Maoists are on a public relations offensive out west

Sword into ploughshare

As he readied his paddytown for planting last week, Ram Bahadur Gurung of Gumi VDC in Surkhet got a pleasant surprise. A group of armed Maoists volunteered to help him.

Some comrades ploughed the field, others used the hoe and the women guerrillas waded knee-deep into the slush to plant paddy. The People’s War now has a different focus here in western Nepal: to win hearts and minds.

Aware that the people blame them for past brutality, the rebels are on a public relations offensive. Ram Bahadur had got used to being forced to give shelter to Maoists and feed them. Now he doesn’t know whether he can trust the guerrillas who still have rifles slung over their shoulders. “They say there will be peace now,” says a wizened 70-year-old farmer, “they help us in the fields, so we are not as afraid as we used to be.”

Just three months of ceasefire, and it is hard to tell that these lush green hills have been soaked with blood the past ten years. The Maoists murdered party workers, teachers, traders. More died in brutal crackdowns by state security.

The rebels cut suspension bridges, blew up telecom towers, roads, radio transmitters, hydropower stations, making this isolated region even more remote. Development has been set back decades, as VDC buildings, health posts, schools and drinking water systems were demolished.

“We were at war and had to obey party decisions,” explains Comrade Jitendra, “we won’t make that mistake, the focus now is not the war.”

It is clear that comrades who till recently believed that power came out of the barrel of a gun now seem to be convinced that power comes from the people. “If the leaders decide to disband the PLA we will go along with it,” says Comrade Pratik of the rebel’s Sixth Division.

Many still think the ceasefire is another Maoist ploy. But Comrade Ramesh appears contrite, “We will now turn from destruction to development.”

Farewell to arms?

The high-level UN mission lead by Staffan de Mistura returned to New York Thursday without being able to persuade the Maoists and the government to come up with a common position on demilitarising before elections.

“There is a lack of trust on the techniques of arms management,” de Mistura told reporters at the airport on Thursday, but added, “on this the UN can help.”

The visit did provide a sense of urgency to the peace process which was stuck because of a deadlock over arms. De Mistura tried to hurry things up by hinting at a Thursday deadline, but analysts said it may have been too much to expect a breakthrough so quickly.

“We’re hoping there is a momentum, I’m not disappointed,” de Mistura said, “if they come up with some kind of consensus while we are back in New York we will take that into account.”

The UN team spent a week in Nepal and actively tried to bring the two sides together. It will now report to Secretary General Kofi Annan and discuss a possible future UN monitoring mission to oversee the peace process.
**PEACE RIDDLE**

There is a Nepal folk riddle that goes something like this: a farmer needs to take a tiger, a goat, and a pile of grass across a narrow bridge to the other side of the stream. He can only take one at a time, but if he leaves the goat and tiger together, the tiger will eat the goat. If he takes the tiger first, the goat will eat the grass. What does he do?

The UN’s Missura mission must have encountered a similar problem while dealing with the government, army, Maoists, parliamentarians in Kathmandu this week. Of course, it would be great if you could trust the tiger not to eat up the goat, or if you could talk the goat into not being greedy and leave the grass alone.

It would be lovely if everyone trusted each other, but it doesn’t work that way in the real world. So you have to resort to what conflict resolution experts call “sequencing”. De-escalation carried out in proper order so that there is no need for the two sides to distrust each other.

Luckily, the Nepal conflict is still a political one, and at the moment they can both argue that they are both sides to resolve it through negotiations. As de Mistura himself said when he arrived, this has made his job much easier because the UN is usually being called to firefigh in wars where the blame is contended.

The sticking point is still that the Maoists don’t want to lay down their arms immediately because a) they don’t trust the army and b) five of their own seven field commanders have expressed reservations. And the Nepal Army, as the armed force of a legitimate state power, doesn’t want the Maoists to be put on the same status as any kind of armed resistance.

Intractable as these two positions may seem, a formula acceptable to the army and the Maoists is possible: both sides confine troops to barracks and keep weapons under monitored storage while the UN supervises the ceasefire and the runout to constituent assembly elections. The only disagreement is about whether these weapons should be under lock and key.

There is a consensus among the international community that the Maoists can’t be a part of an interim setup while still openly carrying arms. And the Nepal Army, despite some ambitious jargons in the ranks, is so beholden to the UN for lucrative peacekeeping that it won’t jeopardise its position.

The trick now is to sequence the moves. Just like the smart farmer first took the goat across the bridge, then the grass. On the return trip he brought the goat back and took the tiger over and left him there with the grass. Finally, he lead the goat across. The farmer used his head, and no one ate anyone up.

**GUEST COLUMN**

Pravin Rana

is bad and the clueless and Americans are behind all the ill's of the world. High Noon is a relevant blast from the past.

Well, at least Thucydides, Hobbes, and Churchill might agree as might most of the Nepal security forces that fought so hard the last ten years.

Minimalism is the movie’s strength. Shot in grizzly black and white, the story unfolds in the span of a few hours in a town called Hadleyville. Frank Miller, a brutal killer, was sentenced to death some five years ago but manages to receive a pardon from

**The elusive formula**

Peace prospects, despite setbacks, are still bright.

**STATE OF THE STATE**

C K Lal

was not well advised. No matter what we think of, King Gyanendra’s acquiescence is still necessary for the democratisation of the Nepal Army, a crucial element of the Nepal peace plan. The government’s first priority is to resolve the army on a leash, but the generals continue to act if nothing has changed.

The generals ignore summons by the commission investigating the April excesses, its drunken officers about and torturing policemen on duty and it doesn’t answer to the Ministry of Defence. The international community, too, seems to have given carte blanche to the Nepal Army on a simple promise they will take orders from the seven-party government. This premise remains to be tested, but gone are the government’s calls for reforms in the army.

The UN team has been looking at ‘arms management’, but all the political parties seem to think it refers only to Maoist arms. In their eight-point agreement, the government and the Maoists unequivocally agreed to request the UN to assist in the management of the arms and arms of both sides to monitor it for a free fair election to the constituent assembly.

As we go to press on Thursday after an acceptable formula managing arms is still elusive. Mission chief Mistura had hinted behind diplomacy but it’s clear that a consensus isn’t possible unless the military of both sides are simultaneously dealt with.

The Nepal Army didn’t succeed in crushing the insurgency. The People’s Liberation Army failed to overthrow the regime through an armed revolution. Both were brought to their senses by a peaceful uprising. It’s the agenda of peace that must prevail. What we have to do now is find a formula to neutralise weapons on both sides.

The Nepal Army’s weapons will have to be quarantined in acceptable locations and monitored by mutually agreed observers. Soldiers may be allowed to keep small arms inside barracks, but they can’t come near the army because their very presence can sway voting patterns.

The strength of the Maoist army first needs to be verified before it can be monitored. They, too, have to be housed in designated areas until the constituent assembly makes a decision for their rehabilitation or reintegration.

During the uncertainties of transition it is tempting to overestimate one’s power. Maoist commanders have been behaving as if they run a parallel government. Nothing of that sort. For a large section of Nepal society and the international community, Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his cohorts are still on probation. Should they fail to respect the people’s yearning for peace, they will have no peace.

The seven-party alliance must, similarly, get over the illusion that it has the mandate to rule with the help of royalists. The Mandates that they have are only temporary. The interim parliament, a step towards establishing peace, brings elected representatives to the table. The Maoist and Nepali media ‘activists’ to the town leaders and priests, and Ian Martin to Helen are intentional and not coincidental.

The reel life relevance of the classic western to today’s Kathmandu

D

described by many as the definitive western, High Noon was made in 1952. Ok, that’s a whole go old, partner, even before an older greyer one like me. When movies today are chucked out for either the mainstream pyrotechnic effect or pretend to explore tough issues but come up with the usual answers (ie, Bush er, politicians we are told [how about that, isn’t that a shock?]).

