On Sunday afternoon, trekkers relaxing after crossing the Thorung La at Muktinath’s Nightingale Lodge heard a loud bang.

Police from a nearby APF camp were seen running with stretchers. The driver of a tractor who was racing another one down the mountain died instantly and his helper died later. Even before the Kali Gandaki highway to Tibet is completed, the road has claimed more lives. Last year two people died south of Jomsom when their tractor fell into the river.

The accidents have also drawn attention to what the roads are doing to a once-pristine Annapurna Circuit trekking route. Most locals in Jomsom, Marpha, and Tukuche welcome it, saying it will make food items cheaper and also give access to markets for the region’s apples and plums. Many Indian and Nepali pilgrims going to Muktinath pay Rs 700 roundtrip from Jomsom on tractor trailers.

But tourism entrepreneurs and trekkers say road access has already altered the aura of this arid and scenic valley located in the Himalayan rainshadow. “There are already hundreds of motorcycles and tractors on this road, it may turn away tourists,” says Jomsom lodge-owner Santosh Sherchan.

On the Manang side, the road from Besisahar to Chame is under construction and has received unfavourable comments on trekkers’ blogs this season. Lodge-owners in Manang say their once-remote valley would be better served by upgrading the airport and telecommunications than bringing in a road.

For trekkers Judy Smith and Robin Bootstead, the Kali Gandaki may now become like the Karakoram in Pakistan. “Like here, the locals wanted the road and the outsiders didn’t,” says Smith, “but seeing the endless stream of lorries, motorcycles, and SUVs on the Karakoram Highway you wonder at what cost.”

Adds Bootstead: “The accident is ironic, really, proves that haste makes waste.”
Can't have it both ways

If you thought the prolonged closure of all the nation's schools is about education, you better think again. Education Minister C K Lal recently talked of the need to upgrade the quality of government schools so we wouldn't need private schools anymore. So, why don't you remove locks can have their hands chopped off. And students padlocking schools have warned staff that those who don't cooperate will be killed.

But instead of reuniting with the parent body, the NC-D faction has drifted apart. Khum Bahadur Deuba made Deuba realise his blunder and return last year should have finally made Deuba understand that change is coming, but that change is not his to control. History will perhaps be kinder to Deuba than to those who have to bear the brunt of the change.

A long-term, nationwide closure of schools was really about improving education. The Maoists would have tried to upgrade the quality of government schools so we wouldn't need private ones.

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Europeans are the ones to blame for the current state of affairs in Nepal. The Maoists have achieved a classless society, but instead of reuniting with the parent body, the NC-D faction has drifted apart. Khum Bahadur Deuba made Deuba realise his blunder and return last year should have finally made Deuba understand that change is coming, but that change is not his to control. History will perhaps be kinder to Deuba than to those who have to bear the brunt of the change.

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SAME OLD NEPAL
The aimless parliament has turned into a lame duck house; an all powerful government is lost in political bickering without any sense of direction, and an untamed Young Communist League has run amok (‘Same Old Nepal’, ‘Burned Again’, #349). The King must be laughing all the way to Dakshinkali and truly believing that his ‘tantrik’ acts are really more powerful than the ‘lokatantrik’ desire of Nepali people. It is obvious that the 7+1 is again putting its own petty interests before that of the Nepali people. What is the 7+1 waiting for to bring it to its senses: another coup a la 1 February 2005, conversion of the VCL into Mao’s Red Guards for another experiment of cultural revolution, or Tamilsation of the tara? Sandesh Hamal, Lalitpur

So we’ve got our comrades and everyone else now ruling the roost with Girija Ji and all the ji’s together (‘Same old Nepal’, #349). What has changed, then? Still the same violence and populist statements that hold no backbone. Who will we blame now that the king is gone? We have populist statements that hold no backbone. Who changed, then? Still the same violence and mistrust. #349

During the 1990s, people’s attitude influenced Nepal’s economy. At the beginning of the decade, industries mushroomed because of peace and free economy which in turn created new jobs. It was all heady until the Maoist problem. Today, every sector is ill because of pressure tactics. People have become selfish in the process and started taking either themselves or the management hostage to fulfil demands. People stopped having faith in democracy and so have the industrialists. Today, because of this change, my prospect to retire does not exist. I am taking a younger man’s job. I know, but I had to change my plans.

Srishti Shrestha, email

SLAVE DEMOCRACY
K B Gurung, the general secretary of the Nepali Congress in an interview with BBC Nepal Service said unification of the NC and the NCD is necessary to save democracy. It is difficult to understand how democracy can be saved by doing that especially since corruption at all levels of the government has increased compared to the one-man rule of the Narayanhiti Palace. To save democracy, the government, the reinstated parliament, and the interim parliament should make urgent laws to discourage corruption, especially at the executive and the judiciary levels. If a law that confiscates the property of corrupt judges and officers comes into effect, corruption would be discouraged, minimised, and eradicated to ensure a long life for democracy.

Ravi Manandhar, Kuleswor

The only person (animal?) that calls it like it is is the backside Ass. Loved ‘Let us bray’ (#348). During a hot debate in class, my professor smiled at me and said, “Do you know that the world is run by people who have more influence and contacts than you? He can be a complete nitwit but he has complete control over your future.”

Gayesh N Goyal, email

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LET DOWN
Biratnagar's bookkeepers* (‘State of the State’, #349) somehow feels like a dumb abstract from C K Lal’s tour diary of Biratnagar. It is unexpectedly cold and painstakingly resembles a cheap local daily writeup. Lal is one of the best writers around but he somehow manages to let us down every now and then.

