chand, over the police radio. A few journalists, including myself, headed to the Accham hospital. “She’s in hospital because her genitals and uterus are infected due to an unsuccessful abortion attempt. Her condition is very serious,” the doctor on duty Arjun Sapkota explained. We had to find out why the police wanted to keep Sushila’s case under wraps. No one knew at the hospital, but the police started following her case when they found out that her husband had been living in India for three years and that it was another man’s child.

Sushila lay in the hospital bed, delirious, saying only, “Nothing has happened to me. I don’t want to say anything.” A source claimed that Sushila’s pregnancy was the result of rape by a Jwaladal Battalion soldier. Meanwhile, a team of doctors from the Centre for Victims of Torture arrived in Mangalsen from Nepalganj to treat a Maoist-torture victim. Dr Sapkota told us that Sushila needed better care immediately, possibly in Nepalganj. A CVICT doctor told us that if she could be transported to Nepalganj, his organisation would pay for her medical costs. We visited Sushila together and after the doctor said he was from Kathmandu, a reassured Sushila told

us this: “I was raped by Dane Mahar, a soldier, who pressured me to abort after he found I had conceived.” CVICT returned to Chalsa, and we faxed the news of Sushila’s rape to Kathmandu.

Shortly after, I misplaced my notebook in a shop. Someone found it and turned it over to the army, who called me promptly that evening to ask me to not talk about the rape. They threatened me with unimaginable consequences if the news were published. The news was published. I was warned in the middle of the marketplace by Major Bishnu Hari Baniya, “Now be prepared to face your punishment.” Sushila’s situation did not improve. The doctors said she had bled too much and the hospital in Accham couldn’t treat her. No one in her family could make the trip to Nepalganj, which required either an army helicopter or the Accham Red Cross ambulance. The army refused to fly Sushila out, and it was late by the time she was put on the ambulance. The ambulance couldn’t make it to Nepalganj due to flooding. Sushila had to go home. A few days later, a student from her village told us of her death. If the army had agreed to fly her to Nepalganj, she would have lived. Her death was unnatural but the army made it natural. The rapist even confessed and asked for forgiveness saying, “Because of me the whole army got a bad name. I made a mistake.” The army wanted to save the rapist instead of saving Sushila. Even worse, no human rights or women’s rights activist in Kathmandu even considered helping the Jaisi family get justice.



Seems like this bridge can’t hold anymore. You should throw away your load!

Abin Shrestha in Samaya, 27 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ I have already told Prachanda that this country will find a solution only if we reach a final decision while I’m alive. Otherwise, there is no guarantee and we could lose everything if we delay ”

Prime Minister Girija P Koirala angrily addressing a cabinet meeting, reported in Janastha, 26 July



# Instead of telling tourists not to visit Nepal in the monsoon, we



PARESH SHRESTHA

**BILLI BIERLING** in MANANG

“How much rain did we see in the past two weeks?” I asked my trekking partner, Sam Voolstra, who came walking with me to the Annapurnas during this year’s monsoon season.

“I would say about one or two hours at the most,” the marketing director of the Last Resort in Kathmandu replied. On this instance the skies suddenly opened and drenched us for the last few hours of our two-week trek which took us from Besi Sahar to Jomsom via Manang.

As both Sam and I are usually busy during the tourist season we decided to visit Nar and Phu in the remote area north of Manang, during the monsoon.

Everybody thought we were mad to go trekking in July, but we were well prepared for the onslaught of leeches and lots of rain. We were armed with salt and special leech oil, and umbrellas, which we eventually gave away as we hardly had any rain and did not see a single leech.

“And the best thing was that we did not see many tourists, no leeches, no people,” Sam said.

From Besi Sahar we made our way along the Annapurna Circuit, which is normally teeming with people. According to ACAP (Annapurna Conservation Area Project), 36.224 trekkers visited the region in 2005. The highest-ever figure is 75,000 in 2001/1. On our trek we only came across four tourists. We had the big lodges absolutely to ourselves.

By the time we were in the



BILLI BIERLING

trans-Himalayan Manang Valley we were basking in sunshine all the time. From the village of Phu (3,761m) we admired snow-covered peaks, like the 6,981m Kanguru towering above us.

As Phu is relatively new to the tourism business it does not have many facilities. But there are some ambitious young people who want to improve the lives of the villagers inhabiting the 30 houses there. “After finishing my studies in Kathmandu I want to come back here and open a hotel and a restaurant,” said 21-year-old Sonam Lama, who grew up in Phu.

After our detour to Nar and Phu we crossed Kang La (5,240m) to rejoin the main trail of the Annapurna Circuit. Manang itself

felt like a ghost town, but the views of Annapurna II and Gangapurna to the south were stunning.

After a rest day in Manang we headed towards the Thorong La which, at 5,416m, is the highest trekking pass in the world. Finding a porter for the crossing proved rather difficult as most youngsters were busy playing football.