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CIVIL SOCIETY

It is good news for Nepal that its civil society has woken up and started realising the responsibility of keeping government-of-the-day in check. However, I agree with your editorial (‘Super parliament’, #308) that our civil society is becoming more reactive than proactive. They have become naysaying nobs of negativity. For monarchy, no. For continuance of parliament: no. For continuity of the present Korala government: no. And it goes on. When the government tries to get civil society involved in helping with the peace process by asking it to join the peace-monitoring mission they refuse. And what about trying to impose a particular doctrine by holding sit-ins for a republic and pretending to represent us, who have reservations about such sensitive issues? Civil society pioneers should shed their prejudiced political line.

Pradeep Sharma, Mumbai

- Really enjoyed your editorial (‘Super parliament’, #308), which was well thought-out and balanced, and allows a proportional ‘give’ to all sides. The distinction between civil society and political activists is key. What makes civil society so potent is its ability to influence policy-making without participating in the legal process itself. Civil society is crucial in upholding the system of checks and balances, especially in a country like ours. But, as your editorial correctly pointed out, if civil society endorses the Maoist line exclusively at the detriment of all other views and actively promotes a role for itself as a practicing member of the governing polity, then it loses its utility as an impartial observer. Worse, if the usual suspects from our self-declared civil society actually participate in any interim government, the result will amount to a biased advantage for the nearest position. Your assertion that the Maoists are afraid of laying down arms because they are unsure of their standing in the population (minus the threat of force) is plausible. So is your view of the heightened probability of a split in the Maoist ranks should the issue of disarmament not suit the inclinations of certain factions within the Maoists. However, the question from the very beginning of this process has been whether the state is working to bring the Maoists into the fold or if the idea is to bring whoever is willing from the Maoists, into the government. If it’s the latter, I’m sorry, but it does not make sense to appease Pushpa, Baburam and their cohorts now, just to have 40 deaths a week and a partially failed peace process, later. The thought of exonerating the political leadership and condemning the Maoist fighting force has repercussions along ethnic, caste and class lines that reach far beyond the obvious issue of settlement.

Yes, there is paranoia of the Maoists going back to the jungsli after this monsoon but I agree that they have come too far too fast to do that. But the paranoia itself isn’t misplaced, in fact it drives much of the policy making here today. The point here is that the Maoists have manoeuvred into a position where ironically, the agenda of peace has become a Maoist agenda. So, the paranoia is justified in the sense that it prevents the seizure of concession from the Maoists that under conditions of parity would be rational. But given the present circumstances, the suggestion of such concessions jeopardise the peace process and bring forth allegations of allegiance to the crown. Yes, the unfortunate alternative is 40 Nepali deaths a week. Equally unfortunate is the idea of 27 million Nepalis being held hostage, psychologically, by the Maoists refusing to disarm. What is really misplaced is the hope the political leadership can navigate the Maoist gauntlet by exposing contradictions in the Maoist position while simultaneously driving the peace process. The idea itself isn’t misplaced, in fact it drives much too far too fast to do that. But the paranoia is completely from the strong Hindu past, to the Maoist line exclusively at the detriment of all other views and actively promotes a role for itself as a practicing member of the governing polity, then it loses its utility as an impartial observer. Worse, if the usual suspects from our self-declared civil society actually participate in any interim government, the result will amount to a biased advantage for the nearest position. Your assertion that the Maoists are afraid of laying down arms because they are unsure of their standing in the population (minus the threat of force) is plausible. So is your view of the heightened probability of a split in the Maoist ranks should the issue of disarmament not suit the inclinations of certain factions within the Maoists. However, the question from the very beginning of this process has been whether the state is working to bring the Maoists into the fold or if the idea is to bring whoever is willing from the Maoists, into the government. If it’s the latter, I’m sorry, but it does not make sense to appease Pushpa, Baburam and their cohorts now, just to have 40 deaths a week and a partially failed peace process, later. The thought of exonerating the political leadership and condemning the Maoist fighting force has repercussions along ethnic, caste and class lines that reach far beyond the obvious issue of settlement. RANA RINPOCHE

Being a Rana myself, I’m at loath to encounter bigoted behaviour amonRanas. They strongly cling to the vestiges of their autocratic past, and are also capable of returning to some sort of a system where they can retain their hold. Many of these families used to own land. They have lot to lose. That’s why we need a clean break from the past.

The abolishment of the monarchy is the only way we can achieve this. The caste system in our society is bad enough, the class these families bring, makes Nepali society look completely feudal. But let’s not lump all Ranas and Shahs together. Many, Ranas are poor themselves. ‘A Rana becomes Rinpoche’ (#308) is an example of a non-stereotype Rana. For a Rana to break completely from the strong Hindu past, to become a Rinpoche and preach its message of peace and happiness, requires strong conviction. We must admire the man’s determination and dedication to do what he thought was the correct path. He is an example for the rest of us.

S Rana, London

- Sridhar S B Rana chose the path destined for him. But I was a little intrigued by your title to the piece: ‘A Rana becomes Rinpoche’. As the question to the editors: A question is just another Nepali surname like Sharma, Chamar, Sherpa, Gurung, Yadav. So why should the fact that Sridhar is a Rana hold any significance? Feudal hangover? GARBAGE IN

Your front page picture (‘Waste management’, #308) is proof of the Nepali government’s lack of interest in public issues. It is shameful that a site of the pro-democratic struggle has turned into a garbage disposal centre. There is organic and inorganic rubbish. They should be separated at home, so the organic waste is composted and used in the garden instead of ending up on the city streets. Recycling the inorganic also creates new jobs. Garbage scavengers should be organised to pick up trash house-to-house instead of picking it from public dumping sites. Fine those who throw household rubbish in the street. The easy way to a cleaner city is with good management and an aware citizenry.

The Green Team, Bhaktapur

WHICH NEPAL, WHEN?

Nepal existed a long time before Pritibar Narayan Shah, contrary to what Bharat Basnet thinks (‘Pritibar Narayan’s message’, #308). It was centred in Kathmandu, and had a government, a legal system, currency, foreign relations, and defined boundaries. That, however, may not have been the case with the other rayas that were merged into present-day Nepal.

Bhupendra Kaji, Kathmandu

INTELLECTUAL POWER

Kunda Dixit writes ‘even if the right decision is taken today, we’ll still have eight hours of winter power cuts daily till at least 2013’ (‘The country’s future is dark’, #308). But his concern raises another major issue: it will take longer than the energy crisis to create intellectual power in Nepal, even if we make sound policies. Smart Nepalis are heading West or are there already, and those who remain are frustrated. The country’s future is indeed dark, in every sense.

Prakash Pangeni, email

FROM BAD TO VERSE

You editorial, ‘Super parliament’ (#308), mentioned Grey Shirts, which led me to pen this little dittie.

SHADES OF GRAY

Prologue
Blown by the southerly winds dark grey cloud hovers over the Himalaya with thunderous lightning and torrential rain ready to wash away the precious soil.

Act I
Grey is the colour of choice for the masses Grey is hip from the colour of hair to dresses Grey is custom-tailored to differentiate between a short-sleeved shirt and a full-sleeved tuck-in shirt in a classless system.

Act II
Grey is the bad/ so are the whiskers Grey is what takes the hair faded by memories of a bygone era Sita Ram Sita Ram Babu Ram Babu Ram Ram Babu Hare Hare Act III
Hot red fire eventually becomes khbarani that is swept away in the Bagmati. Epilogue:
Black and White makes grey. We are, but, brown.

SN Singh, email

NGERIANS IN NEPAL

There are valid points raised about Nigerians visiting Nepal in your translated item (From the Nepali Press, ‘Nigerian Watch’, #308). Having lived with Nigerian students while studying in the former USSR and having read about their involvement drug trafficking in India, I think our authorities are already a little concerned about the game. Our troubled country does not need more problems. So do we need to host them? It also seems ridiculous that Nepali football clubs are hiring Nigerian players for the domestic league. As someone said, this does not reflect our country’s nor favours. The Home Ministry, Immigration Department, Ministry of Tourism, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs should all take action immediately.

