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Q. Whom would you trust the most as the next prime minister?



King's Nominee 21.2%

Nepali Congress 38.8%

Sher Bahadur Deuba 12.2%

None of the above 23.4%

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Total votes:2,318

Weekly Internet Poll # 139. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. What role should King Gyanendra play?



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MIN BAJRACHARYA

ALMS RACE

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The army's troop strength has nearly doubled in three years. Can we afford such breakneck expansion?

Ever since it got dragged into the war two-and-half years ago, the Royal Nepali Army has said it needs more soldiers and equipment to fight the Maoists. Today, the army is engaged in the biggest-ever expansion in its history. The country's military spending has shot up to 12 percent of the total budget from 7.3 percent three years

ago, according to official figures.

The Royal Nepali Army has nearly doubled its troop strength in the past three years, growing from about 45,000 to 75,000. Under current scenarios, it is expected to reach 150,000 in the next five years. This doesn't include the 20,000 paramilitary Armed Police Force.

Senior army officers defend the

expansion, arguing that the forces can't fight a full-scale insurgency on such difficult terrain, guard infrastructure and defend highways with its current strength. "In any classic guerrilla war you need a 10:1 numerical superiority to be able to make an impact," says one senior officer.

However, retired army officers

say that given the topography and hit-and-run tactics of the Maoists, no force will be strong enough to win the war. "To believe in a military victory is to live in a dreamland," says one ex-military man. "However large your force, you will still be too thin on the ground."

continued p6



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Battle royal

The Maoists move into their 'Strategic Offensive' phase

JUNE FIRST

It is not one of those anniversaries that a country looks forward to. Next week, it will be three years since the massacre of almost the entire Nepali royal family on the night of 1 June 2001. Slaughter of a ruling clan on that scale was unprecedented in world history. Even by the standards of gory palace purges in our own past, this was such unimaginable carnage that there was no precedence in the rules of royal succession.

Yet, initially the country seemed to recover from the nightmare surprisingly unscathed. There was an orderly (given the circumstances) transition to a new king, the institutions of democracy tottered, but stayed intact. The Nepali people, used to suffering misery and shock, moved on. They blamed it all on a bad national karma and tried to put the past behind them while struggling with day-to-day survival. Making a distinction between a king and the continuity of the institution of monarchy, we looked to the future and hoped for the best.

Three years later, it is clear the Nepali people never really came to terms with that tragedy. By trying to forget it, many of our questions remained unanswered and the royal family remained reclusive and secretive. It was an opportunity to make a clean break with the past, adopt a new transparent royalty, reinvent a modern monarchy perhaps with a new mission for national well-being funded by a trust in the name of late King Birendra. It was a chance to project a kingship that finally took off its dark shades and made eye-contact with the Nepali people, providing benign guidance and being a unifying force.

This was necessary not just so the monarchy could regain its influence and respect, but also for the longterm survival of the institution. But there was little effort at damage control. The increasingly shrill republican slogans in the jungles, and lately on the streets, are a delayed reaction to June First. As the country descends into instability and violence, the people want a monarchy that stays above the fray as a respected symbol of unity and neutrality, not as another political power-player.

Today, even those who were earlier willing to give the new king a chance have been disappointed by what they see as his incrementally tighter squeeze on the democratic process. Even those who had no love lost for the corrupt and dysfunctional political leadership that squandered democracy are impatient with this unnecessary wait. Three weeks have passed without a government, the Maoists are massing for another blow, blockades have brought the country to its knees, the entire education system is on the verge of collapse.

However, there are indications King Gyanendra senses the national mood. Back channels are active, and there is talk of a deal with the Maoists to be announced simultaneously with the formation of a new government to hold elections within a year. If that is true, this delay in setting up a new government will be understandable.

The ghosts of the ten royals who perished on 1 June 2001 at Narayanhi will not rest in peace until the kingdom itself is at peace again.

Except for the capital Valley, the Maoists hold sway directly and indirectly over much of the country. Army officers regularly receive phone threats and move around in civvies when they venture out of the barracks. Government vehicles all have private red plates. Public buses run only if the Maoists allow

GUEST COLUMN
Puskar Gautam



them to, and the main highways can be cut off at any time.

The army launched a major operation in the Maoist heartland of Rukum, but the Maoists refused to be dragged into a frontal battle. In fact, they have left the midwest and fortified the east and the tarai where they were traditionally weak. They are now numerically capable of capturing and holding a tarai town. Geographically, the Maoists have

moved to what they call the 'Strategic Offensive' phase.

Prachanda's repeated calls for UN mediation is part of a strategy to neutralise any future move by international powers to be directly involved in supporting the Nepali state in a future guerrilla blitzkrieg. Another political weapon is the demand for a constituent assembly, which allows the Maoists to wrap themselves in a democratic cloak. The rebel strategy is to make these two demands vociferously while they take forward their military plans and use the palace-party polarisation to their advantage.