Even though most people here don’t have TV they still knew exactly what was happening in the World Cup. Football fever gripped the whole nation and no matter how high or remote the village, everybody seemed to be kicking a ball.

We eventually managed to find a young man, who happily

put down his 70kg load of wood to exchange it for our ridiculously light bag of about 15kg.

“This is better than carrying planks of wood from Manang to Yak Kharka. We are extending our lodge there and the wood needs to be brought up,” said Suman, who works as a chef during the season.

Instead of sharing the path with hundreds of other trekkers on Thorong la, we only saw three watch-sellers, who were desperately looking for customers. In Muktinath on the other side we were taken aback by the size of the teahouses and the food available on their menus. Once again we were the only guests to stay in the Bob Marley lodge with its gaudy



BILLI BIERLING

**WET FISH TAIL:** Machapuchre from Ghandruk (top) blocks the monsoons leaving Manang high and dry (left). Waterfall near Chame.

decoration and huge dining hall.

“During the season this place, which sleeps 65 people, is normally booked up by lunch and sometimes we get up to 100 people for dinner,” said Karma C Gurung who runs the Marley lodge and learnt his culinary skills in Sydney.

The only stretch we got rained on was the last bit before Jomsom, but due to the high altitude there were no leech attacks. Once in Jomsom, another deserted town during the monsoon, we did not encounter any problems purchasing a plane ticket. The clouds lifted early the next morning and we got the first flight back to Pokhara— where we landed in a heavy monsoon shower. ●



# e should be marketing it



PARESH SHRESTHA

## Monsoon sanctuary

They say it rains leeches during the monsoon here in the Sanctuary on the way to Annapurna Base Camp.

With 3,700mm average annual precipitation, this is the area of Nepal with the highest annual rainfall so it is not surprising.

The rain, leeches and landslides are three reasons the guidebooks tell you to avoid the Annapurna Base Camp (ABC) trek at this time of year. But just last week, the trail had some intrepid trekkers going up to the Sanctuary, the leeches were behaving themselves, and the rain fell mainly at night. The morning views of Annapurna South and Machapuchre with the cleft summit made it all worth it.

However, hotels and lodges in the trekking region managed by the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) bear a deserted look. Years of conflict have taken their toll. The ACAP headquarters in Ghanruk is still a ruin after it was bombed and burnt down three years ago. And despite the ceasefire, it is the fear of money extorting-gun toting Maoists, and not the blood-sucking leeches, that is putting trekkers off.

Hotelier Bikram Gurung in Birenthanti recalls having several customers a day even in the midst of earlier monsoons and can't wait for the autumn season. "Now that the political situation has improved people will come," he says confidently. Higher up the trail in Chomrong, Laxmi Gurung is busy adding rooms to her Mountain View Hotel to accommodate anticipated trekkers later this year.

Even though ACAP has pulled out, its program supporting sustainable eco-tourism has left its mark. Villagers are carrying out conservation work by themselves even though there is no money from the project and no local staff. The monsoon rains have nourished their paddy and maize fields, bringing wild animals like monkeys, deer and mountain sheep right to their doorsteps, but local residents now refuse to trap or kill them. The jungles are lush green teeming with wildlife and echoing with the songs of birds and insects. The sound of falling water never leaves you: the roar of the Modi Khola, the rustle of waterfalls, the murmur of brooks and the sigh of an afternoon drizzle on the forest canopy.

The emerald valleys and dark green slopes make the Annapurnas in the monsoon like no other trek in the Nepal. Despite the mist and clouds, the sun always shines through. And when Machapuchre make its appearance through a rain-washed sky, it looks close enough to reach out and touch. ●

Yalamber Singh in Chomrong



PARESH SHRESTHA

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# Love and longing in Kathmandu



DINESH SHRESTHA

**Samrat Upadhyay was in Kathmandu recently and was invited by the FinePrint Book Club and the British Council for a reading where Ajit Baral interviewed him. Excerpts:**

**Nepali Times:** When you started to write, did you ever think that you would one day become the writer that you are now?

**Samrat Upadhyay:** While I could have never imagined the success I'm experiencing now, I always felt I had a voice that people would be interested in hearing. My friend Nirjhar Sherchan recently reminded me that before leaving for the US for the first time, I had told him, "*Aba ma America gayera bestseller lekhchu.*" I myself recall telling my Bengali friend Erica Ghosh in college that in ten years she'd walk into a bookstore in Washington DC and see my book displayed prominently. While this is all good stuff, what I didn't know then was how it doesn't get easier as years pass. Each book is harder than the one before.

**How do you develop your stories? From an image or a concept?**

I usually think in terms of images, as I am strongly resistant to idea stories. But concepts are embedded in images, so it's also misleading to bifurcate the two so easily. For example, a mother in a dark room crying over the corpse of her son is an image, but it carries with it associative ideas and concepts of the social and political worlds it inhabits. I generate movement in my stories by deepening the image I've begun with, and I find that plot takes care of itself. So, in a way you could also say that plots are embedded in images.