Name withheld, email

PLAN B
I agree with Daniela Ponce (‘Got Plan B?’, #349). Nepal is in need of leaders with understanding and commitment to help the people of Nepal. I was surprised to learn that at the pinnacle of Jana Andolan 2, Daniela Ponce managed to do her graduate research on the role of student movements in Nepal. As a graduate student, our professors tell us to pick topics which spark the attention of the evaluators. I just hope that student, our professors tell us to pick topics which spark the attention of the evaluators. I just hope that student movements in Nepal. As a graduate

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Troubled waters

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

This is probably another late save for the blighted Melamchi Water Supply Project.

Nepal’s largest infrastructure undertaking in history will probably survive this latest tussle between the government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) simply because neither the Maoist minister Hisila Yami nor the ADB want to be the one to pull the plug.

Yami is from Kathmandu, and her constituents are reeling from unprecedented water shortages even for drinking are not going to forgive her. The ADB has too much invested in this and too much at stake to grapple back now.

The challenge for both is how to do that without losing face. The board’s statement last week announcing the planned closure of the project on 30 June began with the conditional: “as it stands now”. Yami, who insists that the contract to manage Kathmandu’s water supply to the British firm Severn Trent was not transparent, says she is reading between the lines.

“Without doubt the banks have put out that kind of statement if it simply wanted to wash its hands of the project,” she said, “the bank knows these are abnormal days for Nepal and would certainly reconsider its decision.”

ADB officials in Washington who spoke to us on condition of anonymity say they want to send a strong message the government. “It’s schooling time for them,” one said, “we have waited long enough, it’s time to learn to play by the rules.”

And those rules are precisely what Yami has problems with. She has questioned ADB’s procedure for selecting Severn Trent, which she says was flawed. The Maoist minister has dramatically toned down her rhetoric this week and made conciliatory statements about having no problem with the

BoK’s deals

Bank of Kathmandu has been awarded a line of credit by the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation (IFC) under its Global Trade Finance Program. BoK has also signed an agreement with the South Asian Enterprises Development Facility (SEDF) in order to develop small and medium businesses. The bank has a $2 million line of credit with IFC and will now be associated with hundreds of banks around the world.

Taking a train

Indian railway tickets are now available for booking from Nepal through Orient Paradise Tours and Travels. Indian Railways and the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) have officially appointed Orient Tour, a subsidiary of KLG Dugar Group, as their general sales agent. Ticket reservation facilities will be available in all major cities in the near future.

Lenovo

Genetics has been appointed the official distributor of the Lenovo brand. Lenovo products include laptops, personal computers, printers, servers, mobile phones, and more than 200 types of branded computer peripherals. The Lenovo showroom is located at Babar Mahal.

Internet link

WorldLink has introduced a new series of wireless modem. This modem is targeted towards customers living away from city areas where proper telephone lines and cables have not yet reached. WorldLink has also designed five new WI-ZOOM Internet service packages - WI-ZOOM Nite Lite (Regular, Standard and Premium) and WI-ZOOM Hours (Residential and Business). The speed range of these services is from 64-9960bps.

Cheaper calls

United Telecom Limited has started its international call rate from India to Rs 20 per minute to Rs 15 plus taxes, during peak hours. It has been further cut down to Rs 12.50 for off-hours from 8PM-6AM. UTL is the first private telecommunications company and boasts the cheapest phone rates at Rs 1 per minute.

Asahi

Asahi, the Japanese lager, has been launched in Nepal for the first time through Evolution Trading. Brewed with malted barley, the beer uses the Asahi yeast strain No. 318 to ferment. Launched in Japan in 1987, the beer is now being brought to Nepal. Evolution Trading has also already made trade deals with Apple, Bose, Panasonic, Sanyo, and Optoma.

Troubled waters

It doesn’t matter whether a cat is black or white as long as Kathmandu Valley gets proper water supply.

A country so rich in water resources has been a chronic failure in ensuring proper drinking water for citizens. Forget about the rest of the country, it can’t do so in its own capital.

It doesn’t matter whether a cat is black or white as long as Kathmandu Valley gets proper water supply. It doesn’t matter whether a cat is black or white as long as Kathmandu Valley gets proper water supply. It doesn’t matter whether a cat is black or white as long as Kathmandu Valley gets proper water supply.

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I'm not easy being a pro-market person in Nepal. Columnists use the vernacular press routinely equate markets with a few big private businesses run by 'greedy capitalists'. These fat cats cut corners, exploit workers, waste natural resources, bribe bureaucrats, fool customers, and are lackeys of those in power. This is one reason why there's little hue and cry when businesses get beaten up, when they are forced to donate and when, because of strikes, they find it impossible to, well, mind their own business. Indeed, in the court of public opinion, a Maoist can get a second chance, but a businessman remains guilty of all real and imaginary charges until proven otherwise. In times ahead, that perception is going to make it difficult for our business communities to explain what competitive markets, of which they make up a part, effectively facilitate: provision of goods, services, jobs, taxes, investment opportunities, and increases in levels of innovation, trust, transparency and accountability. But that difficulty poses a problem and an opportunity. The problem is that with the Maoists in government, we are likely to hear, as we did from Hira Yami last week, the usual more-concerned-about-Nepali-than-those-rhetoric against privatisation and foreign investments. The opportunity is that now is the time for businesses to stop being defensive, and start putting their good sides on public display. Not only does this help them do good for more Nepalis than fatalities. But it's hard to see what tangible shared value really comes out of a well-intentioned bank supporting a well-run hospital. Likewise, for a Kathmandu-based supermarket, paying for scholarships in a remote district makes sense. That's because most salespersons in that supermarket make up a part, effectively

STRICKLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

workers, waste natural resources, bête bureaucrats, fool customers, and are lackeys of those in power. This to drumbeat, add years of involvement, and will put in six hours a week. Because we realise that the number of road accidents in Nepal. Columnists isn't easy being a pro-market person in Nepal. Columnists use the vernacular press routinely equate markets with a few big private businesses run by 'greedy capitalists'. These fat cats cut corners, exploit workers, waste natural resources, bribe bureaucrats, fool customers, and are lackeys of those in power. This is one reason why there's little hue and cry when businesses get beaten up, when they are forced to donate and when, because of strikes, they find it impossible to, well, mind their own business. Indeed, in the court of public opinion, a Maoist can get a second chance, but a businessman remains guilty of all real and imaginary charges until proven otherwise. In times ahead, that perception is going to make it difficult for our business communities to explain what competitive markets, of which they make up a part, effectively facilitate: provision of goods, services, jobs, taxes, investment opportunities, and increases in levels of innovation, trust, transparency and accountability. But that difficulty poses a problem and an opportunity. The problem is that with the Maoists in government, we are likely to hear, as we did from Hira Yami last week, the usual more-concerned-about-Nepali-than-those-rhetoric against privatisation and foreign investments. The opportunity is that now is the time for businesses to stop being defensive, and start putting their good sides on public display. Not only does this help them do good for more Nepalis than fatalities. But it's hard to see what tangible shared value really comes out of a well-intentioned bank supporting a well-run hospital. Likewise, for a Kathmandu-based supermarket, paying for scholarships in a remote district makes sense. That's because most salespersons in that supermarket make up a part, effectively

suraj vaidya
CEO, Vaidya's Organisation of Industries and Trading House

CSR should be an integral part of every business and should not depend on the profits. In our tea estates in Dharkola, we produce certified organic tea, 70 percent of our workers are women and we have a welfare fund run by them. At Toyota we are starting a new pedestrian safety program because we realise that the number of road accidents in Kathmandu is increasing. Our staff will be directly involved, and will put in six hours a week.

Shekar Golchha
Director, Golchha Organisation

Every corporate house should make CSR a priority, and it is at the top of our list. We are supporting two hospitals in Bratnagar, we help charilies, and we have set up welfare funds within our group. We don't use our social contributions as a marketing tool, which is why we don't make too much noise about it.

Anil shah
CEO, Nabil Bank

CSR is an evolutionary concept. When a corporate house is in primary stages, they are most concerned about making profits so social responsibilities are not thought about. Nabil Bank supports health, education and sports. In health we support Tilganga Eye Centre's glaucoma initiative. In education we have supported kids from customers, suppliers, employees, and shareholders but also do well (i.e. earn competitive advantages).

One way a Nepali business can honestly and confidently display its good side is by being serious about how it carries out its corporate social responsibilities. CSR here does not mean diverting a part of a company’s profits into pet projects designed to make the CEO and his wife look smart in lifestyle magazines. Nor does it mean doing generic ‘feel good’ activities by throwing money at charities and NGOs. The latest thinking on CSR is that it’s about creating a shared value between a business and society in such a way that the activity undertaken is meaningful to society and tangibly valuable to the business.

Viewed this way, lauding Nepali businesses may need to rethink how they practice CSR (see interviews below). It is, for instance, a complementary activity for a car distributor to engage in ways to reduce road fatalities. But it's hard to see what tangible shared value really comes out of a well-intentioned bank supporting a well-run hospital.

Likewise, for a Kathmandu-based supermarket, paying for scholarships in a remote district makes sense. That's because most salespersons in that supermarket make up a part, effectively

Suresh Bhandari
CEO, Nepal Investment Bank Limited

So far we have been able to do it ourselves without support from anyone.

PritiK Pande
CEO, Nepal Investment Bank Limited

We have a deep commitment to social upliftment, sustainable economic development and creating a good working environment. Our most recent CSR event was the ‘Run for Fun’ 2007 Annual Marathon, which raised Rs 5,000,000 for the Katmandu Valley Preservation Trust. NIBL has provided monetary support to Bal Mandir and Pashupati Bridhashram, and Nepal Apanga Sangha, Khagendra Nava Jeevan Kendra to help disabled people. We have helped the UNHCR mission to Nepal in their work in improving the living conditions of Refugees.

CSR is instrumental in generating goodwill towards the bank and in helping us to brand and position our corporate name in the business world.
Melamchi sinks
Former minister Gopalman Shrestha in Samaya, 24 May
Just like during the royal regime, Melamchi has again become fodder, this time for the Maoists. A project that was moribund after the royal takeover in February 2005 was finally restarted. We had to work hard to convince the UML to agree to the Melamchi legislation. The Maoists had never been happy about it. If the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works had remained with us, we wouldn’t have had this problem.

