Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has no love lost for King Gyanendra, but in the past year he has refused to be swept along by the republican wave. He is now producing his trump card in exchange for concessions from the Maoists on minimum conditions before they join the government: return of confiscated property, stopping all extortion, a formal renunciation of violence, and general good behaviour.

His Biratnagar statement on 12 March (“in a sense we are already a republic”) was to keep his end of the bargain with Chairman Dahal. But more importantly, it was a last ditch attempt to save Nepal’s monarchy from extinction. It may not do the trick, but Koirala figures it’s worth a try and will also make him look less like a royalist.

By skipping two generations and going directly to Paras’ four-year-old son Hridayendra, Koirala is keeping the option of retaining the monarchy and its still-loyal army brass as an insurance against future instability or dominance of militarised communists.

The three main international players in Nepal, who are concerned about potential post-Koirala power grab, are also said to be in favour of this option. Emiratis took the message to Gyanendra recently, and the king is said to have wanted to know if that was his only option.

What seems to have riled Koirala most are hints of Hindu royalists stoking the tarai fires, as well as the king’s own controversial Democracy Day statement in which he tried to justify his takeover in 2005. Although Gyanendra read out that speech on the phone to Koirala beforehand, the wily prime minister could have given the green light on its delivery knowing full well that it would stir a hornet’s nest. As the prime minister and the king try to out-maneouvre each other, the danger is both could be out-maneouvered by the republicans.

“He [Gyanendra] still doesn’t get it,” said one longtime royal watcher, “to me it looks like he won’t agree to abdication. He’d rather take the monarchy and the country down with him.”

If it’s hard to see how both the king and his son could be convinced about the Naba Yubaraj option, they’d be even less likely to agree to revert the monarchy to King Birendra’s surviving grand-daughter. With abolitionists now literally at the gates, there are questions about whether it is worth going through so much trouble to save the monarchy.

The more urgent business is to set up the interim government which includes the Maoists, and declare a date for elections. In this, the king has become the pawn. However, even within the NC there is discomfort that Dahal and Koirala are deciding on their own on a matter that should be left to the people. “This is simple dictatorship,” said one kampesi leader.

Until now, Koirala has been playing a delicate balancing act by keeping both the Maoists and the army generals engaged. His conundrum: throwing out the monarchy would mean die-hard royals would have nothing left to lose, but keeping a ceremonial monarchy would be the excuse the Maoists need to play hard ball. Hence the halfway Hridayendra option.
It’s soon going to be one year since the April Uprising. Almost every issue of this paper in the past year we have predicted that the future, if any, there will be for the ruling dynasty. Indeed, we have crossed one milestone after another: the restoration of parliament, a ceasefire, the comprehensive peace agreement, the interim government and announcement of dates for constituent assembly polls. When words are weapons and jobs than about whether Nepal remains a monarchy or not. And the Nepali people are much more concerned about health, education, and resources of Nepal, but more than half the population living below the poverty line. Finally, the tarai movement has struck a strong blow to the Maoists, the self-proclaimed saviours of the Nepali people. But, as we are seeing, if such discussions are handled deftly, the charges brought against them, such as the Maoists are far more likely to remain loyal Nepalis. The process of state-building in any part of the world is not only long and violent. There will be a series of such steps, expressing the concerns of various interest groups. It will take years of patience and sacrifice before Nepalis have the word of the king in the ceremonial monarchy. At considerable risk of becoming pariah states, the Maoists have so much public appeal, a significant chunk of the population residing in the tarai would not have revolted against the interim constitution, a statute wholeheartedly endorsed by the Maoists. The solidarity expressed by the protesting groups, such as the Maoists and the Madhesi Movement, has struck a strong blow to the Maoists’ policy statements (aggressive demands, such as that for a republic), and tactics (the use of violence, intimidation, and their edicts) appear to be a consequence of their loss of control over the tarai and pervasive terror among the Nepali electorate at large. Clearly, if the Maoists have so much public appeal, a significant chunk of the population residing in the tarai would not have revolted against the interim constitution, a statute wholeheartedly endorsed by the Maoists. In the tarai movement we can see the beginning of a new identity for Nepal and its institutions, their people, their ethos, and even the very individual.

Koirala’s recent pronouncements suggest he isn’t yet done with what he sees as the twin dangers to his mission of establishing enduring democracy in Nepal: the monarchy and the Maoists. He’s been revived by republicans, despised by democrats and censured by socialists for his controversial stand over cremation. Monarchists are concerned about his party’s poll prospects. Koirala, tried to save some space for the king in the emergent political order.

Koirala’s patronage early in their careers has now acknowledged that one were untouchable for fears of suspiciously building. Debates such as this happened (or doesn’t happen) this month will determine what kind of future, if any, there will be for the ruling dynasty. Traditionally been a party beyond caste and multi-culturalism if such issues are addressed seriously. Nepal is not safely en route to a peaceful resolution to most of its outstanding problems, despite settled public belief to the contrary. So far the tari movement representing madhesi aspirations has claimed the lives of 38 people and more lives seem to be at stake.

The new government better understand that people can’t eat slogans. Populism is oversold, and most Nepalis have a different perspective. This tiny nation could become an exemplar of multi-ethnicity and sensitivity to madhesi demands. The Congress has been comfortably swamped in recent days. True, the Maoists are seen as the most favourable for state-building in any part of the world. But, as we are seeing, if such discussions are handled deftly, the charges brought against them, such as the Maoists are far more likely to remain loyal Nepalis. The process of state-building in any part of the world is not only long and violent. There will be a series of such steps, expressing the concerns of various interest groups. It will take years of patience and sacrifice before Nepalis have the word of the king in the ceremonial monarchy.

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The movement was vibrant. Madhesi leaders have more sycophants than supporters. Maoist and MJF motivators have shown that they offer the best chance for young people who don’t dream of a bright political future. Finally, the tari movement has struck a strong blow to the Maoists, the self-proclaimed saviours of the Nepali people. But, as we are seeing, if such discussions are handled deftly, the charges brought against them, such as the Maoists are far more likely to remain loyal Nepalis. The process of state-building in any part of the world is not only long and violent. There will be a series of such steps, expressing the concerns of various interest groups. It will take years of patience and sacrifice before Nepalis have the word of the king in the ceremonial monarchy.

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I applaud any attempts to expose trafficking and/or profiting off of those less fortunate. Thank you for doing so ('On sale', #339) and I understand that full attention needed to be paid to this activity for the subject to remain in discussion and not disappear after a week. However, adoption is a complicated subject and the piece was not balanced.