**How do you write—straight off and then go over it, or go line by line, correcting it as you go along.**

I do both, depending upon the work. I've written stories that have been meticulously crafted, line by line, right from the start. The novel I'm working on at the moment is a giant

mess; I'm not pausing to correct myself as I go on. Each work dictates its own process, and I happily and anxiously go along with it.

**And the editing part?**

The editing happens on many levels, often simultaneously. I've been writing for so long now that there's one level of editing I do even as I construct a sentence. Often, however, there's a cold, hard look after the first draft is complete. At this stage, I'm more of a critic than a writer, and I'm not afraid to slash and burn if I'm dissatisfied. I feel that this kind of nonattachment is good for a writer—isn't there a compelling Zen image of making a paper boat out of your best creation and watching it float down a river?

**Doesn't the kind of major surgery in the editing process undermine the presence of the author?**

The author is dead, haven't you heard? The author as a solid self whose purity needs to be preserved at any cost is not a notion I find convincing. Do you want the author to be present or do you want the story to be present? If a major surgery is needed to take out the deadly tumor, does it make sense to argue that its removal would undermine the patient's natural body? A well-known editor once told me that often novice writers are most resistant to his editorial suggestions, already well-published writers know how fluid writing can be.

**But isn't there a thing called editorial boundary?**

The editor can't write the story for the author, and if that starts happening, then it's time to end that relationship. The editor needs to like and respect the author's overall vision,

## The characters in Samrat Upadhyay's new book are a metaphor for the state of the country

**T**he nine stories of this new book continue Samrat Upadhyay's journey from his earlier works and further explore the terrain where personal lives intersect with history. These are stories of ordinary people grappling with their individual turmoil even as a society's own turmoil impinges on their everyday lives.

But as before, Upadhyay tells the stories with consummate detachment, an ease with words that allows the author and his language to recede into the background. The stories tell themselves, unencumbered by verbiage and allow the characters space to come alive in front of us so that by the end of each story we have got to know them intimately.

*The Royal Ghosts* employs Upadhyay's trademark prose, a bare-bones use of the English language and a minimalist style. At a time when English language novelists from the subcontinent lather their magical realist plots with self-conscious wordplay to try to be original, Upadhyay uses understated language to mirror the understated emotions of his characters. It is the difference between a line drawing and a baroque painting.

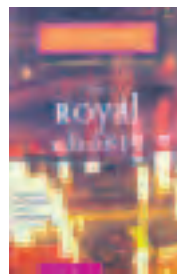
Each of the stories is woven around a plot that turns on the tensions that buffet middle class Nepali society in its headlong dash towards modernity. There are neither easy answers nor safe conclusions as the characters come to grips with arranged marriages, the generation gap, relationships, incest,

mental illness and homosexuality. The sexual subtext is treated with subtlety: love lost, love unspoken, love squandered and love regained. All the while in the background are the shattering historical events of Nepal's recent past: the royal massacre, the insurgency, pro-democracy demonstrations.

Upadhyay builds up the undercurrent of tension in each story until it bursts in a torrent. Pitamber's inexplicable violence against a Maoist sympathiser and then against his young son, Umesh unable to articulate his feelings for Gauri until it's too late, Dharma and Ganga working out their sibling rivalry, or Shivaram's inability to come to terms with his daughter's inter-ethnic relationship. The outpouring of pent up emotion and stress is a metaphor for the state of the country itself.

Upadhyay was in Kathmandu recently, and probably collected more material for future stories (*see interview below*). But we wonder if this genre is becoming a little too predictable and formulaic. Whatever this talented story-teller is contemplating, perhaps next time he needs to set aside Nepal and do a Kazuo Ishiguro. After all, the interplay of emotions and human relationships in all his past three books are of a universal nature and a change of locale would probably benefit us all. ●

Kunda Dixit



The Royal Ghosts: Stories  
by Samrat Upadhyay  
Rupa & Co, 2006  
pp 207  
Rs 295

# “I will always be a disciple of this art, not its guru”

even as he or she might argue with how it's executed in places. The author needs to trust the editor's intentions as well as the editor's art and believe that the editing will improve the quality of the work. Once a fundamental appreciation for the writer's art becomes evident, then the editorial boundary is negotiable.

**What role did your editor, Heidi Pitlor, play?**

Heidi has been instrumental in shaping the quality of my work, and I'm deeply grateful to her presence in my writing. She not only appreciates my writing but also knows how to improve it—I couldn't have asked for a better editor. But I don't like to think of life in such 'locked' terms as your question implies. In an alternate world, Samrat would have found another Heidi, and Heidi would have discovered another Samrat to nurture.

**What is the essence of the craft, the fictional process, technique or plot? Or all of it?**

Craft is basically how a story is put together. Plot is an integral part of craft, not in the sense of this-happened-then-that-happened, but why-did-it-happen-when-it-happened. That's why writers often loathe the question, "So what is your story about?" A story is more than about something.