Hullabaloo over privatisation of the Nepal Water Supply Corporation was nonsense. It was a six-year management contract to streamline water supply. I had warned Sher Bahadur Deuba and Girija Prasad Koirala about giving the ministry to the Maoists who were already saying “melamchi bye bye”. Yet, we offered it to them on a platter. The UML devoured the Arun III project in 1994, this time the Maoists devoured Melamchi. Now who will suffer? It will be the thirsty lower and middle class citizens of the Valley. The eight parties better think about this seriously.

Open schools
Editorial in Abhiyan, 21-27 May
There is a positive correlation between education and the socio-economic development of a country. Countries with high quality education are ahead in terms of economic development. That is why most countries in the world never allow political involvement during the planning stages. Nakarmi and Magar were arrested later and are among the many who were disappeared at the Bhanabhairn Battalion,” said Saaju.

“At first we did not know much about the plan to kill the IGP or about his lifestyle, soon we sent our people to snoop around his residence and later learnt that he goes for regular morning walks, but would change routes for security purposes. Shrestha was under surveillance since July 2002 and our plan was to take action by September 2002. We failed 16 times because he was always changing his routine,” adds Prajapati.

“In mid January 2003 PLA’s special commander Umesh Lama and I, section members Roppal Magar and Juju Bhai Guerrilla arrived in Bagdoti. Laljur, Guerrilla is now company commander of PLAs Third Division and Lama is not in the PLA anymore. On the night of 25 January, I was called by Lama and was informed about the plan to attack IGP Shrestha in front of a restaurant while he was walking on the road,” said Saaju.

Magar, Guerrilla, Lama, and Saaju set out early in the morning on 26 January. “When we saw IGP Shrestha, his wife, and his bodyguard coming down from Ekanta Kuna, Lama took charge. Our plan was to kill Shrestha and shoot his wife in the leg.

At 7.30 AM we came face to face with Shrestha, but he and his bodyguard did not recognise us because we were in civvies. The plan was to have Magar in the middle of the road, Lama, Guerrilla and I on the side. We were standing 2-3 metres apart and were to finish our job in two minutes, but it did not take us that long. They were killed in a few seconds. Guerrilla’s pistol was not covered, so when he took it out, it fired by mistake and hit me in my thigh. I lost consciousness. Just as I opened my eyes Magar and Guerrilla shot the IGP, and his wife. Magar then aimed at the bodyguard but his pistol didn’t fire. Magar was coming to grab mine when Lama fired at the bodyguard. After he was hit, Magar ran to a secure place and Guerrilla and Lama came to get me,” Saaju added.

Police later arrested Sauju from Patan Hospital where he was undergoing treatment.

Min Bajracharya
Stationery shop owner: “We have everything you need for school, what do you want...banners, placards, mikes, locks?”
“The Bhairabnath and Juddha Bhairab incidents were even more atrocious than Hitler’s gas chambers. This is why the struggle against those involved in disappearances hasn’t stopped. Once we establish a republic, we will raise our voices from parliament, from the government, and on the streets.”

CPN-M leader Baburam Bhattarai quoted in Rajdhani, 22 May.

Nepal Oil Corporation: No petrol
Nepal Airlines Corporation: No planes
Nepal Electricity Authority: No electricity
Nepal Water Supply Corporation: No water
Nepal Telecom: No circuit
Constituent Assembly: No idea

instability to affect the education system. Even during the worst days of civil war in Sri Lanka and the Philippines, the schools remained open.

Nepal is just the opposite. Education was affected during the royal dictatorship and even though peace has been re-established, schools are still being closed. Yet, there is no outrage or serious effort to resolve the prolonged closure of schools by the government or the political parties. And the groups that have enforced this strike, which directly affects half the country’s population, seem to be little bothered about its impact. Some of their demands may be legitimate, but closing down schools to have them addressed is illegitimate. It shouldn’t just be child rights organisations that rise up with one voice against the closure of schools, but also guardians, teachers, civil society, and political forces. The state must also make sure that its investments in education are effective and regulate the commercialisation of the sector. This government may not be able to make education child-centred, but it must do more to reopen schools right away despite threats from the Maoists. Otherwise, no one will save us from the fate of being a failed state.

Interview with Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation
Prithibi Subba in Himal Khabarpatra, 15-29 May

As soon as you were appointed minister, Nepal Airlines Corporation’s planes were grounded. All the planes are old and we can’t buy new ones right now. The engineers must be corrupt, else how could they not have known that the aircraft were not in working condition? Meanwhile, after the planes were grounded, tickets were still being sold. All this is under investigation.

How is NAC doing?
During the panchayat, democracy, and the royal regime, the corporation was sucked dry. Everyone from prime ministers and ministers to corporation bosses and employees misused the corporation. We should be ashamed, especially now since all its international flights are cancelled.

How was NAC misused?
An unnecessary new company was set up to siphon way money. The Lauda scandal drove NAC to bankruptcy.

Is it true that of late NAC has made a lot of money?
After the April Uprising, more tourists started coming in and we changed a few internal policies. The Rs 1 billion profit we earned during this period was used to pay back loans. We’ve seen positive results with just minor policy changes. If there had been stringent rules before, NAC would be flying to 70 international destinations by now and our hangars would have been full of new aircraft. Thai started the same year, and now owns over 100 planes. And if foreign airlines can attract tourists to Nepal, so can we.

Why is the government unwilling to bring in desperately needed new aircraft?
The purchase of new planes has always been controversial. NAC insiders are now scared of being accused of corruption. I am new, I work for the people, so I am not scared. The process of buying new planes will begin when applications come in. National pride is attached to the national carrier, and we must stop it from sinking.