Nara Jordi Karki, email

POSTSCRIPT

AUTORIZED

AUDIO

Edu August 2006
Training in Nepal

Preparatory Monitoring and Evaluation August 21 - 25
update yourself with various recent advancements in the disciplines and frameworks for preparing and implementing the land management projects for

professional development projects


A controversial Chinese aircraft deal originally pushed by the Nepal Army and the palace is stuck in cabinet, as the new government comes under pressure from Beijing not to cancel the order.

If the deal falls apart, several sources say the government may even have to pay $8 million more than the cost price for aircraft that are unsuitable and unnecessary. The extra money will most likely line the pockets of palace and army officials, they add.

A cabinet decision approving the purchase of two Chinese MA-60 turboprops was slated for Monday, but deferred indefinitely. A government source told us the cabinet will take a decision on the matter “after all the relevant information comes in.”

The deal is now seen as a measure of the capacity of the weak army government to stand up to pressure from just the Chinese but also from powerful figures from the royal past.

The controversy is in part about whether the aircraft, developed from the Soviet-era AN24 is suitable for Nepal’s flying conditions. But the spotlight now is on how the Chinese was arranged and through whom.

The MA-60 is manufactured by Xi’an Aircraft Industrial Corporation and can carry up to 60 people, but it has been shunned by China’s own domestic airlines.

The Chinese sold two to Zimbabwe last year for $8 million a piece and gave away one free. One made an emergency landing at Victoria Falls while returning passengers, and been grounded and a third caught fire while taking off in Harare last month.

The new campaign moves from the royal past.

A cavorting Rhino Dai is Nepal’s new brand ambassador

The new campaign moves away from obvious expressions of Nepal’s uniqueness, which is long overdue. Nepal is about our mountains, culture and heritage, but it is also about our hospitality, festivals, extreme adventure, air sports, meditation and much more,” says Nandini Lahe-Thapa, Director of Tourism Marketing and Promotion at NTB.

“Nepal, India and other major tourist generating markets,” says NTB’s new brand ambassador, “Once is not enough” should be the slogan, “It’s a creative reputation manager for Asian tourist marketers.”

Social Infrastructure, in large part due to budget realities. “NATURO logo, which is grounded and a third caught fire while taking off in Harare last month.

Visit Nepal, again and again

N epal Tourism Board’s paper trail looks different these days. Gone are the picturesque images of the Kumbh, and the Buddha under the tree. New publicity materials for the ‘Naturally Nepal’ campaign carry cartoonist Abin Shrestha’s illustrations of ‘Rhino de’ hurrying across Basantapur laden with shopping bags, parrying in Kathmandu, bungee jumping over the White Koshi, and meditating at a retreat.

Faced with steadily declining arrivals, top tourism officials are looking to reposition Nepal’s image in the international (and especially Western) market, and compete with other travel destinations in Asia. Since March 2008, the dreamy ‘Visit Nepal’ campaign has been replaced with ‘Naturally Nepal—One True Destination’ which has the ambitious aim of attracting a total of 10 million tourists by 2010 and making Nepal a top ten global destination. Last year’s arrival figure was $75,000. An over-invoiced army order for aircraft we do not need

The plane has no type and airworthiness certification from the US Federal Aviation Agency and Europe’s Joint Aviation Authorities. Which means we cannot use them.

The deal was pushed by powerful royal advisor Shashik Chandra Shah who, along with relatives and associates, is also the local agent for the aircraft. The deal was pursued by the Chief of Army Staff Pyar Jung Thapa when he flew to Beijing via Laos in October 2005.

Upetry led a government team including pilots from the army’s air wing (Number 11 Brigade) to evaluate the planes. Despite misgivings from army engineers and pilots and irregularities in procedure because there was no competitive bidding, Upetry signed a memorandum for the purchase and the government sent an advance of $5 million to the China National Aero-Technology Import and Export Corporation.

After regime change in April, the new government wanted to scrap the deal. But Shah flew to Shanghai in June and got the Chinese authorities to persuade the government to stick to the contract or forfeit the $5 million advance. Sources told us Finance Minister Ramsaran Mahat has lately sided with China’s own domestic airlines.

“The deal on grounds that cancellation would cost money. Mahat told us, ‘This was a liability entered into by the previous government. It is a government-to-government contract. Cancellating it will affect bilateral ties.’” Others say it’s better to cut the losses instead of buying unsuitable equipment and throw good money after bad.

The planes have a list price of about $8.5 million, but Nepal will pay $12 million each. So to save the advance, the government will end up paying close to $8 million in ‘padding’ money. “This was a deal pushed by the royal government and the army,” one source told us, “the intention was not to line their pockets but also to accumulate funds to suppress the people’s movement.”

The irony is that the new army now says it doesn’t want the planes. So the aircraft are being panned off to state-run Nepal Airlines. But officials at the airline don’t want the gas-guzzling MA-60s either because they would be too costly to run.

An over-invoiced army order for aircraft we do not need

Visit Nepal, again and again

After launching the brand in October 2005, and picked the new Delhi-based Alchemy Social Infrastructure, in large part due to budget realities. Alchemy has previously worked on promotional campaigns for the Swatch Group in Kathmandu, India’s PVR cinemas, and an Amul-branded PR agency, Y&R. Its local partner, Business Advantage, is meant to be “creative reputation manager” for the ‘Naturally Nepal’ campaign, working with NTB from December last year through February, to develop an art-based look for the campaign, and carry out research, planning and consultation with private and government agencies in Nepal, India and other major tourist generating markets.

“Unlike earlier campaigns, this brand was not based on mere advertising.”

“The campaign’s tagline ‘Once is not enough’ should serve as a mantra for the Nepalese tourism industry to focus on customer retention rather than

Choppers, too

Irregularities in the MA-60 order have also highlighted the army’s recent order for two Mi-17 helicopters from Russia’s Kazan Helicopter Plant through a local agent for a total of $6.5 million.

In March the royal regime wanted to get a loan from a consortium of Nepali banks to buy four Mi-17s, but when the banks backed out it decided to buy only two and pay for it from the state coffers. If it cancels the order, the government will lose Rs 200 million it has paid for the letter of credit.

Unlike the MA-60 it could be argued that the helicopters have been bought in Nepal’s terrain and are genuinely required. But there are questions about safety. Of the six Mi-17s and Mi-8Is that the army has bought or got as grant, only one is still aero. One line up during the mid-Manghai, three have crashed and one is grounded.

Sources say that the procedures of these military purchases are opaque and involve kickbacks and padding not just in the purchase but also on spare parts. Streamlining hardware procurement and making the army accountable to taxpayers should be part of the reforms contemplated for the Nepalese Army.

“Buying the helicopters is the easy part provided we have the money,” says one military source, “but what is the helicopter going to cost in whole life cycle terms? These are very expensive toys.”
Some win, some lose

Hospitality trade unions had a busy week, forcing two hotels to withdraw from the Everest Base Camp and the city because a mob had gathered along the way to pelt stones at a police station. Once in the city, you have to deal with a severe struggle for supremacy between the Maoist trade union and the trade union coordinating body, TMTU-ONE.

Meanwhile, after eight months of closure, Yale’s Y & K Hotel has resumed operations. A settlement was finally negotiated between management and two trade unions, the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions and the All Nepal Hotel and Restaurant Workers’ Association, issued a statement denying its cashew involvement. “It is not our policy to threaten anyone,” it stressed. Sources say union members have long-established pressure on hoteliers to hire only Nepali staff.

Ambassador.

In the evening, it should plan to make everyone singing the same part. Participation, no amount of cute with posters, but if the campaign that we deliver quality products.”