**What's your next book?**

I'm writing a novel. It's the most complex writing I've ever done, but I'm in the midst of it right now, and structurally there's a lot of exploration to do. It is turning out to be an extremely demanding book, which humbles me and confirms my belief that I will always be a disciple of this art, not its guru.





NARESH NEWAR

NARESH NEWAR  
in NAWALPARASI

Dhaubadi village in Nawalparasi is so remote that many urban Nepalis don't even know it's just 280 km southwest of Kathmandu. But this community has proven that local development is possible without relying on the central government.

In seven years, village women here have managed to reduce child malnutrition from 38 to 16 percent, while nationally the rate of stunting, a sign of early chronic under-nutrition, has dropped only 16 percent in 26 years.

According to the government's Demographic and Health Survey, around 51 percent of children below five years of age are affected by stunting. Around 48 percent are underweight and 10 percent are wasted or too thin for their height, an indicator of acute malnutrition.

The main causes for these problems are low food intake, high rates of disease, poor child and maternal health care, inadequate access to sufficient basic health services and unsanitary conditions.

But nutrition experts in the government and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are positive that child malnutrition can be reduced even in the poorest villages and among illiterate, socially and economically backward communities. "The village communities can be mobilised through education and awareness and empowered to take action to improve the situation by assessing the reasons and causes," said Pragya Mathema, UNICEF's nutrition officer.

On this premise, in 1999 the Ministry of Local Development with support from UNICEF started its Decentralised Action for Children and Women (DACAW) program, which is being implemented in 15 districts around the country and has helped cut malnutrition rates from 40 to 17 percent in those districts.

"We know now why our children suffer from malnutrition," said barely literate Karuna Acharya, a young mother of eight-month-old Kalpana. Acharya has learnt about healthy feeding, sanitation the symptoms of under-nutrition and how to respond to it from DACAW's local community mobilisers.

Thousands of young mothers like Acharya in the 15 districts have benefited from the program,

# Communities making kids healthy

## Local programs cut malnutrition at a faster rate than national ones

**WATCHFUL MOTHER:**  
A Nawalparasi parent checks on her child's growth and health.

forming their own committees to educate pregnant and new mothers about the importance of child nutrition. "The women now sit together, identify problems and find ways to solve nutritional problems," explained mobiliser Yam Kumari Rana in Dhaubadi. She added that the mothers are so conscious about the health of their newborn children that they queue up every month at the village's health monitoring centre to check whether their children are

gaining weight. "Such community-level initiative has been successful in combating malnutrition," said UNICEF's Pradeep Shrestha in Nawalparasi.

But such success has been limited to a few districts and the rest of the country still has a major child malnutrition problem. According to UNICEF's 2005 report *Nutrition in Nepal*, there has been slow progress in reducing the problem. For example, stunting among children aged six to 36 months has fallen only 16 percent over the last 26 years. "It will take up to 2040 before the Millennium Development Goal of a 50

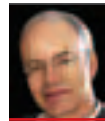
percent reduction of child malnutrition in Nepal will be reached," said the report.

At that rate, it will take another 75 years before the malnutrition level reaches an acceptable level, it added. "The only way for Nepal to swiftly reduce child malnutrition rates is by empowering communities and mobilising them to get involved in community-level nutrition work," explained Rajendra Devkota, secretary of the Nawalparasi DDC. "There is a need to replicate such an initiative in the rest of the country. Both aid agencies and the central government should act," he added. ●



# Happiness, money and giving it away

**W**ould you be happier if you were richer? Many people believe that they would be. But research conducted over many years suggests that greater wealth implies greater happiness only at quite low levels of income.



**COMMENT**  
**Peter Singer**

People in the United States, for example, are, on average, richer than New Zealanders, but they are not happier. More dramatically, people in Austria, France, Japan, and Germany appear to be no happier than people in much poorer countries, like Brazil, Colombia, and the Philippines.

Comparisons between countries with different cultures are difficult, but the same effect appears *within* countries, except at very low income levels, such as below \$12,000 annually for the US. Beyond that point, an increase in income doesn't make a lot of difference to people's happiness.

Most surveys of happiness simply ask

people how satisfied they are with their lives. We cannot place great confidence in such studies, because this kind of overall 'life satisfaction' judgment may not reflect how much people really enjoy the way they spend their time.

My Princeton University colleague Daniel Kahneman and several co-researchers tried to measure people's subjective well-being by asking them about their mood at frequent intervals during a day. In an article published in *Science* on June 30, they report that their data confirm that there is little correlation between income and happiness.

On the contrary, Kahneman and his colleagues found that people with higher incomes spent more time in activities that are associated with negative feelings, such as tension and stress. Instead of having more time for leisure, they spent more time at and commuting to work. They were more often in moods that they described as hostile, angry, anxious, and tense.

Of course, there is nothing new in the idea that money does not buy happiness.