Will the government stand as guarantor during the purchase?
It has to! We are working towards NAC eventually being a public-private partnership enterprise. The government would own 50 percent, the private sector 40 percent, and the public and employees the remaining 10 percent.

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“They have sucked NAC dry”
Someone to watch over us
Take away contemporary clothing, the taxi, tourists, railings, and Basantapur seen from the Shiva-Parbati temple looks gratifyingly similar to how it did in the early 1940s when Ganesh Man Chitrakar photographed the square. The old building in the left corner is missing, but today’s stone pavement is an improvement.

Time passes
The old Ghantaghar with its Moghul-Victorian masonry stood proudly next to an ultramodern electricity pole in this 1915 photograph by Dirgha Man. Nepal was one of the first Asian countries to generate electricity in 1903 with the Pharping power station. This tower came down in a heap of rubble in the 1934 quake and was rebuilt its present shape and the political graffiti matching the jacarandas in full bloom.

Still abuzz
On this scorching day in 1920, Dirgha Man climbed to the roof of a nearby building and captured the spiritual and commercial transactions that made Indrachok the nerve centre of old Kathmandu. To shoot the scene today, with the renovated Akash Bhairab temple and electricity pole and the unimpressive brick and concrete box that has replaced the high temple on the right, you have to clamber atop a car in the thick of traffic.
Nearly a century after these photographs were taken much has changed in Kathmandu, but much remains the same.

A bird’s eye view
In 1910, when Dirgha Man took this picture from Dharara, Tundikhel looked almost barren with just a solitary statue watching over it. Ninety-six years later, his grandson Kiran Chitrakar re-enacted the scene from the top of the tower and printed his photograph in sepia to give the same texture and mood.

The long view
This shot of Ranipokhari with the Darbar High School behind it was taken in 1918 by Dirgha Man. Today, from the balcony of Ghantaghar, the temple is still set against a distant backdrop of hills, but the vista is marred by the high concrete matchboxes of Asan.
Remember the good old days when all we had to worry about was the earthquake? Compared with the plethora of concerns facing society today, this primal fear shared by our ancestors seems almost quaint and folksy.

The 1990’s brought pollution, overcrowding, and a rapidly deteriorating environment to the nation’s capital. Urbanites fretted about smog and effluents, the air was filled with toxic emissions, and the beloved Bagmati River degenerated from holy to filthy.

These perils have not gone away, but who has time for such mundane matters nowadays? New dramas, far more tangible and immediate, currently preoccupy us.

With crime soaring, theft is the only ‘old fear’ still in the news, holding our attention by mutating into ever more alarming forms. Home invasion by armed gangs is burglary’s latest and nastiest manifestation, outdone only by the Maoist innovation of evicting house-owners and stealing all property outright. Simple, time honoured anxieties like losing valuables to a thief in the night have been ousted by the fear of dispossession at gunpoint.

Worries once considered irrational have become dreadfully real for many. Outrageous crimes like extortion and kidnapping inflict psychological terror leaving scars that may never heal.

The introduction of such wholesale fear in society can be blamed on the war and its perpetrators. Kathmandu was recently one of the safest capitals in the world, and the countryside even safer, until the flood of guns fueling the conflict changed everything.

The use of intimidation and terror for political ends is a well-known Maoist trademark, employed for decades with brutal efficiency by the Chairman himself. Human wave attacks on isolated police posts and mass abductions of school children for propaganda indoctrination are among the many Maoist introduced traumas that no society should ever have to endure.

Mainstream politicians blundering their way through the war launched clumsy reprisals notable only for their brutality, bringing state sponsored terror home to many of Nepal’s villages. Things got even weirder after the second People’s Movement, when the police seemed to follow the monarchy into a purely ceremonial role. Reports of widespread desecration in the form were confirmed when emergency calls for help went unanswered, leaving the citizens to fend for themselves in a country riding a crime wave. Rumours of off-duty officers in uniform stealing whatever they could grab during spontaneous house searches added new fears we never wanted to think about, especially the part about liquor on their breath.

The social cohesion that helped control crime and provided moral support in the past has been wrecked by the displacement of millions, shredding the fabric of both the villages left behind and the cities flocked to. One can’t count on the neighbours in a pinch if you’ve never met them, or they’ve already fled.

As civil society remains under siege, our repertoire of dread grows. The recent incarnation of Mao’s infamous Red Guards in the guise of the YCL has introduced fear of the mob, every bit as primal and unpredictable as that of the quake.

The fact these threats haven’t been thrown in jail causes yet more anxiety, leading many of us to suspect the state has broken down. Given the track record, we cannot expect the firearms hidden by the Maoists in contravention of the peace accord to be used against us in the near future. Since the guns don’t officially exist and surely won’t be thrown away, at the very least they’ll add to the huge quantity of illegal weapons already in circulation and skew the odds in favour of criminals for years to come.

The Hand salutes the Nepali spirit for its remarkable resilience in coping with these insane developments, but wonders how the perpetrators of such abuse are allowed to get away with it.

If adapting to new sources of stress is necessary for survival these days, it’s important to remember life wasn’t always like this and doesn’t necessarily have to be this way in the future. To live free of fear is a basic human right we have been robbed of, and the worst uncertainties plaguing Nepal these days are manufactured by those with a political agenda who will have very little left once the fear is gone. Innocence lost may never be regained, but given time and a bit of luck even these troubles will pass.
The Maoists have bought a powerful FM station in Palpa

Aruna Rayamajhi likes to be known as a “revolutionary journalist.” During the conflict she was a radio reporter for the Maoists’ clandestine Radio Ganatantra.