The Maoists are hoping to jump directly from rural guerrilla war to an urban uprising by skipping the conventional war part, and replacing it with their campaign of blockades to strangle the state. With their carefully calibrated blockades, they are

testing the waters to see if public frustration and anger can be turned against the state. If it works, they may launch a series of major offensives and hope that the people will join in a mass uprising. So far it looks like the blockades spread misery and inconvenienced a lot of people, nothing more.

Even so, the fact that the state military machine has been unable to thwart the Maoist advance can be seen as proof that the Royal Nepali Army is still in defensive mode. Prachanda's statement last week analyses the army's strategy to "weaken us and force us to negotiate". This statement is uncannily similar to what the head of the Western Division, Gen Rukmangat Katuwal said recently: "Our aim is to disarm the Maoists and bring them back to the mainstream."

But remaining defensive after two-and-half years can be interpreted as a kind of defeat for the army. It follows from this that the king is also on the political defensive. Squeezed militarily by the Maoists and politically by the parties, the king is trying to consolidate his power by picking off the parties and the Maoists one by one. After all, his longterm threat is from the Maoist revolution, and the students' anti-monarchy slogans on the streets are built on the republican seeds planted by the Maoist 'people's war'.

If the Maoist 'Strategic Offensive' is on a militarily decisive phase, their next attacks can be expected to be daring and dramatic. ●

Translated from the Nepali original in *Himal Khabarpatrika*.



SUBHAS RAI

LETTERS

FEDERAL

I must congratulate you for finally mentioning the big 'f' word, federal, in your editorial. ('Emergency surgery', #197). But what does this word mean in the Nepali context? Words have a habit of meaning different things to different people, more so with a word like 'federation'. I grew up in a democracy, the Panchayat democracy, single party democracy as it was called, where all Nepalis were said to be Panchas and all Panchas Nepalis. It was democracy of the Panchas, for the Panchas and called a democracy by the Panchas. The country has just been through another democracy, a multiparty democracy. A democracy of the parties, by the parties and unfortunately only for the parties. I witnessed a rally of a 'mainstream' political party that took place in Butwal last month. The crowd was pathetically

small, even a snake charmer could amass more people. It seems most party leaders were ordered to attend other 'mass rallies' in Kathmandu, and the local population in Butwal, as in the capital Kathmandu, were just too far from this new fangled multiparty democracy to really participate. So what does this 'federal Nepal' mean? Instead of one distant ruler in Kathmandu, do we get a dozen distant rulers in the hitherlands? Could perhaps the political pundits (and you) explain the structure of this federal Nepal in more detail? I, for one, am not ready to buy a pig in a poke.

Kabindra Pradhan,
Butwal

LIFE AND DEATH

After reading the letters by Debra Stoner and Stephen Bezručka (#197, 196) critical of Sraddha Basnyat's report 'Trekking bring medical care to the Annapurnas' (#193) I would

like to tell the learned doctors that their esoteric arguments on medical ethics may be a fine subject to debate in the public health doctoral programs in their respective institutions, but it is of little comfort to a child dying in Beni because of dehydration or a mother suffering from birth complications in Rasuwa. As a volunteer in rural Nepal for the past few years, I have seen enough suffering and unnecessary death due to lack of facilities and medicines to say with confidence that any help to augment the equipment or drugs in health posts and hospitals can



spell the difference between life and death. Bezručka's argument that America is a nation with poor health care and therefore it has no right to preach to others is specious. First of all, the good samaritans featured in the article just happen to be Americans. They could be any other nationality. Secondly, who cares about America's health programs? What is important is how much difference even simple things like a dental floss demonstration or the training value of a resuscitation baby makes here. Your article summed it up rather well: 'Medicines for Nepal at least provides medicines where there aren't any and has a regular channel to keep the supplies going to remote health posts.' And what a great way to make trekking so directly beneficial to the people!

Judi Goldener, Pokhara

BANDA AID

This is in response to Ashutosh Tiwari's 'Banda Aid' (Strictly

Business, #196). He mentions five days of strike in two weeks, but forgot the blockades and strikes in other parts of Nepal. This week saw a 12-day strike in the eastern districts, I don't think any media even carried this news. But I agree with Tiwari that there are ways to end bandas. The government can pass laws, but will the bunch of leaders that we have elected follow that law? They have never cared about anything other than their self-interest. Be it Maoists or the five party alliance, if they even cared for the nation, they would not call frequent bandas. A terrorist is defined as a person who engages oneself with public destruction. In that sense, our political leaders are no different than terrorists: they destroy national property, economic development, endanger national security and have plunged us back into the dark ages. If any one of the Maoists leaders or five party leaders have some common sense, they would work towards



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Back to the future?

Restoring parliament may have become a moral necessity

Recently, a Nepali student in New Delhi sent an email emblematic of the SMS generation: 'as i walk down the road of jnu...watching bougainvillea blooming everywhere...i can't help but

STATE OF THE STATE CK Lal



silently envy the spring that this country has sustained...unlike the cold winters preserved in my country..."