Many religions instruct us that attachment to material possessions makes us unhappy. The Beatles reminded us that money can't buy us love. Even Adam Smith, who told us that it is not from the butcher's benevolence that we get our dinner, but from his regard for his self-interest, described the imagined pleasures of wealth as "a deception".

## Money can't buy you happiness either

Nevertheless, there is something paradoxical about this. Why do governments all focus on increasing per capita national income? Why do so many of us strive to obtain more money, if it won't make us happier?

For 50 years, American investor Warren Buffett, now 75, has worked at accumulating a vast fortune. According to *Forbes* magazine, he is the second wealthiest person in the world, after Bill

Gates, with assets of \$42 billion. Yet his frugal lifestyle shows that he does not particularly enjoy spending large amounts of money. Even if his tastes were more lavish, he would be hard-pressed to spend more than a tiny fraction of his wealth.

From this perspective, once Buffett earned his first few millions in the 1960's, his efforts to accumulate more money can easily seem completely pointless. Coincidentally, Kahneman's article appeared the same week that Buffett announced the largest philanthropic donation in US history: \$30 billion to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and another \$7 billion to other charitable foundations.

At a single stroke, Buffett has given purpose to his life. Since he is an agnostic, his gift is not motivated by any belief that it will benefit him in an afterlife. Buffett reminds us that there is more to happiness than being in a good mood. ●

*Project Syndicate*

*Peter Singer is Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University and the author, with Jim Mason, of The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter.*

## Tigers, people

**BATTICALOA**— Sri Lankan civilians are caught in an increasingly violent war between the country's Tamil Tiger rebels and the Tiger breakaway group, Tamil Freedom Panthers (TMVP). Panther leader Col Karuna broke ranks with the Tigers in early 2004 and defected to government-controlled areas from where his group has been launching attacks on LTTE cadres and camps. Several high-ranking Tigers and Karuna loyalists have died and, more importantly, the Norwegian-facilitated ceasefire that temporarily halted two decades of Tamil secessionist violence, in which more than 65,000 people died, began to come under strain. Whenever the two factions clash, civilians flee their homes in large numbers. Recently, close to 100 families arrived at an army-controlled area alleging that the Tigers were forcibly imparting military training and recruiting children.

## S Asian media

**NEW DELHI, Jul 24 (IPS)** - While claiming to uphold democratic values, ruling establishments across South Asia are introducing laws to curb the working of independent media. India's information and broadcasting ministry recently released the proposed 'Broadcasting Services Regulation Bill, 2006' which ostensibly seeks to regulate 'objectionable' content on tv news by, among other things, setting up a body that would classify news as 'proper' or 'improper'. In neighbouring Pakistan, the instrument of media regulation, the Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), formed in 2002 has the right to issue directives on policy matters 'as and when it considers necessary' to private TV channels. (IPS)

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# Celestial fireworks

Meteors, or shooting stars, light up the August sky



Watching meteors and meteor showers is a great way to start observational astronomy. Because this requires no telescope or even binoculars, it's an astronomical activity that almost anyone can enjoy. All you need are your eyes, a comfortable lawn chair and, of course, clear and reasonably dark skies.



STAR GAZING  
Kedar S Badu

Meteor showers are caused by tiny particles of dust and rocks left over from the formation of the solar system that are constantly falling down to Earth. Most of them go unseen because they are so small but the larger ones produce 'shooting stars'. On an average night you can see about 10 meteors per hour with the naked eye. However, when the Earth passes through a comet's tail or the debris left by a long dead comet, that number grows

greatly. We entered the debris of a comet late last month (as we do every year) and will continue passing through it for a few more weeks. So this month is a great time to look for meteors! Topping the meteor watcher's August list is the well-known **Perseid** meteor shower. Perseid meteors may be seen from late July to late August but the peak this year is expected at midnight on Saturday, 12 August. The Perseids have a peak rate of up to 100 meteors per hour, or more than one a minute, so there should be large numbers of meteors falling throughout the night, perhaps as many as one Perseid every couple of minutes towards dawn. These meteors all seem to radiate from a point in the constellation Perseus, which can be found in the north-east sky at midnight and much higher by dawn. Perseus lays midway between Polaris (the North Star) and Taurus the Bull. Unfortunately, the waning gibbous Moon will be in Pisces

and rising about 9PM so we may not see many of the fainter meteors. For best results, watch the sky a little to the left of the radiant point, well away from the Moon. Also on this month's meteor watch are the Southern Delta Aquarids. While they reached their peak earlier in July, keep an eye out for them through mid-month too.