In Nepal, women do not have the right to legally relinquish children to welfare agencies for the purpose of adoption. Even an unnamed father has over a decade to claim his progeny, leaving the child to be institutionalised. I opened the paper earlier this week to read that Nepali women are gaining many rights. This right, to make provisions for a child for whom care cannot be given, must also be granted. Until such time, welfare agencies will use other ‘systems,’ such as fictional police documents, to enable such children to be placed for adoption. Though in these circumstances fictional documents are prepared in the child’s best interests, the ‘system’ throws down the welcome mat for abuse. It also robs children of their pasts, the only thing they have as they move on to new lives with adoptive parents. Give women the right to provide for their children as they see fit, and the ‘legitimate’ need for fictional documents is eliminated, and adopted children are given a great gift.

A decade ago most adoptees were either unwanted babies or the children of widows and widowers who needed to give them up in order to make a new life. They were given up as much for cultural reasons as for poverty. However, many children who needed a new family did not find their way into this system and grew up unwanted and with minimal care.

In recent years western agencies have descended on Nepal in search of adoptable children. They have created demand and, without asking questions, the supply is being ‘found.’ Lessen the demand by enforcing accountability. Insist that foreign agencies operating in Nepal perform rigorous oversight of the money they send here for adoptions instead of being in ‘don’t ask, don’t know’ mode. Without a state-funded orphanage and adoption system, even with all its inherent flaws, people who work in adoption need to support themselves. This is true for agencies in wealthier adopting countries and social welfare organisations in the countries from which children are adopted. By what standards they pay themselves is the issue and where the remainder of the money goes is the root of the problem.

There are two kinds of unconscionable activities going on in Nepali adoption. One, children who are not truly in need of new families are being trafficked. This is not unique to adoption and must be addressed on many levels. The second is that inordinate sums of money are being pocketed in adoptions, regardless of the child’s true need. Social workers deserve to be paid and ethical child welfare organisations deserve donations that enable them to expand their work and support the children left behind. I hope the proverbial baby is not thrown out with the bath water.

Ellie Skeele, Patan

Children are being kept like gold mines—orphans make money from sponsors and from adoptions. But I was surprised that the most notorious orphanage was not mentioned at all: Nepal Children’s Organisation, Bal Mandir. I have heard horror stories: undisclosed rape cases, the bosses getting very rich, children living in bad care. Some are there for life, because it is lucrative to keep the whole place running by getting foreigners to sponsor children. Go there yourself, it feels like a medieval place where children are held hostage. Isn’t the job of every child welfare organisation to either repatriate children to their own village or nearest of kin, or find loving parents for them if they really are abandoned? Certainly not to hoard children and keep the programs running in hope of funds. Was it because too many ‘big people’ are involved that Bal Mandir was not even mentioned?

†Name withheld, email
Not by promises alone

Nationalising education could be the worst thing for an already-fragile system

Interview with Hisila Yami, MP and politburo member, CPN-M

Nepal Times: What went wrong with Nepal's education system?

Hisila Yami: Fundamentally what went wrong is that we started thinking about education as an industry. People started investing in education—they would sell off their land and homes, so their kids could go to private schools. So much money was invested, but in the end young people just left the country seeking a better life abroad.

What should the new education policy look like?

First the state should regard education as fundamental right. During the People’s War our efforts in education were appreciated because our emphasis was on monitoring. Government schools need to be consolidated, facilities provided, and the performance of teachers monitored. Our education policy will be inclusive and will merge the natural and social sciences. The emphasis will be more on polytechnic education because people who get such training can be employed quickly. Kathmandu-centric education may not work for the rest of Nepal. Similarly we will link education with labour, because it is our biggest asset. The future generation will understand Nepal culture not as a feudal Hindu dominated Bahun-Chhetri culture, but as inclusive of all ethnicities, castes, and languages.

What is your stand on nationalising private schools?

What is your ‘revolutionary education’ (janabadi sikchhya) all about?

Janabadi sikchhya is a type of education answerable to the people. More than 80 percent of our country’s population is in the villages, which means this type of education has to be rural-oriented. Our economy is dependent on agriculture, therefore there must be a strong bond with agricultural economy. The emphasis will be on creating manpower that is productive and science-based, and it will define nationality in a new way.

We can’t change the structure right away, we will change the base first and eventually revamp the entire system.
Nepal’s first ABBY

Prisma Advertising won Nepal’s first ABBY at the 40th annual ceremony of the prestigious awards in Mumbai on 3 March. Prisma won the Merit Prize for their public service campaign “What do you want?” run in association with Himalmedia. The ad encourages people to see education as essential for children, even if they must also work. Prisma has previously won an International Bell Ringer award from J and J, Agency of the Year previously, and a The Himalayan Times Pegasus Critics award.

Better banking

Ace Finance says it has Rs 320 million in paid-up capital, the highest among all non-banking financial institutions in the country. The company has now applied to Nepal Rastra Bank for an upgrade to development bank status. If it is granted the license, Ace Finance will be the first national level finance company to make the step up. The license is issued based on criteria set out in the requirements on the RBI Act 2063.

Going Hollywood

Foto Hollywood, a digital photo studio, has opened in Kathamandap Bazaar at Kamaladi. The studio, which uses the newest technology to develop digital prints, also offers other services such as modelling, family photos, and product photography. Foto Hollywood has the largest photo enlargement machine, able to develop prints of up to 100 inches.

Branching out

Everest Bank, which recently opened its 20th branch in Bhasmapur, now has the education banking network of private commercial banks in Nepal. Since it started in 1996 in association with Punjab National Bank, Everest Bank has won a number of awards including The Banker’s Bank of the Year 2006, and the Excellence Award of the Nepal India Chamber of Commerce and Industry twice.

Fun run

Nepal Investment Bank is organising a Run for Fun on 17 March to raise funds for the Patan Darbar Heritage Conservation project. The marathon, which will award a total cash prize of Rs 500,000, has a total number of categories—21km for professionals, amateurs, and foreigners, 10km for women, 5km for children, and 1km for the handicapped.

Bajaj at Everest

Financing options for Bajaj motorcycles are now available through Everest Bank’s Teku branch. The scheme requires a down payment of 30 percent, and buyers can pay in up to three years at a nine percent interest rate.

NEW PRODUCTS

ICE: Sun Gold Brewery, the maker of Oranjeboom and Hayward’s 5000, has launched a new beer Nepal Ice. The company says that a unique combination of Nepali raw material and Australian malt gives the beer a Nepal feel with international standards. The 5.5 percent alcohol beer is available in all urban areas in 650ml bottles.