“My comrades carried guns, I carried a broadcast antenna in my hand and a transmitter in my backpack and went to scenes of battle to cover the news,” recalls Rayamajhi.

Today, Rayamajhi is no more underground. She is a radio news reader for Radio Paschimanchal 99.4FM in Tansen and her voice can be heard all over Palpa and eight surrounding districts.

Radio Paschimanchal was set up in 2003 by a group of pro-Nepali Congress businessmen and headed by the NC’s district president. The station never really got back to normal after it was damaged during a firefight here in February 2005 (see: ‘Radioactivity in Palpa’, #310). The station, which has been under pressure to repay its bank loans, was bought by the Maoists on the 11th anniversary of their ‘revolution’ in February.

Loyal 99.4 listeners noticed a dramatic change. The news coverage became focused on Maoist events and brought a heavy dose of Maoist propaganda everyday. The news even used the derogatory word “mandale” to describe anyone critical of the Maoists, and regularly referred to the king as “Gyane.”

Early morning, when the other three FM stations in Palpa are broadcasting religious chants, 99.4 belts out revolutionary songs like the hit song, ‘Avalanches unite to make glaciers… the people unite into a flashflood’.

“Whenever our underground radio we were trying to make the people politically aware, and now that we are in the mainstream we are still doing the same thing but much more effectively,” explains Rayamajhi.

Her boss Kishore Panthi is head of news and has been involved with Radio Ganatantra ever since it started broadcasting from clandestine mobile transmitters during the war.

Listeners’ reactions are mixed. Under its original owners, the station was perceived to have a pro-Congress stance and many took it as a given that change in ownership would mean a change in slant.

Locals blame the Congress as much as the Maoists. “All this wouldn’t have happened if the NC workers had been more committed to democracy and press freedom,” said one.

The station was finally sold for Rs 4.5 million to a consortium of Butwal businessmen known to be sympathetic to the Maoists. An employee says the radio is now run directly by the party, which has purged most of the journalists associated with it earlier.

“This is the first radio station that is being used to promote the party’s ideology,” admits station in-charge, Balak Ram Buda without any hint of irony. Buda wants to upgrade the station’s 400W transmitter to 1,000W to extend its reach and adds that the station is careful not to be too propagandistic.

But station manager Satis Chapagain openly admits that “this radio is being run more as a party organ than a professional station.” Chapagain is one of the few journalists who have been retained from the previous avatar of the station. “We have been told by the new owners that our mission is to argue for the republican cause,” he says.

Indeed, 99.4FM launched transmission under its new owners with a live broadcast of Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s public speech in Kathmandu in February.
A state-supported talibanisation of Islamabad is underway

COMMENT

Pervez Hoodbhoy

Musharraf, who President George W. Bush calls his “buddy” and who supports “enlightened moderate” Islam, wears as a badge of honour two attempts on his life by religious extremists. But as his authority weakens, so increases his reliance on the Taliban card—which he has been accused of playing for years. Signs of government-engineered chaos abound. In Islamabad, vigilante groups from a government-funded mosque, the Lal Masjid, roam the streets imposing Islamic morality and terrorising citizens in full view of the police. The clerics openly defy the state. Since 21 January, baton-wielding, burqa-clad students of the Jamia Hafsa, the woman's Islamic university next to Lal Masjid, have not threatened to go for the enforcement of Sharia law. The Lal Masjid clerics operate with impunity and there has been no attempt to cut off the mosque’s electricity, gas, phone, website, or illegal FM station. The chief negotiator appointed by Musharraf, Chaudhry Shujaat Husain, called the veiled kidnappers “our daughters,” with whom negotiations would continue and against whom “no operation could be contemplated.”

The clerics’ initial demand—the rebuilding of eight illegally constructed mosques that had been knocked down by Islamabad’s civic administration—became a call for the enforcement of Sharia law across Pakistan. In a radio broadcast on 12 April, the clerics threatened: “There will be suicide blasts around the country. We have weapons, grenades, we are experts in manufacturing bombs. We are not afraid of death.”

The Lal Masjid head cleric, a former student of my university in Islamabad, had the following chilling message for our women students: “The government should abolish coeducation. Quaid-e-Azam University has become a brothel. Its immoral female professors and students roam in objectionable dresses. They have to hide themselves in hijab... My daughters of Jamia Hafsa] have not threatened to throw acid on their uncovered faces. But that could be used to create the fear of Islam among sinful women. There is no harm... There are far more horrible punishments in the hereafter for such women.”

On 7 May, a female teacher in the QAU history department was assaulted in her office by a bearded, Taliban-looking man who screamed that he had instructions from Allah.

As Islamabad follows Pakistan’s tribal towns, the next targets will be girls’ schools, internet cafés, bookshops, and stores selling western clothing, followed by purveyors of toilet paper, tampons, underwear, mannequins, and other un-Islamic goods.

Until a few years ago, Islamabad was a quiet, orderly, modern city. Still earlier, it was the abode of Pakistan’s hyper-elite and foreign diplomats. But its demography rapidly changed, bringing with it hundreds of mosques with audio cannons mounted on minarets and scores of madrasas illegally constructed in public parks and green areas. Now, tens of thousands of their students dutifully chant the Koran all day and in the evenings roam the city, gaping at store windows and lustfully ogling bare-faced women.