Other August highlights:  
**The Sun:** The Sun is in the constellation of Cancer at the start of August, moving into Leo on the 8<sup>th</sup>.  
**Venus:** Venus is a brilliant 'morning star', rising in the north-east about two hours before sunrise. It is easy to pick out even in the dawn twilight.  
**Mercury:** Mercury reaches its greatest elongation west of the Sun on 7 August, so there is a chance we might be able to see the planet before dawn this month. On the morning of 9 August, Mercury will be almost directly below Venus.  
**Mars:** Mars is setting in the west less than an hour after sunset so we are very unlikely to see the 'red planet' this month or indeed for the rest of this year.  
**Jupiter:** Giant Jupiter is low in the south-west at dusk and sets about two hours after sunset. It looks like a very bright, steady star, almost bright enough to imitate Venus as the 'evening star'. The Moon hovers above lone Jupiter on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.  
**Saturn:** Saturn is at conjunction, almost directly behind the Sun, on 7 August so we won't be able to see the ringed planet at all this month. Venus and Saturn are very close together on the 26<sup>th</sup> but difficult to view in the brightening dawn. ●



# Tiger roars again

with his british open defense, woods moves closer to nicklaus record

When Tiger Woods missed his first cut in a major tournament at last month's US Open, there was a flurry of speculation about his form and his future. Some even suggested that the death of his father, also his mentor and best friend, might be permanently crippling. But Woods silenced all doubts by successfully defending his British Open title last weekend at Royal Liverpool, Hoylake.

Woods played exceptional golf to total up 18 under par for the championship, two strokes ahead of fellow American Chris Dimarco. Ernie Els and Sergio Garcia had an outside chance, but their game fell apart as they tried to push ahead in the leader board.



TEE BREAK  
Deepak Acharya

Woods played so sensibly that he never pulled out his driver except on one occasion in the whole tournament when the fairways were too hard to control the ball and escaped all deep and monstrous fairway bunkers. Woods hit his two-iron stinger on most of the holes to keep the game steady and alive. In the final round in particular he was so much in control that he hit all but one fairway, and struck a phenomenal 85.7 percent on driving accuracy for the week. Even though he three-putted his very first hole (on Thursday) from inside 20 feet, he was able to keep his putter well in control. He found 15 of 18 greens, too, on the final day and when the heat was on, he made three straight birdie putts on the homeward nine (14, 15 & 16) to hold off the hard-charging Chris Dimarco.

Woods' uncanny ability to pull off shots when a competitor is closing in on him is phenomenal. I guess that's why he is not just the world's best golfer, but has also taken the game to another level. He has 49 PGA tour titles and perhaps that confidence helps him outplay opponents so consistently. So, though there were a couple of players within a few shots before the final day's play, Woods knew that only he and Ernie Els had ever won the Claret Jug.

This was an extraordinarily emotional victory for Woods, given his recent loss. He was teary even as he walked up to the 18<sup>th</sup> green to the sound of raucous cheers. After his final putt, clinging on to his caddie Stevie Williams was all Tiger Woods could do to control his tears.

This is Woods' most significant Open win—a major championship record score of 19 under. Now, with 11 majors under his belt, Woods has tied Walter Hagen and is looking to surpass only Jack Nicklaus, who has 18, to set a new record. ●


Deepak Acharya is a golf instructor and Golf Director at Le Meridien Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu. [prodeepak@hotmail.com](mailto:prodeepak@hotmail.com)





"Saas Hunjel Aas" (Where there is Rice, there is Hope) - as translated by UNACOOTs, the United Nation's Association of Cartoonists - NEPAL - sanctioned safe for all ages.


**THE ADVENTURES OF THE FANTASTIC 4**



**DR. PROTECTO Gives Advice on Choosing an ISP (Internet Service Provider) for Safe & Fast Surfing in Nepal:**

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"Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day; give that person the internet and they won't bother you for weeks." -- Sam Bell, US Dept. of Social Welfare

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#132 चण्ड 2064 by jigme gatun - read. love. write.

The Adventures of HeroJig can also be seen at [www.extreme-nepal.com](http://www.extreme-nepal.com)

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Colours of Life** an exhibition by various Nepali artists at Hotel Glacier, Pokhara till 10 August.
- ❖ **Exhibition of Creation** An exhibition of paintings and installation art by Japanese artist Masanori Yoneda at Siddhartha Art Gallery till 10 August. 4218048
- ❖ **Freedom of Expression** through collage by Gaurav Shrestha at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur, 31 July-2 August.
- ❖ **Impressions of Manang** 10-28 September, Nepal Tourism Board

EVENTS

- ❖ **Mani Kamal Chettri** at Paleti, 28 July at Nepa-laya 'r' sala, 5.30 PM. 5542646
- ❖ **Third Annual Father Watrin Basketball Tournament** league matches at the GAA Hall. Updates of match results available on [www.gaa.org.np](http://www.gaa.org.np)
- ❖ **Constitutionalism** with Professor Krishna Khanal, 29 July at 4PM, Martin Chautari. 4780522
- ❖ **Bowl For a Cause** charity event, 29 July. 6661666
- ❖ **FSA Film Club** presents Director Mohan Mainali's *Six Stories* and *Seeking Peace in Karnali* at Yala Maya Kendra, 4 August at 5PM, Rs 50. Films followed by discussion with the filmmakers. 5542544
- ❖ **Human Rights** with Rabindra Bhattarai, 5 August, at Martin Chautari.
- ❖ **A View from the Bridge** by Rato Bangala School's Aangan Teda at St Xavier's College, 11-13 August. 5522614
- ❖ **Sunsilk Nepal Fashion Week** at Hotel Hyatt Regency 10-14 August
- ❖ **Changa Chait-2063** Battle in the sky at Club Himalaya on 9,16 and 23 September.
- ❖ **Alcoholics Anonymous** problems with alcohol? 9851016079