Himalaya, says: “While it is Tourism veteran Yogendra appearing on the nightly news publicity even if it is Nepal Everest).

But if any publicity is good and others are plain wrong, such of the images in the brochure are visitors might notice that some

The incident occurs during a severe struggle for supremacy between the Maoist trade union and the trade union coordinating body, TMTU-ONE. The Maoists are using the casuistry and peace to expand and strengthen their organisation.

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Some win, some lose

Hospitality trade unions had a busy week, forcing two hotels to withdraw from the Everest Base Camp and the city because a mob had gathered along the way to pelt stones at a police station. Once in the city, you have to deal with a severe struggle for supremacy between the Maoist trade union and the trade union coordinating body, TMTU-ONE. The Maoists are using the casuistry and peace to expand and strengthen their organisation.

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King wants to talk to Prachanda

Jana Aastha, 2 August

There is information to suggest that the king has offered to talk to Prachanda.

Sources close to the palace and Maoists say that the king has been using various channels to try meeting Prachanda this week. But it’s certain that Prachanda shows no signs of agreeing to this, no matter how cold the Maoists’ relationship with the seven parties may be turning. Meanwhile, although Prachanda wanted to meet Girija Prasad Koirala, the NC leader’s advisers kept staving him off with excuses of no time.

These are the circumstances around the king’s interest in political talks with Prachanda, and royalists have been using various channels trying to make this happen. According to sources, they have approached Prachanda asking why he is not willing to meet the king if he wants to run the government with the support of thousands of supporters from the villages to the central level. “We have not sent any response as we are still in favour of sustaining our relationship with the seven parties,” one senior Maoist leader.

Sources say that king became interested in meeting the Maoists’ chairman after the UML, the NC and the NC (D) cut off their privileges and authority and began in earnest to treat him as just a ceremonial monarch. His current efforts are seriously puzzling party leaders. Their best-case scenario is that the king wants the Maoists to agree to the parties’ proposal of a ceremonial monarch. Or, he could be trying to widen the gap between the parties and the Maoists.

It appears that during the second round of talks in 2003 (which failed), the Maoists had proposed meeting the king to know his stand on the constituent assembly. The king showed no interest then, ironically, now that he has no power he wants to talk to them. Koirala, on the other hand, has been distancing himself from the Maoists leaders and even outright ignoring it. When he wasn’t in government, Koirala would go running to New Delhi. For the Maoists, Koirala and the king behave in the same manner when they are in power, and they take Koirala’s refusal to meet Prachanda seriously. People are slowly believing that the UML and the NC, which had promised successful talks with the Maoists, have failed to make the peace process decisive.

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Knowing Koirala

Nepal, 6 August

Girija Koirala has always been known as someone who makes decisions in haste and regrets them later. Whether as a prime minister, party president or political worker, Koirala has always made controversial decisions, and many of his political moves have been outrageous.

Close friend of Koirala who struggled with him through the Rana and Panchayat regimes, says that the Koirala family doesn’t know who really looks out for them. Loyal supporters were kicked out of the Koirala house, while selfish and disreputable people came as they wished.

Close family friend Bhanu Lal Jha says that when Koirala became prime minister in 1991, he was surrounded by a small group of cunning politicians who encouraged him to make decisions that made him very unpopular. “Koirala was never able to form a good team and failed to advance his party and lead the country well,” says Jha.

The reason he has backing in the party is because he fights hard for his party and the movement, and he can impress anyone. For example, it’s difficult to keep up with Koirala. Not even his deteriorating health has slowed him down. He remains patient, confident, and hopeful, no matter how difficult the political situation. Koirala is also praised for his simplicity, cheerfulness,friendliness and generosity. He didn’t change even when his health worsened, which earned him more friends.

Koirala’s lifestyle has never changed much. Since he gave up his favourite western-style suits and ties, he has always worn a white homespun kurtha pyjama with a coat. He still uses his favourite fragrances, Evening in Paris and Kanta. Koirala is non-vegetarian, he relishes mutton and chicken, and is also fond of eating vegetables from his own kitchen garden. He enjoys tea and drinks six-seven glasses a day, and takes a glass of milk every morning. Koirala used to smoke

MIN BAJRACHARYA

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Nepal was established in May 2005, following the signature of an agreement of cooperation with the Government of Nepal. The Office has a mandate to monitor the observance of human rights and international humanitarian law, bearing in mind the practical and the political context in the country with a view to creating an enabling environment for the promotion and protection of human rights in Nepal. The Office is based in the city of Kathmandu.

UN/International Interpreter/Translator, 5 positions

Dominic Kathmandu, Bhubaneswar, Nepal

Bilingual (English and Nepali) interpreters and translators will be required to provide the following services: Interpret in various meetings as and when the need arises; this includes interpreting for the Field Coordinator and Foreigners Division, Harman Rajo Rega and other UN officials, during meetings with government officials, NGOs, non-governmental organizations and family members, in the absence of qualified interpreters;

Provide interpreting services in the context of a “human rights and humanitarian law violations hotline” in response to requests for services from individuals in all courtesies from Nepal to Nepal, ensuring that all declarations are made and the quality of translation is adequate. Keep track of all written translations of documents in accordance with the legal and administrative authorities. Advise the requesting party on the appropriate avenues to have requests for translations of documents; and

Other tasks as assigned.

Qualifications and other desirable skills for the position:

Advanced University degree, preferably in Foreign Languages or equivalent Law, International Relations, Literature, Anthropology or other disciplines related to Social Sciences. A combination of some of these fields will be considered. Experience and training in translation of official documents and experience in the use of professional translation software is desirable.

Candidates are required to complete a UN Personal History form available either at UN offices throughout the country or the OHCHR’s web-site http://nepal.ohchr.org/vacancy.htm.

The deadline for applications is 15 August 2006. All applications are strongly encouraged to be submitted through the paper-based by mail to the Permanent Mission of Nepal to the United Nations in Geneva, or electronically to the Office of the United Nations in Kathmandu, Nepal.

Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.
60-70 cigarettes a day, especially after the death of his beloved wife Sushana, but has recently quit on the advice of his doctor. He still drinks a couple of pegs of whisky.

Koirala is quite passionate about his health — in the early days he made a special trip to Calcutta to buy equipment, and mostly photographed his wife. He has an interesting quirk that still endures—he makes sure that anyone who takes his picture sends him a copy.

**Envoy selection**

Ghadhni, 30 July

During the royal regime, Nepal’s diplomatic sector became a recruiting centre for revolutionaries and nongovernmental organisations. With all the political changes in Nepal, the diplomatic community is also trying to redeem itself by becoming more inclusive and loktantrik. Although 12 serving ambassadors were recalled by the new government, it still hasn’t been able to send new envoys to replace them. A highly placed source within the government tells us that the government has been doing its homework for the selection process. Deputy Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and Prime Minister Koirala are in the process of finalising standards for new nominations. Apparently, the House of Representatives will hold special hearings for important diplomatic positions. The OML has also been pushing nominations who could improve Nepal’s image abroad, and they believe civil society should be represented. The party has recommended Nilambar Acharya (for a top ambassadorial post), and says it will obtain Indira’s support if necessary. The UML has also recommended party central committee and foreign desk member Ram Krishna Gyawali. The party believes that Gyawali’s background in political science and diplomacy will be an asset to Nepal’s diplomatic community and that she (CHK) should be in an important foreign ministry position. Milan Tuladhar is the choice for China’ forwarded by the UML and political experts. Former student leader Tanka Karki is also on the list, and UML central advisory committee chairperson Kamal Koirala has been recommended for SAARC country. Others on the list include human rights activist Arjun Karki, Surjya Pandey, Parvati Dhakal, and Professor Surya Subedi. The NC has recommended former vice chancellor Dr. Mina Pradhan and former member of parliament Bimala Gurung, among others.