Mind your business

Manage yourself before you manage others

The Effective Executive

Peter Drucker

Most glossy management books, I tell them, are overpriced, over-hyped and terrible—no matter how high they claim to be the top management bestseller list. Yes, some become fashions of the month. But soon enough, they sink into oblivion, and are not of lasting help to most managers whose jobs call for managing resources and people.

In fact, it could be argued that Nepal managers are at least more about management than about managing. For instance, almost all the Shaunespeare and Bal Krishna Sama than by understanding some clever marketing methods developed by Coca Cola or Apple in the United States. After all, to most people, what is management but a form of human drama that revolves around the lives of employees and one protagonist at the office, aka the boss?

Skill, one management book I recommended again and again is Peter Drucker’s classic The Effective Executive. Written in clear English, the 178-page book’s thesis is brilliantly simple: executives can be knowledgeable, charismatic, or imaginative. But such traits mean nothing if those executives are not effective. If executives cannot manage themselves, they are unable to manage others, and so are ineffective. In other words, good self-management comes before good management.

Fortunately, Drucker assumes us, with enough practice, the art of managing oneself can be learnt by just about anyone, regardless of temperament.

Re-reading the book the other day, I was struck once again by what Drucker says about three critical executive tasks: managing time, setting priorities, and making decisions.

Effective executives, Drucker says, do not start with tasks. They start with their time. An organisation with too many employees, where managers are always in meetings, and where much effort is spent on fighting yesterday’s fires is a time-waster. Drucker’s advice to executives in such organisations is that they watch how they spend their time, and consolidate discretionary time to tackle routine activities, and set aside large chunks of uninterrupted time to do work that is likely to take their organisations forward.

Drucker is no fan of multi-tasking. Even a jagger, he says, can only keep the balls up in the air for about 10 minutes. Having observed many executives in action, Drucker reports that the effective ones concentrate on completing one future-oriented activity at a time before moving on to finish other tasks. This way, at any given time, such executives are likely to have completed more tasks than have a perpetual display of many half-finished and unfinished activities.

In his discussion about the elements of decision-making, Drucker talks about the importance of converting decisions into actions lest they remained just intentions. Most decisions, he says, do not have an action element woven into them as someone’s work assignment. This ensures that most decisions are never carried out. For the ones that are carried out, there is often no system to accept feedbacks, and that further ensures that little gets learnt about how the ultimate results compare against earlier expectations.

At its root, management means getting things done by using resources through people. To practice it well, there’s no need to buy every business bestseller that appears in bookstores. One favourite thinking managers do for their own effectiveness is to apply the lessons of Drucker’s book to how they manage.
Shivra Gaute in Himal Khabarpankha, 15-31 March

Himal has obtained a recorded phone conversation that proves how rife bribery is in Nepal’s Supreme Court. And it goes right to the top: the tape implicates the Chief Justice himself in payoffs so that plaintiffs can get favourable decisions. The recorded conversations also show how blatant corruption is in the country’s apex court.

The gist of the conversations is just proving the Americans right, and the prime minister, who claims to have brought terrorists to the peace table of war and democracy, wrong. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The looting of private property and threatening industries with labour militancy may be less common now, but it hasn’t stopped. We haven’t yet seen a commitment to negotiation, compromise, and rule of law. Instead we see the Maoists taking down their well-trodden path of terrorising people and destroying their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. The Maoists continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? 

Property rights

Editorial in Abhiyan, 12-18 March

If the country is to move forward, the right of citizens to private property needs to be guaranteed. There can be no foreign investment without this. But the recent capture of private forests in Chitwan’s Kumaure and Sinaha prove that the Maoists have systematically and methodically been confiscating timber from private land and selling it off. This is a threat to the right to private property and, as in Chitwan, it is also a grave threat to the environment. Local communities had worked with Pumari Agro-forestry to plant and nurture the need in order to prevent devastating floods that have caused havoc in the past. There is outrage about these incidents, and maybe the Maoist leadership will say sorry. But that is not going to help local communities.

Sach's behaviour does not befit a party that is now represented in the interim parliament and will soon be joining the government. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? If not, they should first pass a law through parliament. Instead, the Maoists continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. The Maoists’ behaviour is just proving the Americans right, and the prime minister, who claims to have brought terrorists to the peace table of war and democracy, wrong. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests? The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. They continue their culture of threats, intimidation, and violence and haven’t returned property confiscated during the conflict. The least the Maoists should do is declare their policy on private property. Are private individuals allowed to own and grow forests?

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removed the Maoists from the terrorist list. They have said they won't do that until the Maoists formally renounce violence. Even countries that were soft on the Maoists are now fed up. If they enter government without a commitment to peaceful politics and an end to intimidation and violence, we will be inviting an even bigger catastrophe. If those who are plundering the people are let into government they will never have the public’s confidence.

**Gun addicts**

*Editorial in Kantipur, 13 March*

The Maoists are desperate to be a part of the interim government soon to be set up, but they are losing credibility everyday. That is the message we get from the opinions Chairman Prachanda expressed in Baglung on Monday: he seems to be getting ready not to enter government but to go back to armed struggle. A party that should be assuring the public about its intention to be involved in mainstream peaceful politics is sending just the opposite signal.

By saying that “thousands” of weapons are not in containers and that fighters are not in cantonments Prachanda has cast doubt on the entire role of the UN in arms monitoring. The statements also confirm the doubts many have about whether the camp inmates really are guerrillas. The whole point about guns in containers and guerrillas in cantonments was to remove the fear of violence, but Prachanda's statement undermines this intention. Such statements are going to be major obstacles in assuring the public about the process of bringing the Maoists into the interim government.

**Dilemma**

*Sanghu, 12 March*

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala has said time and again that the next prime minister will be selected impartially. But it is understood that, secretly, Koirala wants to see his daughter Sujata take on the responsibility. This is why senior Nepali Congress leaders are not seen in important party, administration, or government positions. But that isn’t Koirala’s biggest worry at present. He is more concerned about the fact that after all these years, Sujata is still not accepted in the party. Other parties don’t trust her to be a responsible leader either. Koirala is said to be looking for a person who can take on the responsibility during the interim period and quietly let Sujata take over when the time is right.

Sujata is not the only person hoping to get a powerful position. NC vice chairman Nawal Koirala is also eying the post of deputy prime minister. The new constitution shifts the power to the deputy prime minister in case the prime minister dies suddenly.

When the Speaker of the House of Representatives was being selected, the Maoists said that the party from which Speaker comes is not eligible to make recommendations for the position of deputy prime minister.