MUSIC

- ❖ **Jatra Saturday Special** with Stupa, 29 July. 4256622
- ❖ **Jammin' with Friends of Music** with DJ Sanny, 8.30 PM, Rs 150 at Moksh Live. 5526212
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant. 4422613
- ❖ **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 along with BBQ every Friday from 7PM at Fusion-The bar at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479448

DINING

- ❖ **Tuscan Food Fest** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 27-29 July. 4273999
- ❖ **Tempting Treasures of the Sea** Seafood delicacies at Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency till 29 July. 4491234
- ❖ **Masterpiece menu** at The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La Hotel. 4412999
- ❖ **Mezza and Margarita** at Dwarika's Fusion- the bar every Wednesday, Rs 555. 4479448
- ❖ **Eden Lounge Bar** Happy hour 3-7PM, buy one get one free cocktails. 6<sup>th</sup> floor, Kathmandu Mall, Sundhara.
- ❖ **Monsoon Madness Wine Festival** Enjoy wines from four continents at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440
- ❖ **Mango Masti** At all restaurants in Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Traditional Cuisines** at Patan Museum Café. 5526271
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** Special package of swimming and lunch, or overnight with breakfast and swimming, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Earth Watch Restaurant** Breakfast with birds, lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fireplace at Park Village Hotel. 4375280.
- ❖ **Speical budget lunches** at Rum Doodle Bar and Restaurant. 4422613
- ❖ **Breakfast** Singma Restaurant, 8.30-11AM daily. 5009092.
- ❖ **Jatra Wednesday Nights** Free cocktail for women. 4256622

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Shamanism Full Moon Trek to Lake Gosainkunda** Rs 5999, 4-12 August. 4412508
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, relaxation and massages in Pokhara. 4361500
- ❖ **Conferences and workshops** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Dwarika's Overnight Package** Night of luxury at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Escape to Godavari Village Resort**, an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5560675

Quest Entertainment

Omkara, or Omi, is a powerful chieftain who heads a gang of outlaws, which include Langda Tyagi and Kesu as his chief cohorts. The story begins when Omi appoints Kesu and not Langda as his chief lieutenant. Seething with envy Langda hatches a plot to falsely implicate Omi's beautiful lover Dolly in a love affair with Kesu, Omi's favourite lieutenant. With the help of Indu, Langda's wife, the plan takes shape and results in horrific tragedy. Using petty lies, Langda keeps poisoning Omi's mind till one day it snaps and Omi goes about tearing up his perfect world. By the time he realises what he has done it is already too late.

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**Himal Southasian:** August issue is on the stands.



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**NEPALI WEATHER** by MAUSAM BEED



There are always either highs or lows in rainfall distribution, and that is true this year too. July is going to be the second consecutive month this year with below normal rainfall in most of the country. Especially badly hit are the eastern tarai and central Nepal. Evidence of this is that the Kulekhani reservoir, which should be full by now, is half-empty. The rain is also uneven: coming down in heavy cloudbursts and not sustained jhari which farmers need for their paddy crops. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows that the ocean is continuing to pump clouds towards the Himalaya, but only a portion of the moisture is reaching here. Expect overcast skies and more rains this weekend, mostly over the night.

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

Fri  29-20	Sat  29-20	Sun  30-21	Mon  29-19	Tue  30-19
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**आगोको याम**



आगोको याम  
आगोको याम  
आगोको याम

अनुशासन र नैतिकताविहीन व्यक्ति र समाज अन्ततोगत्वा पतन भएर जान्छन् । त्यसैले राष्ट्रिय जीवनका हरेक आयामहरूमा उदाहरणीय अनुशासन र नैतिकता कायम गर्नुपर्छ । र त्यसको सुरुआत आफैबाट गरौं ।

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**सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय**  
**सूचना विभाग**





**TU WANNABES:** Students affiliated with the Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training protest at the Ministry of Education and Sports on Wednesday. The students want to be affiliated with Tribhuban University.



**FEDERAL REPUBLIC JINDABADI:** Students from Adarsha Saral School, Patan said Maoists forced them to attend Wednesday's civil society protest at Ratna Park.



**FIRST OFF THE RACK:** Actress Arunima Lamsal chooses a dress at the newly-opened Forever 21 boutique in Kupondole on Saturday.