The stage is being set for transforming Islamabad into a Taliban stronghold. When Musharraf exits he will leave a bitter legacy that will last for generations, all for a little more power. • (Project Syndicate)

Pervez Hoodbhoy is professor of physics at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, Pakistan.
Running riot in Christiania

Something is still rotten in the state of Denmark

Coming out of a café one evening while talking with friends about the uncertainties of Nepali politics, we immediately noticed the familiar and unmistakable smell of burning tyres in the air. We followed the fire trucks as they ran red lights at intersections, their sirens screaming. Crossing a bridge to the southern fringes of the city, we saw traffic being diverted because a riot was in progress. Police vans with blue lights flashing were tearing out of the side streets.

But there it was the next morning in the Christiania section of Copenhagen: barricades still smouldering, burnt out skeletons of bikes, broken glass everywhere and the familiar circular stains where the asphalt had melted. All this was just a short walk from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and 200m from parliament.

A Danish friend who lived through the Kathmandu Spring of April 2006 couldn’t help making comparisons. “A bit like Kalanki,” he said. Indeed, for a visiting Nepali there was an odd sense of satisfaction that it’s not just us who have the world monopoly on incinerating tyres and bikes on the streets.

In Kathmandu the uprising was fuelled by a desire for democracy and perhaps a sense of hopelessness on the streets stemming from social inequities and joblessness. Here in Copenhagen it seemed to be young people bored with affluence and a welfare state that leaves nothing to chance.

The ‘Free City’ of Christiania was established by a group of hippies in 1971 who had just returned overland from Kathmandu and Afghanistan. They ‘liberated’ a military base to set up a commune and declared independence from the rest of Denmark. They made their own rules, tried to be self-sufficient, and lived close to the wild earth. A liberal state allowed the experiment to flourish even though its laws did not apply in this flower power enclave. Indeed, over the years Christiania became a symbol of Danish tolerance and the second biggest tourist draw in Copenhagen after the mermaid.

Around the corner from a street littered with debris from last night’s battles, the Nepali got another jolt: there was a replica of the Boudhanath stupa on a street corner (see pic) and Buddhist prayer flags fluttering above the sidewalk. Christiana is like walking into a space-time machine. The bars are inhabited by ageing hippies with white beards smoking hash. In Kathmandu they used to be on Freak Street, here they are on Pusher Street. Houses are painted with 70s style psychedelic art with peace signs, an elderly woman transports firewood by rickshaw.

The ageing demographics of Christiania are probably one reason for the tension. The original inhabitants of the collective are in their 60s. Many have grown comfortable in their surroundings and now want ownership of property in this prime real estate area that only the state can give. But there is pressure from youth groups from across town who represent the entire spectrum of rebels ranging from anti-globalisation activists to anarchists and Hells’ Angels motorcycle gangs attracted by Christiania’s outlaw character.

Trouble had been brewing ever since youth groups were evicted from an abandoned building they had occupied last December, and what better way to draw attention to their anger than to stage a riot in Christiania. Most ex-peaceniks here took a dim view of the youngsters, and for the young anarchists the bearded ones had gone soft and lost the fire in their bellies.

As a Nepali, I could only extend an invitation to the hippies to return to Jochhe and re-establish their Free City in Kathmandu. And perhaps leave the groovy experiment called Christiania to be chewed up by Copenhagen’s refined and relentless gentrification.
E X H I B I T I O N S

- Sacred realms mixed media works by Seema Sharma Shah at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babai Mahal. Revisited, until 26 May, 11AM-6PM daily. 4218048
- My World, My View photographs by the girls of SOS Bahini, Pokhara, until 30 May, 9 AM-5.30PM at the British Council. 4419786
- Colors of the sepals and petals an exhibition of paintings by Neera Joshi Pradan, 25 May mid-June, at Park Gallery, Lajimpal. 4419333

E V E N T S

- CSON monthly lecture ‘A People War’ - Photo Tour of Nepal by Kunda Dixit, 9.30AM, 25 May at the Shanker Hotel.
- Earth a film by Deepa Mehta, at the Lajimpal Gallery Cafe, 6.45 PM on 25 May. 4416142
- Cine-diner showing of Monsieur Batignole followed by dinner, 25 May, 7PM at Alliance Française, Rs 300. 4241163
- Yuva Chefill Shinkhala on water management in the context of Melamchhi. 25 May, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107599
- Shastraartha on ‘consumer rights – its Nepali avatar’. 28 May, 4-6PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- Riding solo to the top of the world a film by Gaurav Jani, presented by the FSA Film Club and WAV magazine, May 27, 5.30 PM at Yala Maya Kendra, Rs 50.
- Pottery course by Santosh Kumar from the Delhi Blue Pottery Trust, at Nepal Art Ceramics in Mdyapur, Thimi, 25 May-24 June. 9841257968
- Core Empowerment Training by writer Paula Laxmi Horan, five day intensive retreat at the Farm House, Nagarkot, 13-17 June. 9803569700

M U S I C

- Paleti mini-concert with Gayak Phatteman, 25 May, 5.45 PM at nepalaya’s r’sala, Kalkiasthan, Rs 50 plus taxes. 4437893
- Soul of Raga live classical and fusion music, every Friday night at Nibuchha’s Kitchen, The Organic Bistro. 4429093
- Open mic night at Via Via Café, every Friday, 8PM onwards.
- Live music at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 8PM with Yanki and Zigme Lepcha. 4416071
- DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers live at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234