If the post of Home Minister becomes vacant, Shekhar Koirala will have to be made the next minister, because it is important to have someone who the Maoists trust. But if Shekhar Koirala is made the next Home Minister, he automatically becomes Sujata’s future competition. Shekhar Koirala is understood to be a very ambitious man, which is why the prime minister may recommend Chandra Prasad Hazarika or Amol Prasad Upadhaya’s name instead.

Critics say Koirala is being selfish and that this confusion is delaying the unification of the NC and NC-D. Others say Koirala does not really want the two parties to unite, because he hopes to see the NC-Die part of the NC instead.

**QUOTE OF THE WEEK**

“No petrol.”

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**FROM THE NEPALI PRESS**

7

16 - 22 MARCH 2007

#340

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

“"The situation at present is abnormal, which means the Constituent Assembly elections will be abnormal, but they will happen in June.”

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala quoted in Kantipur, 15 March
Mass summits and treacherous solos this mountaineering season

BILLI BIERLING

Together with warm weather and spring, mountaineers from around the world will also descend on Kathmandu in the next few weeks. Most teams this spring will attempt Chomolungma, either from the south side here in Nepal or from the north across the border in Tibet. Last year was tragic—11 people lost their lives on Chomolungma—but that isn't deterring the regular stream of first-timers, mountaineering veterans, and individual climbers trying to put up new routes or aiming to do something special, like climbing half-blind, half-naked, or without arms or legs.

One of the major highlights for Nepal is the joint expedition of two heroic, record-breaking Sherpas. This year Apa Sherpa, who has stood on the top of the world 16 times, and Lhakpa Gelu, who holds the speed record of 10 hours, 56 minutes and 46 seconds from base camp to the top, want to draw more attention to the essential role of the Sherpas in the mountaineering world. The two Super Sherpas will climb via the South Col, on the route Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary took on their first ascent in 1953.

Meanwhile, 50 Chinese mountaineers want to take the Olympic torch to the top from the north side. The China Tibet Mountaineering Association says this is a trial run for the 2008 torch ceremony ahead of the Summer Olympics.

Another expedition will have fewer people but will lug almost 22 tonnes of equipment through the Khumbu region to base camp. A British research expedition, led by high altitude clinician Mike Grocott, hopes to learn lessons from the parallels between the human body pushed to its limits in extreme environments, and during critical illness. The tests include experiments with an exercise bike and the first arterial blood samples taken on the summit. This could pose a problem, given the harsh, freezing conditions on the mountain.

But if the doctors are having trouble pushing needles through their own down suits, they could look out for Dutchman Wim Hof, who plans to climb from the Tibetan side wearing just boots, shorts, gloves, and a cap. The Briskane Times quoted expedition leader Werner de Jong as saying that Hof “will have with me a Nepali Sherpa called Pasang Tendi, who will follow me and help me if I collapse. I am prepared and ready to take up that challenge,” he writes on his website. Before getting to Chomolungma, the 40-year-old climber plans to summit Cho Oyo, the world’s sixth highest mountain.

More than 50 expeditions will share Base Camps on both sides of Everest. Last year more than 450 people reached the top. According to the Himalayan Database, compiled by climbing chronicler Elizabeth Hawley and Richard Salisbury, there have been 3,045 successful ascents of Everest (some people have summited more than once).

Chomolungma is by no means the only peak climbers will tackle in Nepal this spring. At 8,091m Annapurna I may only be the 10th highest mountain in the world, but it is one of the most treacherous and avalanche-prone peaks. Experienced, respected climbers, including Anzali Bukkree from Kazakhstan, have died in fatal avalanches on it.

This year Swiss climber Ueli Steck will have a crack at the South Face of Annapurna I, a route first climbed by a 16-member British team in 1970. That expedition, under the leadership of Chris Bonington, used supplementary oxygen and died about 2,500m of rope. Steck, who set a new speed record on Eiger’s North Face in Switzerland in February, sees this sheer face as one of the major challenges in Himalayan climbing. “Until now nobody has been able to solo this steep and technically difficult line. But I am prepared and ready to take up that challenge,” he writes on his website.
ne of the perks of being a coach is the chance to be a role model for kids. Studies have shown that besides parents, coaches and teachers have the most influence in a young person’s life. I have always embraced opportunities to help and give direction to youngsters. This past winter break, a young Nepali boy came to spend two weeks with me. I was touched by his innocence and moved by his determination to make the most out of his time in the US. Here is an essay he wrote after his time with me and my family:

My name is Utsav Rijal and I am a tennis player from Nepal studying at Luther College, USA. This past Christmas, I had the opportunity to visit and train with Coach Sujay Lama. Being a Nepali and studying in the same college Coach Lama did, it was a valuable experience to meet my 39-year-old compatriot. I had a chance to relate to him and learn the things that he had experienced as a college tennis player and a student. Training with Coach Lama was not only rewarding but it was also an eye opener towards life, discipline, and hard work.

Everyday we would start our training with three hours of tennis. We would focus on intensity and dynamic footwork on the court. We did a lot of match play to build confidence and work on the tactical aspects of the game. To finish off practice, coach Lama would make me do line drills on court for efficient footwork and speed.

We worked on our conditioning in the evening by running for about half an hour. As Coach Lama put it, “Tennis is a game that requires you to be supremely fit to make you mentally tough.” Sometimes he would drop me at a street about two miles from his home and ask me to run back in the blistering cold to gain the mental edge.

We ended our day with 30 minutes of workout which involved stretching, abdominal work, push ups, sit ups, and shoulder stabilisation exercises. Coach Lama is innovative in how he trains his athletes. “Tennis players need to be disciplined” says Coach Lama. He maintains that discipline is very important, not only in tennis but also in life, including proper sleep and eating habits. “Early birds catch the worms” he says.

On court he was a tennis coach and off-court he was a brother to me. During my stay, we not only talked about tennis but also about life. He made me feel like a friend and we did not hesitate to share our stories and experiences. Blessed with a six-year-old daughter, a two-year-old son, and a wonderful wife, Coach Lama is a model father and husband. Coach Lama always gave me positive reinforcement. He is passionate about the game of tennis and helping young Nepali players like me.

As far as my improvement goes, my endurance, mental toughness, and physical fitness were all up. I learnt lessons for life, which will help me become a good human being, a good student, and a good tennis player. I am thankful to have a mentor like coach Lama.
black when internet and IT hysteria was at its height in India, a newspaper—I forget which one—revealed a startling fact. Many leading members of the political elite in Delhi didn’t know how to use computers. They had cottoned on to the need to exploit the IT sector, and take credit for its roaring successes, but they couldn’t type, or access the web, or even switch on a PC.