**Uncivil society**

At a time when the Maoists and the government can’t agree on the fate of parliament, other disagreements have surfaced. They may look serious, but they’re not natural, and if there is a commitment to negotiate, a solution can be found. However, there are elements posing as allies trying to provoke the other sides.

It may not be a bad idea to keep parliament so there is no political vacuum and so it can help the peace process. However, if parliament becomes a den of murkiness it may actually end up being destructive. Why was the Speaker in such a hurry to instruct the government to sign the Rome Statute? Why was it done without consultations, and on behalf of which organisation or group was the move made?

There is a similar danger from the Maoist side. Prachanda now wants a parliament that has already agreed on an election for a constituent assembly to announce a republic through the interim parliament. This is disingenuous coming from a man who earlier had promised to abide by the constituent assembly verdict even if it was in favour of monarchy. Why is Prachanda emulating the king to wrest away the people’s choice?

“…This movement will not end until we have a democratic republic.”

Mr. Sitaula give in to all his threats. Prachanda should also remember that even if Koirala or Sinha in all his demands and hand power over to the Maoists it won’t have any meaning. Only the people can make such decisions, and in a free election.

In all this there is a section of civil society and parliamentary left leaders who seem more responsive to what the Maoists want than what the country needs. If civil society is now on the side of the pressure group for the Maoists, then we can conclude that civil society no longer exists. Civil society can’t be used by anyone as a twin brother of any one party. True, there are doubts about the constituent assembly elections. But these doubts can be tackled by talking to the government and the Maoists. Instead of taking responsibility for patching up and finding a solution, civil society is taking to streets to widen the gap between the Maoists and the government.

The government, Maoists, parliament and civil society should be showing responsibility and playing a creative role to solve problems.

After all, “agitation” becomes not just counterproductive but also gives birth to anarchy.
Below the stoic, humbling mountains that ring Kathmandu Valley, the chaos of life and the lively people who create it have a palpable rhythm. In the tradition and culture here is movement. As a dancer from America recently arrived in Nepal, I wanted to explore the movement of Nepal, magnify it and understand more about the country’s traditional dances in order to learn more about the pace of life here.

Of the numerous dances attributed to various cultural groups and social movements, my main interest was the Newari Dance, in part because I’m based in Kathmandu and it makes sense to explore the culture with its deepest roots here. All I knew to start with was that Newari dance was festive, and included traditional costumes and masks. But when I started exploring, I came up against a curious challenge: finding places to learn the Newari Dance and see it being performed is more difficult than you think. Despite Kathmandu and Bhaktapur’s abundant Newari population, the ritualistic and celebratory dances are sadly not often taught in dance studios, and the dance is mostly performed in a few tourist venues or at festivals.

“People don’t have time anymore to pass on such traditions,” said Raju Hyaumikha, 36, the director of the Kathmandu University-based Newari Music and Dance Centre in Bhaktapur. “Now people have different occupations than when I was young, so they don’t have time to think about this older culture.”

Most traditional dance and music schools agree that teaching Newari Dance in order to preserve the culture is extremely important. The dance movement tells stories of the deities and reflects various religious and philosophical aspects of Newari culture. These schools often carry on traditional Newari music classes, but in the months between festivals, dance classes are scarce. “Students are studying hard,” Hyaumikha explained, “the classes will start up again next term.”
Suresh Nepali, 36, has been a dance student for 18 years and performs various dances with his wife from time to time. “I started with modern dance, moved to Nepali folk and then I learned Newari,” Nepali said. “Now, people want variety,” he explained. Newari Dance embodies only one culture and dance students want to branch out. “Newari Dance,” he said, “is also the most difficult to learn. There is a specific language, and when studying Newari Dance, one must also study the music.” Nepali, once a private teacher of Newari and Nepali folk dances, also believes that he and others simply don’t have enough time to dedicate to this art.

It is saddening that in a country so reliant on its traditions, that one rich tradition is scarcely found. If the most popular dances taught are hotels and restaurants, then—Kala-Mandapa, the Institute of Nepali Performing Arts. This group directed by Rajendra Shrestha is one of the top of Hotel Vaja. One of the most respectable and well-known dance groups performs here—Kala-Mandapa, The Institute of Nepali Performing Arts. This group directed by Rajendra Shrestha is one of the cultural centres in Kathmandu devoted to propagating the rich traditions of Newari culture’s performing arts. Shrestha has made Newari dance accessible outside of its traditional festival setting. He has taken the religious, ritualistic and philosophical aspects of the dance and woven them into a performing arts form that is shown weekly. Kala-Mandapa’s repertoire includes ritual operatic dance drama, ritual dances of gods and festive rhythmic dances, as well as comical and satirical social dramas.

The Newari Dance I saw here was vastly different from that at the Sadhana Kala Kendra. The costumes were made of highly coloured fabrics and the dancers wore thick make-up, intricate crowns and ornate jewellery. The movement was low to the ground and deeply centred with dancer’s limbs that expanded, hands that stretched far back with fingers that were strong. This dance was not like western dance, where nowadays, anything goes, and tradition is not very in fashion. This dance told a story, had a philosophy, and every gesture, stance and glance had meaning. This was the Newari Dance I had been searching for, one that mirrored the deep religious and cultural aspects of Nepal.

“Through dance and music, we learn the real knowledge of our being,” Shrestha said. One hopes for a realisation in Nepal of the richness of the country’s movement traditions. And I hope that Newari Dancing, a vital and once-vibrant part of Newari culture, is further supported and taught.
From guns to grown-up jobs

MARTY LOGAN

Ten years of conflict have dumped loads of distress and destruction onto this country but also revealed some positive findings about Nepali society. One is that, deprived of their men and forced to manage their families’ affairs, women are far more resilient and resourceful than anyone ever gave them credit for. Another is that even faced with imminent danger to their most precious assets, their children, parents plan carefully before they rush their offspring to safety.

The latter was one finding of a recent field study about children forced to flee the conflict in villages to work in Nepal’s towns and cities. “Family and village networks supported the children well during migration. Exploitative labour agents and traffickers were not reported,” says Asylums of Exploitation, published by Nepal-based NGO Terre des Hommes Foundation.

Employers should:

• provide basic health care services and access to education

Municipalities should:

• shift emphasis from drop-in centres and shelters to mobile outreach

NGOs should:

• shift emphasis from drop-in centres and shelters to mobile outreach

Families employing children should:

• finance their education and health care and link them with supporting organisations

Employers should:

• receive training on supporting and protecting working children, existing laws and child rights and make necessary changes to provide these

recommended

Central government should:

• relax school enrolment rules so IDP children without documentation can study

Both democratic and nondemocratic settings have been filled with situations that are occurring in Nepal’s politics today, it is a timely read for those interested in gaining insights into the mechanisms that underlie political change. Although the book is a general theory of democratisation, and not a country study, it can still be of use in understanding democratization in Nepal’s political context, and the endurance of democracy as a political institution.

A book that is a must-read for anyone interested in democratization processes is Dictatorship and Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Comparative Politics by Aart de la Ronde and Dorothee C. H. Muller. The book is a general theory of democratisation, and not a country study, it can still be of use in understanding democratization processes in Nepal’s political context, and the endurance of democracy as a political institution.

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At higher levels of inequality, however, the citizens do have something to gain, so a revolution can take place and the elites will have to make credible concessions. This explains why the Ranas, the Panchayat and recently King Gyanendra conceded power. However, when inequality is extremely high, then again democratisation will not take place, because the rulers will find it less costly to repress a revolution than to make concessions.

In 1990, in order to prevent the monarch from using further repression, the democrats of Jana Andolan I struck a bargain with the king that although policies would be decided by parliament, the king could keep his crown and control of the army. The deal led to the institution of constitutional monarchy that we have had since then. Evidently, however, the citizens felt that too much was conceded, and their patience finally wore out this past April.