D I N I N G

- Friday evening BBQ with live music, at the Hotel Himalaya, 7PM. Rs 499 net. 5523900
- Walk and lunch every Saturday at the Shivaipati Heights Cottage. 9841271927
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841230619
- Krishnarpan Nepali specially restaurant at Dwarka’s Hotel, six to twenty course ceremonial lunch and dinner. 4479868
- Weekend special with sekwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lajimpal, 5.30 PM onwards. 4417196
- Mongolian BBQ Wednesdays and Fridays, 6.30 PM on at the Splash Bar and Grill, Radisson Hotel. Rs 1,000 for unlimited barbeque and beer 4.432828
- Flavours of the Middle East every Friday and the taste of Thailand every Wednesday at The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234
- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at LaSoom, Pulchowk, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- Continental cuisine and wine by the fire place at Kilecy’s, Thamel. 4450440
- Smorgasbord lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- Gyakok at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La minimum four diners at Rs 450 per person, two hours’ notice.
- Retro brunch barbecue with Crossfire Band at Le Meridian, Gokarna from 12-4PM, Rs 1,000 including swimming. 4451212
- Calcutta’s rolls, biryani, kebabs Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- Woodfired pizzas at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel 4262768, Bhatbhateni 4428587 and Pulchowk. 5527755
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- Jazzabell café enjoy great food, exotic cocktails and music, Chukupati, Patan. 2114075

G E T W A Y S

- Weekend package at Le Meridian Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4451212
- Wet and wild package at Godawari Village Resort, every Saturday and Sunday, unlimited swimming, buffet lunch with a bottle of beer or a softdrink, Rs 690 net. 5560675

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepaltimes.com

Metro is a story of intertwined lives and last times. Shikha (Shilpa Shetty), and Ranjeet’s (Kay Kay Menon) marriage has turned boring and Ranjeet has found a new love in Neha. Driven by a desire to save their various lives, she falls for this new man and her fidelity wavers towards Ranjeet. With a host of other characters, the film takes off with an intertwining of their various lives.

Call 4442225 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com

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HAPPENINGS

FACT-FINDING MISSION: Visiting UNHCR chief and former Portuguese prime minister, Antonio Guterres, (middle) with Nepal representative Abraham Abraham briefing the press Wednesday after touring Bhutanese refugee camps. Guterres left for Bhutan on Thursday. Tension is rising in the camps between those in support of third country resettlement and those opposed.

... AND DOUBLETHINK IS DOUBLE POWER: Mahendra Adarsha Bidashram at Sat Dobato wears a deserted look on Wednesday on the sixth day of the closure of schools nationwide. Nearly eight million children nationwide have been forced to stay home as talks between teachers’ groups and the Education Ministry are deadlocked.

BURNING BRIGHT: A child’s curiosity overcomes his fear at the Jawalakhel Zoo as he tries to touch tiger skins and a rhino skull that were taken out of the store-room to dry in the sun.

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Democratic ass-ent of Everest

Your humble Ass has never quite understood what drives mountaineers to risk life and limb, since the only ascent this donkey has ever indulged in is social climbing.

I know, I know, they climb them because they’re there. But what could be more absurd than nearly getting yourself killed just for scenery you could easily see from the window of the Lhasa flight.

So, it must be for the pomp and adulation one gets after a record-breaking climb. Like Apa Sherpa’s jubilant homecoming on Wednesday as he was taken into town from the airport sitting on a sofa balanced precariously on the back of a pickup. As it turned out, Apa and the Ass were both stuck in a monstrous traffic jam in front of the Supreme Court.

There was heavily-garlanded Apa sitting at the back of a stationary truck under the blazing sun waving at bored passengers in surrounding buses and cars who all waved back because they thought he was tele-evangelist Shri Shri Ravishankar. Apa has just set foot on the world’s highest mountain for the 17th time or so, and such spontaneous appreciation by fellow-Nepalis must make it worth all the trouble.

The YCL’s nation-building spree continues apace with the destruction this week of all veggie and fruit stalls along the Ring Road so the Green Belt can be turned into a Red Belt. A-ha, this is what they meant by “climb on the shoulder and hit the head”. When the shopkeepers dared to burn a couple of tyres at Koteswor in protest, the young communists gifted them a plot of land next to Gonga Bu Bus Park and promptly sank themselves into a legal quagmire because a local businessman has a 50-year lease on that property.

History is repeating itself in Nepal, and every passing day the Ass is reminded of Animal Farm, the book in which some Comrade Donkeys attained martyrdom. It’s getting more and more difficult to tell the present bunch of loktantrik clowns from the previous bunch of royal clowns. Comrade Yummy has removed pictures of the ex-king and ex-queen and replaced them with portraits of Comrade Awesome and Comrade Pushpalal in her corridor of power. NTV has been instructed to begin work on a documentary profile of His Awesomeness called: “Prachanda, The Man”. And a cotton swab used to wipe the sweat off the Dolakha Mahadeb has been re-routed to Baluwatar instead of Narayanhiti.

Breaking News: Democratic Everest abandoned its only female climber who was lagging behind during the summit putsch and she had to be rescued by bidesi mountaineers. If this is what happens on a democratic expedition, the Ass can’t wait for a republican expedition. Another Breaking News: The man who wanted to be the first to climb Everest in shorts didn’t make it.

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