At the time it occurred to me that this would be a good way to test our politicians. Can they type a simple document? Find things on Google? Do a complicated series of tasks on a computer and put together a presentation? Or are they the type who snap their fingers and get an underling, a cyber-peon, to do it? If the former is true, they’re qualified for public office. But if all they can do is issue orders and take credit for the result, then they should be ‘outed’ and given a choice: learn how to use a computer or get a new job.

Of course, that might not be fair to the pre-IT generation. In days of yore, gentlemen didn’t type. They got a woman to do it. This is no longer acceptable. Now, people of all ages are immersing themselves in skills they never dreamed they’d seek—including the use of keyboards and software. You have to be hands on. You have to know how to do it yourself.

In Nepal I wonder who among the current crop of leaders and hopefuls is computer-friendly. For make no mistake, information technology is the way ahead for Nepal. Not that we need to build Bangalores everywhere; those will spring up if the local conditions warrant. But the use of IT and the global communications tools that come from the internet and web-driven media will bestow countless benefits upon the people of this country. It’s far too important to leave to the private sector alone.

Whatever form of government this country eventually comes up with must prioritise communications and computers, along with general literacy. That means those cheap laptops NGOs are pushing in villages, PCs in schools, and large-scale use of Nepali and other vernacular language computer programs. Government departments—especially land registries and the finance ministry—need to gather all their information into data banks and put it online. There should be websites in all areas of government with information and help lines for citizens. Video conferencing and email must be used to make up for distance and rough terrain. Cell phone coverage has to be universal, with government subsidising towers and service in remote areas.

Eventually, broadband internet access needs to be extended to everyone, perhaps through that cellular network. These days, you can go anywhere in North America, plug a small card into a computer and surf the net. Why not in Nepal?

But back to the original point. Who in the eight-party alliance can type and who gets others to do it for them? I propose a national test to be put together by young people, business types, and smart Nepalis from other sectors—NGOs, activists, thinkers. Sit leaders and other politicians down at keyboards and make them show their stuff. Tell them to find something on Youtube or United We Blog. Make them download the latest BBC report from Kathmandu and find the UN website, then insist they prepare a simple PowerPoint presentation.

Those that can’t should be instantly enrolled in night school or sent to the retirement home. Life’s too short to have low standards in high places.

**Daniel Lak**

**Here and There**

If you can’t work a computer, you’re unfit to lead a country

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or a decade now, Nepal’s tourism entrepreneurs have thought of tourism in terms of trekking to Khumbu, sightseeing in Kathmandu, and boating on Phewa. It’s time to push the envelope and define adventure tourism in a whole new way. Some trekking groups are already travelling to Rolpa and Rukum to combine trekking with the publicity generated by Nepal’s Maoist insurgency. Even during the conflict, trekkers used to look forward to encounters with Maoists and took home receipts of Maoist ‘revolutionary tax’ as souvenirs. “There is a surprising level of interest in visiting these areas,” says a Japanese tour leader, “people want to know what it looks like in a Maoist base area.”

Contrary to the belief that most tourists are cautious, trekking agencies in Kathmandu say they have lots of queries about visiting mid-western Nepal or other regions like Rara, Dhopatian, and Phoksundo that were out of bounds because of the insurgency. Because of the ceasefire, bookings are strong this year for off-the-beaten trek destinations like Bud Gandaki, Mansalu circuit, and Kangchenjunga, which had seen a sharp drop in visitors because of the conflict. To be sure, the facilities on the Rolpa trek can be rudimentary—a bit like the Langtang trail 20 years ago. Even so, the terrain is harsh but spectacularly scenic, especially with the unprecedented snowfall this winter. The people are unexposed to the outside world in this remote area and therefore very hospitable. Trekkers to the mid-west also get a sense of satisfaction from helping these war-torn districts recover, that their money is generating employment, and helping the area return to normal. Taking a bus from Dang up to Tila, it is a two day walk to Thabang. This is the cradle of the Maoist revolution and was partially flattened in aerial bombardment by the army in 2002. A road is being built to Thabang, and it may be good idea to get to go there before the road does. The road has several landslides because of construction, but the route has some dramatic vantage points for scenery. There are private tea houses, and also Maoist-run cooperatives, which offer food and lodging, but no beer or alcohol. Food is cheaper here than most parts of rural Nepal. Rs 35 for a plate of rice and vegetables and overnight lodging is usually free if you eat in the shop.

During the war, the party paid us to feed the guerrillas and cadre who passed through,” remembers Comrade Zamana who runs a cooperative restaurant, “but now we have to run it like a business. It would be good if more tourists came through.”

When we get to Thabang, we asked Comrade Inkar, the town’s Maoist headman, if Americans are welcome. “Why not,” he replied, “we will welcome them like we have welcomed them in the past.” Suddenly turning serious, he added: “But their intention should be pure.” Inkar said lots of foreigners including Americans have visited Thabang, but admitted most of them were journalists. The Maoists are trying to make the revolution itself a tourist attraction, and Inkar tells us Thabang is being established as a model commune. Phone lines have been repaired and there will soon be electricity in Thabang.

Just like Mao-chic has become a tourist attraction in China, Rolpa’s revolutionary songs and dances can also bring employment and income to local cultural troupes. After all, Rolpa has everything: scenic mountains, a rich folk tradition, and revolution.

Photograph: Subina Shrestha

 From Maoism to tourism

Rolpa may show the world how to make a revolution a tourist attraction
ika Maya Rai thought hard and looked around her tiny candy shop in the Bhutani refugee camp in Beldangi one recent chilly evening. “No, I don’t want to go to the United States or any foreign country,” she finally said. “I don’t know if life in America will be any different,” Rai explained, and asked, “Is there any guarantee that we won’t be repressed there too?” She just wants to go home.

Until a few months ago, sentiments such as Rai’s—home, repatriation, being a good Bhutani—were the only thing you’d hear when visiting the camps or speaking with the refugee leadership in Kathmandu. But that has changed dramatically in recent months. For every Tika Maya Rai we spoke with, there was a chorus of Chandra Bhattarai. “I’d happily go to America or even India”. Bhattarai just wants to forget the “dark days” he describes to us in detail, Nepali Bhutanis were forced to give up every symbol of their identity, often on pain of death, rape, or torture. Bhattarai wants the religious and cultural freedoms of other countries, and life outside a refugee camp.

The offers by governments, including those of the US and Canada, to absorb as many as 60,000 of the 100,000 refugees over the next three or four years, has split the refugee community.