Not surprisingly, there is a belief that the form of democracy that caters less to the citizens and more to the elites, gradually to that which caters more to the citizens and less to the elites. There are many ways to share power in democracy, and just because one type of democracy is not successful does not mean that democracy, in general, cannot work. *

Life in a nondemocracy

underlie political change. Although the book is a general theory of democratisation, and not a country study, it can still be of use in understanding democratization processes in Nepal’s political context, and the endurance of democracy as a political institution.

At the heart of the book is the distinction between ‘democracy’ and ‘non-democracy’. According to the authors or non-democracy policies reflect the interest of the rich ‘elites’, who are a minority, whereas in a democracy, policies reflect the interests of the poor and poor zones, who are relatively poor.

Both democratic and nondemocratic governments use incentives to structure their preferred policies, but are constrained by external threats. The elites, when they are in power, are threatened by the possibility of revolution. The citizens, when they have power in a democracy, are threatened by the possibility that the elites will mount a coup.

Faced with such threats, democratic and nondemocratic regimes, if they are to survive, must make concessions. In the threat of a revolution today, the elite will try to promise reform, but tomorrow, when the threat subsides, they will find it in their best interest to renege. In consideration of this, the revolutionaries, when they are strong, have no reason to accept promises of policy concession. They will demand more. They will demand that the political institutions be changed so that they can guarantee themselves favourable policies in the future as well. Democratisation is in a way of making such guarantees.

Democratisation occurs when inequality is high so that the democrats have more incentives to contest power. However, since income gets lost and assets get damaged when a revolution occurs, it is possible that the gains from revolution may not be as high as the costs of it. When inequality is low, the citizens do not have much to gain by revolting, so a revolution will not be a threat. This is the case in Singapore, which is a relatively equal non-democracy.

At higher levels of inequality, however, the citizens do have something to gain, so a revolution can take place and the elites will have to make credible concessions. This explains why the Ranas, the Panchayat and recently King Gyanendra conceded power. However, when inequality is extremely high, then again democratisation will not take place, because the rulers will find it less costly to repress a revolution than to make concessions.

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Not surprisingly, there is a belief among some critics that ‘democracy failed in Nepal’ and that alternative political institutions must be sought. The Maoists for instance have appealed to communism. One should be careful in making such arguments. As the Acemoglu-Robinson theory seems to imply, there are many types of democracies. In fact, there is a continuum of types: from democracy that caters less to the citizens and more to the elites, gradually to that which caters more to the citizens and less to the elites. There are many ways to share power in democracy, and just because one type of democracy is not successful does not mean that democracy, in general, cannot work.

Life in a nondemocracy

Probing the economic origins of dictatorship and democracy

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Unfriendly fire

Report tallies the destruction of a deadly decade

War is dirty business. Unconventional wars and armed conflicts, friendly forces and enemies are identical in appearance. Every tool has the potential of being used as a weapon. The harder a state tries to win, the deeper it sinks in the quagmire of retribution and reprisal. ‘Collateral damage’ is higher in internal armed conflicts, since the line between the militant and the militia is so thin. The farmer in the paddie field may be a militia in mufti. The youngster in telltale boots in the bus may be a real soldier. Or not.

There is no proven way to calculate the impact of a war. The consequences of the Darumka killings or the Madi massacre are impossible to calculate. You can’t put a price on the grief of a widow, an orphan or aged parents.

The cost of war is a rough estimate of identifiable losses and opportunities. It’s basically a guestimate. As the peace process moves along, it can be instructive to look back and see what we have collectively lost in the last decade of conflict. That, say the researchers of the report A Decade of Disaster, is their main objective.

The subtitle of the report is more appropriate: Human and Physical Cost of the Nepali Conflict, 1996-2005. The term ‘disaster’ sounds rather too banal to describe a conflict that tore our social fabric apart. That’s another problem with this publication: the choice of words, sentence structures, and the writing style makes a reader wish they were in Nepali. Come to think of it, why is it published in English anyway?

Among other tallies of death and destruction, the report lists numbers of children killed in the conflict by gender, district and region in detail that can be shocking if we pause to think that every child had a story, a future and two grieving parents.

War means bigger budgets, faster deals done in the heat of war. It’s a strong squad. Though the selection process was marred by some controversy, Wicketkeeper Chhetri caught out five batsmen in the last ICC under-19 Cricket World Cup 2006 held in Sri Lanka in February. Besides Chhetri, the team is also counting on players like Sarad Veswakar, Paresh Lohani, Shakti Gauchan, and Paras Khadka among others.

Among other achievements, Nepal was once again the ACC Champions in the ACC Trophy, we’ll secure a place for the ICC World Cup Cup; if we are runners-up, we’ll qualify for the Asia Cup, says Shakti Gauchan, vice captain of the national team.

The team is strong, but not all it could be. Kanishka Chaugain, who captained Nepal’s winning team at last year’s ACC tournament in Malaysia and who’s been a star national player since 2000, is heading US-wards to study. “I know how important these games are and that the team was counting on me,” he said, “but I have to focus on education.” Captain Binod Das says that while Chaugain will be missed, Mahesh Chhetri, his replacement, is a solid team player.

At the ACC Trophy, the Nepal team is looking to not just field and bowl well, but to improve their often weak batting, says vice captain Gauhhan. To reach the finals in Malaysia, Nepal will have to play 17 countries, including heavyweights like former champions Malaysia, the UAE and Hong Kong.

Nepal must defend its Asian Cricket Council title this month to qualify for the 2007 world cup.

Once and future champions

PRERANA MARASINI

"When selecting players for events like this, we look for players who have already played at least national games. International experience is a bonus," said Sharma. For example, Mehboob Alam, another top player, who usually plays for Qatar’s Set Club but was recalled by the Cricket Association of Nepal and has been training with the team for the last few months.

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A decade of disaster: Human and Physical Cost of Nepali Conflict, 1996-2005

A Research Report, May 2006

Page: 4-10 August 2006

#309

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War means bigger budgets, faster deals done in the heat of war. It’s a strong squad. Though the selection process was marred by some controversy, Wicketkeeper Chhetri caught out five batsmen in the last ICC under-19 Cricket World Cup 2006 held in Sri Lanka in February. Besides Chhetri, the team is also counting on players like Sarad Veswakar, Paresh Lohani, Shakti Gauchan, and Paras Khadka among others. Top off-spinner Sanjim Regmi’s omission was hotly debated, but Biju Sharma, who heads the selection committee, defended his decision: “Sanjam is a good bowler but he not a great batsman. Akash Gupta, who is replacing Sanjam, can do both well.”

"When selecting players for events like this, we look for players who have already played at least national games. International experience is a bonus,” said Sharma. For example, Mehboob Alam, another top player, who usually plays for Qatar’s Set Club but was recalled by the Cricket Association of Nepal and has been training with the team for the last few months.

The team is strong, but not all it could be. Kanishka Chaugain, who captained Nepal’s winning team at last year’s ACC tournament in Malaysia and who’s been a star national player since 2000, is heading US-wards to study. “I know how important these games are and that the team was counting on me,” he said, “but I have to focus on education.” Captain Binod Das says that while Chaugain will be missed, Mahesh Chhetri, his replacement, is a solid team player.

At the ACC Trophy, the Nepal team is looking to not just field and bowl well, but to improve their often weak batting, says vice captain Gauhhan. To reach the finals in Malaysia, Nepal will have to play 17 countries, including heavyweights like former champions Malaysia, the UAE and Hong Kong.

A decade of disaster: Human and Physical Cost of Nepali Conflict, 1996-2005

A Research Report, May 2006

Page: 4-10 August 2006

#309

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The Middle East is a tinderbox, with key players on all sides waiting for every chance to destroy their enemies. Israel’s vulnerability, and a repetitive cause of violence, is the holding of prisoners. Militant Palestinians and Lebanese know that a captured Israeli soldier or civilian is a cause of conflict or a valuable bargaining chip for prisoner exchange, and there have been many such trades.