**ITALIAN TREATS:** Head Chef Suresh Thapa of Soaltee Crowne Palza displays Italian delicacies at the Tuscan Food Festival 27-29 July.

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# A Rana becomes Rinpoche

**S**ridhar Samsher J B Rana is the first non-Tibetan to be bestowed with the title 'Rinpoche'. Rana, whose interest in religion was sparked when he returned to Nepal after studying in India in the 1970s, came into contact with Khaptad Baba when he was studying Hinduism in 1976 and started training under him. So impressed was Khaptad Baba with Rana's deep interest in the Vedas and religion that he offered to become his mentor. Rana was so interested in religion that he started studying Zen Buddhism in 1980 under guru Osho Nen Re Kobori at the

world famous Daitokuji school in Kyoto. By 1994, Rana had trained under numerous Tibetan gurus and with permission from one of his teachers, Tulku Ugren Rinpoche, he was permitted to start teaching 'Maha Vipasyana'. The same year he gained the title Acharya from the renowned Rinpoche Karma Thinle. In 1996, Rana decided to master 'Tantrik Vipasyana' techniques. Under the supervision of his teacher Chobgya Thrichen Rinpoche, 11 years ago he embarked upon a prolonged intense period of meditation and recently earned the title 'Mahayogi Sridhar Rana

Rinpoche'. Rinpoche is a Tibetan word meaning 'precious gem'. Before Rana began meditating, he started a group called Byom Kusum whose members translate Buddhist religious scriptures into Nepali and teach meditation techniques and other spiritual activities. They are also trying to revive the ancient traditions of Nigma, Kagya and Sakya in Nepal and India. Apart from meditation, Rana has also been writing sermons for his students. His writings emphasise the comparative study of religion and attempt to explain Buddhism in a modern scientific way. ●

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# My letter to Kofi

News that GP 'Sanubuwa' Koirala and PK 'Awesome' Dahal have sent letters to Kofi Annan has set off a chain reaction of letter-writing to the UN Secretary General by Nepalis from all walks of life who also want him to be their penpal.

So far, there are no reports of Kofi having replied to any of the letters, so the correspondence thus far is a bit lopsided. But the UN's office in Pulchok clarified in a press release that the secretary general intends to reply to all letters even if it means taking time off from his busy schedule meeting world leaders in Rome to negotiate peace in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, parliament's State Affairs Committee has issued a directive asking everyone who has written to Kofi to appear before the committee with notarised copies of the correspondence in triplicate. "Parliament needs to know what's going on, and it has the right to read private mail," Speaker Subhas Nemwang said.

Deputy Prime Minister KP Oli was summoned and after reading the prime minister's letter committee members declared that it could not be made public. Its content was deemed so embarrassing it would actually undermine national security. Parliament hasn't yet summoned the Fierce One, but we have it on good authority that his letter is also a major national embarrassment.

However, by invoking the Freedom of Information and Citizens' Right to Be Embarrassed Act 2005 we can finally, in the public interest, reveal the actual contents of the letters:

Dear Kofiji  
I am writing this to you from my hospital bed, so please excuse my handwriting. Hope your family is fine and you are in the best of health. They told me to write to you, that is why I'm writing to you. Drop me a line sometime.

Cheers.  
GP Koirala  
PS: Please burn this letter after you get it.

Comrade Secretary General Annan, Lal Salam!  
As you know, even the unenlightened peasant is aware that democracy, parliaments, elections and freedom of press have remained, in so far as they did, a mere screen. They were utilised, when it happened to be convenient, to deceive the masses. The task of the dictatorship of the proletariat, on the other hand, is to break up the machinery of government created by the bourgeoisie and to replace it with a new one created on a different basis and recognising the machinations of running dog lackeys of global imperialist warmongers. But having said that, can I ask you a personal question? Who does your suits?

Long live COMPOSA, CRZ, M-L-M and the Path named after yours truly!

Hi Bro,  
Long time no see, man. You must be looking forward to retirement, can't say I blame you given the kind of people you have to deal with every day. Here in Nepal we are still celebrating the demise of dictatorship and are in the process of undoing all the draconian laws enacted by the royal regime. And we are making fantastic progress. For example, just this week we lifted the ban on pillion riders wearing helmets that was enforced by our country's erstwhile tyrants in a flagrant violation of the Geneva and Rome Conventions. Next, we will allow drivers to use mobile phones again and even throw the handset out of the window when it doesn't work. The other thing we have done is honour the achievement of People Power II by turning the site of the biggest anti-king demonstration at Khula Munch into a landfill site for Kathmandu's garbage. As you can see, we will leave no stone upside down to make this democracy work.

See you around next time you're here.  
Kunda Dixit

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**Registration and testing is open on** Tuesday 25, Wednesday 26 July any time from 8.30am to 3pm. Thursday 27, Friday 28 July any time from 8.30am to 5pm. Also on Saturday 29 July from 8.00am to 4pm only.



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