Home away from home

Bhattarai’s sentiments are especially common among the young students in the local schools run and funded by Caritas-Nepal and UNHCR. Between classes there is talk of the US, Australia, the United Kingdom, but especially the US. “I want to go to America at least to study,” says Subodh Adhikari, who passed SLC two years ago and is now studying hard for the TOEFL. Subodh’s only hope of studying abroad is finding a sponsor. It’s a common story in the camps, and young people say they ask every visitor for email and other contact information. “Maybe one of them will finally get me out of this camp,” says young Jeewan Khanal.

But it’s a sensitive discussion, given how many of the older refugees see the offer of resettlement as a betrayal of their right to go home. Dilli Ram Sharma, the headmaster of a local school in the Pathari camp, says all the decisions and ambitions of students and increasingly their parents are driven by a desperate need to not live as refugees any more. But, Sharma is quick to add, teachers and students are not encouraged to discuss such issues at school. He takes a more conditional line and says that resettlement is a temporary solution, and that he and other Nepali Bhutanis should be allowed to return to Bhutan, if there is a major overtum, such as change in the present form of government. Tek Nath Rimal, chair of the Kathmandu based Bhutanese Refugees Repatriation Committee holds firm to the line that the resettlement proposal jeopardises the democratic movement in Bhutan.

A few people we spoke to in the three camps in Beldangi said they felt resettlement was being forced upon them, with vague threats that the World Food Program would not be able to distribute rations any more, or that funding to schools would be cut off. There are other heated debates about who among the refugees would get to the United States, and who to India. “Everybody wants to go to America,” Purna Lamgade says above the din. “I think we’re being manipulated. How hard is it to start a new controversy about who goes where?” But he is drowned out in the clamour where one word is repeated over and over: America.
‘Another me’ is a vivid record of trafficking survivors’ imaginings of themselves as human, animistic, and divine beings of power, love, revenge, and freedom. Kolkata-based documentary photographer Achinto Bhadra and counsellor Harleen Walia guided 126 girls and women through a “healing journey of psychological transformation”. The girls and women in these photographs, aged 8 to 25, have been in the care of Sanlaap, a non-governmental organisation in Kolkata, India. Bhadra and Walia encouraged them to narrate their powerful stories of disappointed childhood, abuse, betrayal, abduction, and slavery in brothels. They then identified an imaginary being that would be an empowered physical expression of their sorrow, anger and hope. The costumes and makeup were created by the participants and the photography sessions were conducted in ritualistic silence. For a brief time, each woman and child was transformed.

The project was supported by the Swiss Terre des Hommes Foundation.

Another me: photographs by Achinto Bhadra, runs from 16-26 March at Indigo Gallery, Naxal, 4413580.
**EVENTS**

- **Yusa Chaffal Shrinkhals** on NSU’s National Convention in the changed context: role and importance, 16 March.
- **Dining**
  - **DINING**
  - **Gaine (Gandarbhas)**
  - **Open Mic Night**
  - **Fusion and classical Nepali**
  - **Retro brunch barbecue**
  - **Light nouvelle snacks**
  - **Fusion and classical Nepali**
  - **Trendy martinis**
  - **St. Patrick’s Day**

**MUSIC**

- **Music**
  - **NMC Jazz 07** featuring Norwegian jazz band Motif, 16-23 March,
  - **Performances**
  - **Classical music series**
  - **Media Discussion Series**
  - **Haat Bajar**
  - **ASMAN**
  - **Run for Fun**
  - **Another Me**

**EXHIBITIONS**

- **Exhibitions**
  - **Neel** (Aftab Shivdasani) is a billionaire bachelor with a wonderful life until he is diagnosed with a fatal heart disease. He then meets the seductive Anahita (Celina Jaitley) and his life changes. Along the way, he also meets up with the mysterious Ria (Amrita Arora) and soon the three are embroiled in a dark love story in the style of French film noir.

**EVENTS**

- **Run for Fun** marathon organised by the Nepal Investment Bank, on 17 March starting from NIBL’s head office at Darbar Marg. 4228223
- **ASMAN** annual mela with food, fun, and music at St. Xavier’s School, Jawalakhel on 17 March from 10AM-6PM. 9851099481
- **Haat Bajar** with alternative handmade garments, metal crafts, paper products, and antiques at Nhuscute’s Kitchen – the Organic Bistro, 11AM-5PM on 17 March. 4299003
- **Media Discussion Series** on the Nepali transmission of All India Radio, 22 March at 3PM, Martin Chautari. 4228050
- **Yoga Camps** at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage, 23-25 March. 9841719927
- **Toastmasters** communication and leadership program, every Wednesday 6PM at the Institute of Environmental Management, Trisupeswor.
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  - **Run for Fun**
  - **Another Me**

**NEPALI WEATHER**

The rain last week shouldn’t have come as a surprise. The vibrant weather systems create good conditions for low-pressure zones and for clouds to collect enough moisture for showers. As a result, the Valley has now received its monthly quota of 35 mm of rain. Unlike the systematic summer monsoon fronts, weather systems have fluctuating high-altitude patterns, which makes predicting their onset difficult. This will be a good weekend for Valley residents—Thursday’s satellite picture shows no major low fronts around. This will be a good weekend for Valley residents—Thursday’s satellite picture shows no major low fronts around. The rains means sunny days with passing, patchy clouds, fresh mornings, and breezy afternoons.

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Michael Shermer

Imagine you have a choice between earning $50,000 a year while other people make $25,000, or earning $100,000 a year while other people get $250,000. Prices of goods and services are the same. Which would you prefer? Studies show the majority of people select the first option. This seemingly illogical preference is just one of the puzzles science is trying to solve about why happiness can be so elusive in today's world. Several recent books by researchers address the topic, but my sceptic's eye found a historian's long-view analysis to ultimately be the most enlightening.

Consider a paradox outlined by London School of Economics economist Richard Layard in *Happiness* (Penguin, 2005), in which he shows that in general people are no happier even though average incomes have more than doubled since 1950 and “we have more food, more clothes, more televisions, more central heating, more foreign holidays, a shorter working week, nicer work and, above all, better health.” Once average annual income is above $20,000 a head (in developed countries), higher pay brings no greater happiness. Why? One, our genes account for roughly half of our predisposition to be happy or unhappy, and two, our wants are relative to what other people have, not to some absolute measure.

Happiness is better equated with satisfaction than pleasure, says Emory University psychiatrist Gregory Berns in *Satisfaction* (Henry Holt, 2005), because the pursuit of pleasure lands us on a never-ending hedonic treadmill that paradoxically leads to misery. “Satisfaction is an emotion that captures the uniquely human need to impart meaning to one’s activities,” Berns concludes. “While you might find pleasure by happenstance—winning the lottery, possessing the genes for longevity, or having the luck not to live in poverty—satisfaction can arise only by the conscious decision to do something. And this makes all the difference in the world, because it is only your own actions for which you may take responsibility and credit.”

Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert goes deeper into our psyches in *Stumbling on Happiness* (Knopf, 2006), in which he claims, “The human being is the only animal that thinks about the future.” Much of our happiness depends on projecting what will make us happy (instead of what actually does), and Gilbert shows that we are not very good at this. Most of us imagine that variety is the spice of life, for example. But in an experiment in which subjects anticipated that they would prefer an assortment of snacks, when it actually came to eating the snacks week after week, subjects in the no-variety group said that they were more satisfied than the subjects in the variety group. “Wonderful things are especially wonderful the first time they happen,” Gilbert explains, “but their wonderfulness wanes with repetition.”

This habituation to even a multiplicity of wonderfulness is what economists call “declining marginal utility” and married couples call life. But if you think that an array of sexual partners adds to the spice of life, you are mistaken: according to an exhaustive study published in the Social Organisation of Sexuality (University of Chicago Press, 1994), married people have more sex than singles—and more orgasms. Historian Michael Hecht emphasised this point in *The Happiness Myth* (Haper, 2007). Her deep and thoughtful historical perspective demonstrates just how time and culture-dependent is this happiness research. As she writes: “The basic modern assumptions about how to be happy are nonsense.” Take sex.

“A century ago, an average man who had not had sex in three years might have felt proud of his health and forbearance, and a woman might have praised herself for the health and happiness benefits of ten years of abstinence.”

Most happiness research is based on self-reported data, and Hecht’s point is that a century ago would most likely have answered questions on a happiness survey very differently than they do today.

* (Scientific American)
INTERNATIONAL

European leaders need to get serious about Europe’s cocaine problem. The ‘white lady’ is seducing a steadily growing number of Europeans, and denial will only worsen the consequences.

Cocaine used to be America’s problem, to the point that the United States started a major campaign against sellers and consumers of crack cocaine in the inner cities, drug traffickers, and suppliers in the Andes. But now demand for cocaine in most of the world is stable or dropping. Coca cultivation has dropped by a quarter in the past five years, and seizures of cocaine have almost doubled. Forty-two percent of all the world’s cocaine was seized in 2005.

Only Europe is bucking the trend. Cocaine use is on the rise, especially in Spain, Britain, and Italy. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence about traces of cocaine found on bank notes and in water supplies.

Here are some harder facts. For the first time, the level of cocaine use in Spain—3 percent of the population aged 15 to 64—now exceeds that in the US. And the UK is not far behind. In 2005, 2.4 percent of the UK population used cocaine at least once, up sharply from 0.6 percent a decade earlier. Ten years ago, 20 percent of all new clients entering rehab in the Netherlands were addicted to cocaine. Now it is 40 percent. In Spain, the figure in 2002 was 42 percent, up from just 7 percent in 1995, and it has certainly risen again.

Cocaine users in Europe are switching to cocaine from heroin. Cocaine is fashionable, attractive white, not dark; sniffed, not injected; consumed in living rooms and nightclubs, not dark alleys. It is seen as a drug for winners, not losers. To many it is a symbol of success, until they end up in a hospital or a treatment centre. Cocaine use by high-profile entertainers, executives, models, and socialites does not help, nor does uncritical reporting by the media.

Cocaine is highly addictive and harmful. That’s why it is a controlled substance. Addicts may be in denial, thinking that they can control their ‘recreational use’, but cocaine, to quote JJ Cale, “she don’t lie.” Too many governments—particularly in rich countries—fail to invest political capital in preventing and treating drug abuse. Their societies have the drug problem they deserve. This raises a basic credibility issue: how can Europe urge Colombia and Peru to reduce supply when its own drug habit is driving cultivation? The solution is to address both supply and demand. Coca crops in Latin America need to be replaced with agricultural crops, and cocaine use in affluent Europe must be reduced.

On the supply side, there must be more support for poor farmers in drug-producing countries to give them viable alternatives to growing coca. Most illicit coca growers are extremely poor. Crop eradication will not work over the long term if there is no legal economy to replace drugs. Drug control and development assistance must therefore go hand in hand.

Environmental protection is also at issue. Coca farmers and producers slash and burn forests, pollute streams with toxic chemicals, and damage fragile ecosystems. The Andean region has less than 1 percent of the world’s land area, but more than 15 percent of its plant life. Vast areas of vegetation are being destroyed for cocaine. Europeans should be made aware of the long-term destruction done to a precious, fragile habitat for the sake of a short-term high.

But controlling supply is not enough. If Colombia’s farmers stopped growing coca tomorrow, unrestrained demand by the world’s 13 million cocaine users would quickly generate as much cultivation somewhere else. The ultimate challenge is to prevent drug abuse and to treat and rehabilitate drug users successfully. Sweden is a good example. Drug use there is a third of the European average due to decades of consistent policies that combine tough punishment of dealers and comprehensive treatment for users.

The fever people are cocaine addicts, the less harm done to individuals and families, the less money goes to criminals, insurgents, and terrorists, and the less damage done to the environment.

Himal Southasian

- Thoughtful
- Irreverent
- Coherent
- Regional

*Himal Southasian* March issue is on stands!

**COVER FEATURE:** India discovers Southasia As India takes over as SAARC chair, we offer six stories exploring New Delhi’s new regionalism.

**COMING UP IN THE APRIL ISSUE** Tibet, the mundane: Himal Southasian looks at Tibet’s evolving partnerships – with China, with Southasia, and with itself.

White lines

**Cocaine running around the brain in Europe**

**A THORNY PROBLEM:** Demand for cocaine fuels toxic and dangerous farming in Central America.

Here are some harder facts. For the first time, the level of cocaine use in Spain—3 percent of the population aged 15 to 64—now exceeds that in the US. And the UK is not far behind. In 2005, 2.4 percent of the UK population used cocaine at least once, up sharply from 0.6 percent a decade earlier. Ten years ago, 20 percent of all new clients entering rehab in the Netherlands were addicted to cocaine. Now it is 40 percent. In Spain, the figure in 2002 was 42 percent, up from just 7 percent in 1995, and it has certainly risen again.

Drug users in Europe are switching from heroin. Cocaine is fashionable, attractive white, not dark; sniffed, not injected; consumed in living rooms and nightclubs, not dark alleys. It is seen as a drug for winners, not losers. To many it is a symbol of success, until they end up in a hospital or a treatment centre. Cocaine use by high-profile entertainers, executives, models, and socialites does not help, nor does uncritical reporting by the media.