June’s renewed violence came when Palestinians dug a tunnel under the barrier that surrounds Gaza and assaulted Israeli soldiers, killing two and capturing one. They offered to exchange him for the release of 95 women and 313 children from the almost 10,000 Arabs in Israeli prisons. Israel rejected a swap and attacked Gaza in an attempt to free the soldier and stop rocket fire into Israel. The resulting destruction brought reconciliation between warring Palestinian factions and support for them throughout the Arab world.

Hezbollah militants in south Lebanon then killed and captured Israeli soldiers, and insisted on Israel’s withdrawal from disputed territory and an exchange for some of the several thousand incarcerated Lebanese. With US backing, Israeli bombs and missiles rained down on Lebanon. Soon, Hezbollah rockets supplied by Syria and Iran were striking northern Israel. Israel has a right to defend itself against attacks on its citizens, but it is inhumane and counterproductive to punish civilian populations in the illogical hope that they will then blame Hamas and Hezbollah for provoking the devastating response. Instead, Arab and worldwide support has increased for these groups, while Israel and the United States are condemned. Israel belatedly announced, but did not carry out, a two-day cessation in bombing Lebanon, after global condemnation of an air attack on the Lebanese village of Qana, where 57 civilians were killed and where 106 died from the same cause 10 years ago. As before there were expressions of ‘deep regret’, a promise of ‘immediate investigation’ and the defence that dropped leaflets had warned families in the region to leave their homes.

The urgent need in Lebanon is that Israeli attacks stop, that Lebanon’s regular military forces control the southern region of the country, that Hezbollah cease as a separate fighting force, and future attacks against Israel be prevented. Israel should withdraw from all Lebanese territory and release Lebanese prisoners. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has rejected such a ceasefire. Even Security Council implementation of such a solution will be a band-aid. The current conflict is part of a repetitive cycle of violence that results from the absence of a comprehensive settlement in the region, exacerbated by the unprecedented six-year absence of any effort to achieve this goal. Leaders on both sides ignore strong peace majorities, allowing extremist-led violence to preempt all opportunities for building a political consensus. Traumatised Israelis cling to the false hope that their lives will be made safer by incremental unilateral withdrawals from occupied areas, while Palestinians see their remnant territories reduced to human dumping grounds surrounded by a ‘security barrier’ that embarrasses Israel’s friends and fails to bring safety or stability.

The general parameters of a long-term, two-state agreement are well known. Israel is violating key UN resolutions, official US policy and the international ‘road map’ for peace by occupying Arab lands and oppressing the Palestinians. Except for negotiated modifications, Israel’s official pre-1967 borders must be honoured, and US government leaders stay in the forefront of achieving this long-delayed goal.

A major impediment to progress is the US administration’s policy that dialogue on controversial issues only comes as a reward for subservient behaviour. Direct engagement with the PLO or the Palestinian Authority and Syria will be necessary for secure negotiated settlements. Failure to address these issues and leaders risks the creation of an arc of even greater instability running from Jerusalem through Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad and Tehran.

(Projec Syndicate)

Jimmy Carter is a former President of the United States and the founder of the nonprofit Carter Center in Atlanta.

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Stop the band-aid treatment

Without a comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, there will be more Lebanons.
T he high-level UN peace mission to Nepal wanted a consensus on arms management by the time it left on Thursday. That didn’t happen, but the trip was not in vain.

It did inject a sense of urgency to the peace process, and give the issue of demilitarisation a momentum on which future efforts can be built. Given the polarised positions on both sides perhaps it was too much to expect things to be patched up so quickly.

Despite a week of official and behind-the-scenes meetings by de Mistura with the Maoists, the two sides failed to agree on the key issue of arms management. Both sides, however, did reiterate their commitment to the eight-point agreement of 16 June that deals with other political aspects of the peace process.

A UN diplomat said that though it was disappointing, the inability to secure an arms agreement now was not a blow to the peace process. “The issue could be taken up again in the near future,” he said.

De Mistura arrived here last week with a mandate to forge a consensus on demilitarisation ahead of constituent assembly elections. Several ideas were floated, including a ‘Double Key’ approach to arms management (see box).

The Maoists initially agreed to Double Key, but later insisted that the Nepal Army should also be subject to the same conditions. The government and army both said no and the UN apparently saw little reason to push them hard at this point. The meeting between Prime Minister Koirala and Pushpa Kamal Dahal Wednesday evening appears to have been sideline by other discussions.

Additionally, rebel negotiators linked arms storage with overarching political issues, calling on the UN and Nepal government to try for a comprehensive ‘package’ agreement on an interim government, joint command of the two armies and reforms in the Nepal Army.

Asked if his party accepted the double key approach to arms management, Maoist chief negotiator, Krishna Bahadur Mahara told us: “Yes we do, but only if the Nepal Army is subject to same conditions.”

His colleague Deb Gurung elaborated: “We will not agree to a system that separates only us from our arms. Being a formula equal to both sides, and we have no problems in accepting it.”

A Nepalese government official said that it would be unrealistic to expect the Nepal Army to submit to disarmament. “Everywhere, it has been the rebels who have been disarmed, not the legitimate force.”

While the Maoists face considerable pressure from their commanders in the field who do not want to give up their weapons, the government may also have found it hard to convince the Nepal Army about being confined to barracks.

De Mistura is concerned that emerging crises elsewhere in the world will distract the UN. Secretary General Kofi Annan has taken a keen interest in Nepal, and he thinks his retirement at the end of this year could leave the future uncertain.

“Will Nepal be a priority for a new secretary general? We don’t know,” said a source close to the UN mission, “this is the reason why de Mistura was really appealing for a consensus on the arms management. That would have strengthened the UN’s role in Nepal and would have contributed towards lasting peace.”

The ‘Double Key’ formula

The double key formula has widely been used in conflict resolution in many parts of the world. Under this system combatant armies are confined to separate barracks which have armories in which each weapons inventory is stored under two sets of locks. One set of keys is held by the respective combatant army and the other by UN monitors.

The disagreement in Nepal is over the Maoists insisting that the Nepal Army be subject to the same procedure of weapon storage as itself, and the military saying that as the army of a legitimate state it can’t be treated at the same level as a rebel force.
Escape to Godavari Village Resort,™ Dwarika’s Overnight Package™ Escape Kathmandu Nature Retreat™ Conferences and workshops Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge™ Shamanism Full Moon Trek to Lake Gosainkunda™

GETAWAYS

Breakfast with birds, lunch with butterflies at Godavari Village Resort. 4361500

Special package of an overnight stay at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927

Free cocktail for women. 4256622

Breakfast with birds, lunch with butterflies at Rum Doodle Bar and Restaurant. 4250440

Kathmandu Valley

Check out our website at www.sinte.com.np.

Seeking Peace in Karnali complex till 18 August.

An exhibition of paintings and installation art by Japanese artist Masanori Yoneda at Hotel Hyatt Regency.

Human Rights Film Festival by SAIKAL at Hotel Hyatt Regency. 4412999

Nepali weather

Midway through this monsoon, and paddy farmers are already hoping for a late save. There’s some hope, though. Thursday morning’s satellite picture shows overcast skies over Nepal, and while they aren’t strong enough to bring much needed rain to salvage the season’s farming, there is another storm coming out of the Bay. It will lose some strength, but right now how rain is distributed is as important as how much of it arrives. On Tuesday morning, for example, a powerful torrent flooded the central and northwest of the Kathmandu Valley, while the rest of it remained dry. This week, Valley residents should plan to stay in during the hot, humid days, and enjoy cool, wet nights.