Cocaine is highly addictive and harmful. That’s why it is a controlled substance. Addicts may be in denial, thinking that they can control their ‘recreational use’, but cocaine, to quote JJ Cale, “she don’t lie.” Too many governments—particularly in rich countries—fail to invest political capital in preventing and treating drug abuse. Their societies have the drug problem they deserve. This raises a basic credibility issue: how can Europe urge Colombia and Peru to reduce supply when its own drug habit is driving cultivation? The solution is to address both supply and demand. Coca crops in Latin America need to be replaced with agricultural crops, and cocaine use in affluent Europe must be reduced.

On the supply side, there must be more support for poor farmers in drug-producing countries to give them viable alternatives to growing coca. Most illicit coca growers are extremely poor. Crop eradication will not work over the long term if there is no legal economy to replace drugs. Drug control and development assistance must therefore go hand in hand.

Environmental protection is also at issue. Coca farmers and producers slash and burn forests, pollute streams with toxic chemicals, and damage fragile ecosystems. The Andean region has less than 1 percent of the world’s land area, but more than 15 percent of its plant life. Vast areas of vegetation are being destroyed for cocaine. Europeans should be made aware of the long-term destruction done to a precious, fragile habitat for the sake of a short-term high.

But controlling supply is not enough. If Colombia’s farmers stopped growing coca tomorrow, unrestrained demand by the world’s 13 million cocaine users would quickly generate as much cultivation somewhere else. The ultimate challenge is to prevent drug abuse and to treat and rehabilitate drug users successfully. Sweden is a good example. Drug use there is a third of the European average due to decades of consistent policies that combine tough punishment of dealers and comprehensive treatment for users.

The fewer people are cocaine addicts, the less harm done to individuals and families, the less money goes to criminals, insurgents, and terrorists, and the less damage done to the environment.
HAPPENINGS

QUICK GETAWAY: US Under Secretary for Management Henrietta Fore leaving Baluwatar after a meeting with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on Saturday. Fore said her government was concerned about the impact on the democratic process of impunity for Maoist excesses, and hardening divisions along ethnic lines.

TOP DOGS: Winners of the boss Top Ten awards for excellence in business, management, and entrepreneurship smile for the camera after being felicitated at the Soaltee Crowne Plaza on Friday.

ABBY DAYS: Ranjit Acharya, CEO of Prisma Advertising, receives Nepal’s first ABBY Merit awards from Nirmal Raj Poudel, president of the Association of Advertising Agencies in Nepal on Sunday. Prisma received the award for a public service ad launched with Himalmedia to raise awareness about the importance of education for all children.

Laxman Shrestha is known for painting abstract landscapes that contain vast expanses. His first solo show in Kathmandu in 40 years shows the master at his best. The seven digital monochrome prints of paintings currently on show in Mumbai titled Elaborations, together with paintings from personal collections in Nepal, speak of restlessness, honesty, wildness, and the courage to destroy everything—qualities, Shrestha says are essential to be an artist. Shrestha has come a long way from that first letter he wrote as a young man to the dean of the JJ School of Art in Mumbai, expressing his desire to study art, and then running away from Kathmandu with just Rs 500 to his name. The Siraha-born painter today exhibits around the world and his work goes for millions. He’s prolific, too, and says he paints 30 big canvases, and 40 watercolours in a good year.

“Financial success has given me a lot of freedom, but I am constantly evolving, and searching for more depth,” says Shrestha. When he started painting seriously 45 years ago, the 68-year-old Shrestha focused on figurative paintings that had “a level of distortion”. Because he didn’t just want to paint what was visible to the regular eye. “I like to create new beings with the normal things I see,” he explains. Particularly influential was a trip to Paris in 1964, when he saw the immensity of art history, and changed gears to a more abstract impressionist style. But Shrestha doesn’t care too much for labels, and says that at the end of the day, he is just a painter.

Despite the years of painting and all the acclaim, for Shrestha, every new painting is a fresh start. “I feel as if I don’t know how to paint,” he laughs. He lays out the basic structure of a new painting in one trance-like hour on a huge canvas spread out on the floor. Then I stretch it across the easel, and the thinking, feeling, and planning begin,” Shrestha explains. “It’s like putting flesh on a skeleton or dressing a body.”

Shrestha, recognised the world over as a Nepali artist, calls Mumbai home. He visits Nepal every year to be inspired and to unwind. His contribution to the contemporary art scene here: “right next to my name in every international art house where my work hangs is the word Nepal.”

Shitu Rajbhandari

Laxman Shrestha in Kathmandu, paintings and prints on show at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 15-22, 4218048.
Just kidding

The NC-D is going to hold on tight to Hydropower in the interim government even if it means sacrificing Deuba’s chance to be President. Girijababu himself wants his cousin Sushil and not Ram Chandra to be Deputy PM. The Maoists will have to settle for Forests and Information.

But just imagine if the Maoist Information Minister’s job is to send out CDs like the one that is alleged to contain evidence of Paras’ plot to assassinate republicans. The Ass saw excerpts on Mero Sansar and it’s just a clipping service of digitised newspaper cuttings. Comrade Mahara will have to do better than that if his job is going to be feasting state media off-the-cuff pronouncements like the ones his boss has been making in the past weeks. First he said the palace was planning to kill Americans and blame it on the Maoists so the Americans would think the Maoists did it and bomb Nepal to smithreens. Then he stated categorically all guns were in containers, but some may have been washed away in floods, suddenly remembered he had a whole lot of them clamped away. Then Ian raised a surprised eyebrow, Chhabilal Baje said he was just kidding, and then backtracked again and said he meant socket bombs. OK, PKD, wake us up when you make up your mind.

King Gyanendra couldn’t stand trees. He saw them as symbols of democracy. So during his royal regime he had all the majestic gum trees along Pulchok and Baluwatar chopped down. Rumour has it that tantriks convinced the king that this would keep loktantriks away. It didn’t. But the stumps are still there and the democratic governments haven’t shown much interest in replanting the trees. And now the Maoists are following the monarch’s footsteps and have given orders to cadre to decimate all private and community forests wherever they can find them. Forests have been a traditional source of income to fund elections ever since they were cut down to buy off the yellow votes in the 1980 referendum. Now, the Maoists seem to have reached the same conclusion. As one wag put it: let’s at least hope the comrades are cutting down the jungles because they don’t intend going back into them.

Girijababu’s pronouncement this week that King Gyanendra and Paras should both abdicate doesn’t seem to have ruffled too many feathers in Narayanhiti which is still sending out greetings to foreign heads of state just like in the good old days. However, the palace gets responses only from Arab sheikhdoms and Thailand. Certainly, Paras doesn’t seem to be planning to go anywhere, he is having a swimming pool built in Gokarna.