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About Town

EXHIBITIONS

- The duration 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
- BARLM: a painting exhibition by Korean American Artist Joong Bock Kim at Nepal Art Council, till 11 August. 4220735
- Impressions of Manang: 10-28 September, Nepal Tourism Board

EVENTS

- FSA Film Club presents Director Mohan Mainali’s Six Stories and Seeking Peace in Kamali at Yala Maya Kendra, 4 August at 3PM. Rs 50. Films followed by discussion with the filmmakers. 5542544
- Satyagati (Deliverance) by Satyaji Ray at Nepal India Library, RNAC building, 4 August, 3PM.
- Human Rights discussion with Rabindra Bhattarai, 5 August, at Martin Chautari.
- A Tribute to Artist RN Joshi pre launch of a book and art workshop, 5 August, Park Gallery. 5220307
- Shubharambha: classic music and songs of early ’50s to early ’60s, at Russian Culture Centre. 5th August, 3PM. 9841313879
- Tej Festival at Radisson Hotel, stalls, exhibition, sale and more 11-12 August. 9AM-7PM. 4425889
- A View from the Bridge by Ralo Bangala School’s Aangan Tedo at St Xavier’s College. 11-13 August. 5522814
- Sunsilk Nepal Fashion Week by Satgati (Deliverance) 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

- Cloud Walkers at Moiksh Live, 4 August, 8.30 PM. Rs 150 5320121
- Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant. 4422813
- Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM at Upstairs.
- Live Music at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- Unwork the good times with Cinoy and Par-e-jat playing along with BBQ every Friday from 7PM at Fusion-The bar at Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479448

DINING

- Tempura Festival at Hyatt Regency till 10 August. 4491234
- Masterpiece menu at The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La Hotel. 4412999
- Meza 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. 6th floor, Kathmandu Mall, Sundhara.
- Monoison Madness Wine Festival Enjoy wines from four continents at Kilroy’s of Kathmandu. 4250440
- Mango Masti at all restaurants in Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273998
- Wet & Wild Summer Splash Happy hour 3-7PM, buy one get one free cocktails. 6 th floor, Kathmandu Mall, Sundhara.
- Mezza and Margarita at Dwarika’s Fusion—the bar every Friday from 7PM at Fusion-The bar at Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479448

GETaways

- Shangri-La’s 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 Godawari Village Resort, 5506755
- Nature Retreat at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- Escape to Godavari Village Resort, an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5506755

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.

Call 4442250 for show timings at Jai Nepal
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KATHMANDU VALLEY

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CHIEF GRILL: Chief of Army Staff General Pyar Jung Thapa is ambushed by reporters on Thursday as he makes his way to answer the Rayamaji Commission’s questions, just a little late.

FOR GOD, KING AND COUNTRY: Hindu fundamentalist groups burnt tyres and obstructed traffic for hours Thursday morning demanding that the decision to turn the country secular be revoked.

FARMERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE: Maoist cadres put down their guns to join the toiling masses planting rice in Gumi VDC, Surkhet last week.

GAMBLING IN SHANGRI-LA: The newly-opened Casino Shangri-La welcomes its first punters on Wednesday.

A gift of sight

Sandak Ruit, ophthalmologist, was pleased, but not surprised to receive the Ramon Magsaysay Award this week. The soft-spoken 52-year-old doctor sees the award as an honour for every Nepali, and most particularly his team at the Tilganga Eye Centre.

"Deep down, I always knew that someone somewhere in the world would recognise the work we have been doing," he says. While personally gratified at receiving the award Ruit hasn’t decided what he will do with the $50,000 prize money, but assures us the money will be put to good use.

Tilganga’s ophthalmologist team under Ruit is small, but it does big work. The clinic is one of the world’s best places for cataract surgery and intraocular lens transplants. The team travels around the world for eye surgery camps and training programs.

In fact, Nepali doctors are even making North Koreans see. Tilganga doctors travelled twice to the virtually closed country, but Ruit is careful not to say too much. “The work we are doing is not related to any political ideology, I am not bothered about what political system any one country has,” he says, “I care only about blind people everywhere in the world.”

Tilganga’s eye doctors also go to less controversial countries such as Pakistan, India, China, and Bangladesh. Recently a team of 100 Thai doctors visited the clinic to learn about how their Nepali counterparts have managed to grow so much in 12 years. Since Tilganga was established in 1994, it has helped tackle rampant corneal blindness caused by vitamin A deficiency, by running regular microsurgical eye camps in remote parts of Nepal. “Wherever we go, Nepal or North Korea, local communities are thankful and we really feel like we make a difference in their lives,” Ruit says proudly.

The Tilganga centre is also renowned internationally for its production of world-class intraocular eye lens which are used to replace damaged natural lenses. The centre’s Fred Hollows Foundation Intraocular Lens Factory in Kathmandu is Nepali-run and produces 1,000 lenses every day for export to over 50 countries.

Even as a child in remote Olangchungola, Sandak Ruit felt that he had to do something about the deplorable health conditions he saw around him. Now he’s set that ball rolling, he says, “We should be working towards uplifting the image of Nepal and we’ve already done that to some extent.”

The Magsaysay certainly helps.

LIFE’S BUT A STAGE: Young actors perform Abhi Subedi’s Jiban Dekhi Jiban Samma at Gurukul on Wednesday.

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We are losing the fire in our bellies? Are we slacking off and allowing lethargy and ennui to obliterate the fervour of the April Uprising? The answer to both questions is: “Umm, that’s a thought.”

How else does one explain the sharp drop in the number of car stonings, traffic stoppages, chukka jams and todfods in the city centre this week? We are keeping close count here at the semi-autonomous National Demonstration Centre (call hotline for latest information on which roads are blocked by dialing 103) and have found that there was an entire rush hour period on Tuesday evening when no one blocked traffic at Singha Darbar intersection by lying down on the asphalt.

Not a single royal statue was vandalised throughout the kingdom the whole of last week. The Mahindra and Mahindra Highway was actually not blocked for six hours on Sunday after a minor traffic altercation in Lahan. No one stoned any newspaper office on Thursday. This is a scandal.

What’s wrong with us, are we going to let go of the gains of our pro-democracy movement so easily? Will we allow the euphoria of freedom to evaporate into thin air? Have human beings outlived their usefulness? What is the best cure for my dandruff? Will someone stop me before I ask another rhetorical question? Thank you.

As we all know, there are entire sections of society that are still not using their hard-won freedoms to rise up and struggle for their rights by bringing the nation’s capital to a grinding halt through relay hunger strikes to fast unto death over and over again.

Have come no one set fire to a single government vehicle and made a complete awan of himself when Sunday was made a working day? And there you all are, sitting idly by and not gheraoing the prime minister’s residence to force the government to shift Nepal’s capital out of Kathmandu.

We have changed the rules of royal succession to allow daughters to become queens in the new Republic of Nepal, parliament has declared Nepal a secular Hindu Kingdom and the government has refused to collect royalty from mountaineering expeditions because it doesn’t like the “R” word. Yet we refuse to take the bull by the horns and shift the nation’s capital out of Kathmandu and rid ourselves of its monarchical past.

The question arises, where should the capital of a New Nepal be located? That is a very good point, and luckily for you I have been doing my homework and have a shortlisted the following:

- Kathmandu is running out of water, the government wants to bring water from Melamchi but the people of Melamchi don’t want to give it to us. Solution: if Melamchi doesn’t want to come to Kathmandu take Kathmandu to Melamchi.
- Okharpauwa residents have refused to give us. Solution: Relocate Nepal’s capital to Okharpauwa and no one will notice because both are garbage dumps.
- Jomsom. Nepal’s capital must be located in a place that has the best apple brandy in the country. Ministers can ride mules to work.
- Shift the capital to Kalapani and you kill two birds with one stone: you regain Nepali territory, and you are the farthest you can possibly be from the rest of Nepal so no one will ever bother you.
- Relocate Nepal’s capital to New Delhi. Everything’s being decided there anyway.

Capital flight