With that lower-case message, the student expressed the anguish of a lost generation of 20-something Nepalis. What have we done to make our youth so disconsolate? Some are shouting slogans on the streets, others have gone into the jungle with guns. Woe betide a society that ignores the yearnings of its youth.

The collective frustration of Nepali students abroad and the

cry of their compatriots back home have a common feature: they are not comfortable with the institution of monarchy anymore. People of our generation may find it a little difficult to accept a Nepal that is not a kingdom, but there is a growing segment of the Nepali population that sees the monarchy as the root of all ills. Unless the grievances of this generation are addressed, their republican slogans will be self-fulfilling.

Nobody knows who or what prompted Sher Bahadur Deuba to exercise his doomsday authority two years ago to dissolve parliament and call for elections. But it has been downhill ever since that fateful decision on 22 May 2002. The country continues to wallow deeper in a cesspool of violent insurgency, street protests, ineffective governance and a creeping anarchy.

The king has been hiring and firing premiers at will, but to no avail. Governance remains stuck in

a Panchayat-type rut. Even under despotic regimes there is a token legislative body to which the executive is at least nominally accountable. But not in our quasi-democracy.

Unless that fundamental condition of constitutionalism is met, it is difficult to see how King Gyanendra can run a civilian government with another set of handpicked flunkies in Singha Darbar. It is symptomatic of a deeply-flawed polity that this country continues to stumble along without a prime minister for three weeks.

In the absence of parliament, there is no forum to debate the conduct of constitutional bodies, the report of the auditor general is in cold storage, recommendations of different commissions gather

dust—all because there is no mechanism to legislate necessary laws. By reenacting the same or similar ordinances every six months, and that too upon the recommendations of his own nominees, the king is not just undermining democracy but also chipping away at the credibility of the institution of monarchy itself.

Depoliticisation leads to bureaucratisation, and as philosopher Hannah Arendt puts it, "the greater the bureaucratisation of public life, the greater the attraction of violence". Restoration of parliament may not resolve the insurgency, or even bring back political stability right away, but it will at least dissuade a lot of other people from losing faith in

peaceful politics.

The king talks about elections in a tone that defies the panic-stricken ground reality in the country. When soldiers shoot at police in broad daylight at the international airport, who will guard the guardians in the countryside? Before the political plantations of the season can begin, it is first necessary for the king to set the constitutional house in order. It is a moral necessity to restore the House of Representatives by a royal decree. This may not be constitutional by definition, but shock therapy to kick-start a comatose polity is neither illegal nor immoral. All it needs is sagacity and courage so that the young student in Delhi will one day witness a revival of democracy in his own motherland. ●

reforming the nation through their ideologies of development rather than destruction.

Pravesh Saria, email

SOLDIER POET

Re: 'Soldier poet' (Nepali Society, # 197). There are other things that a soldier and poet have in common besides 'strong sensitivities'. Each also has a pair of eyes, two ears, a nose, a mouth and let's see what else...oh, yes, two hands and two legs. But that's where the similarities end. The uncommon aspects between the two are:

One wields a gun, the other a pen/ Soldier is a doer, poet a thinker/ One is bound by rules and regulation/ in that type of environment the other would not be able to function/ Soldier lives and works in a group/ poet is basically a loner/ For one it is drill and timing, for the other it is the thrill of rhyming/ Soldier has a crew cut, poet looks like a hippie/ The differences are so many that the two would never become chummy!

'Sagar', Kathmandu

Navin Singh Khadka's profile of the army's new spokesperson Rajendra Thapa may have been great journalism for those who do not know him personally but for a retired army officer like me, it was hilarious. Thapa's claim that he is a strong soldier who climbed up the hierarchy with hard work is correct—he spent a tremendous amount of time and effort as a ghost writer and gardening consultant for his superiors.

Name withheld, email

NOTICE

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Nepal thrives as regional drug hub



MIN BAJRACHARYA

NARESH NEWAR

Gordon William Robinson should not be a free man. Two years ago, he was caught red-handed at Kathmandu airport with 2.3kg of heroin hidden in his shoe and luggage. A special court fined the notorious British drug trafficker Rs 1.7 million and sentenced him to 17 years in prison after he confessed to smuggling the drug from Mumbai to Nepal through the Sunauli border.

But on 23 April 2003, the Supreme Court acquitted Robinson on grounds of insufficient evidence. Robinson left Nepal immediately thereafter.

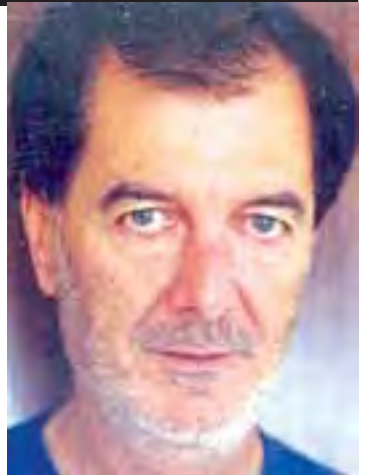
This controversial release of a known narco-trafficker has once again put Nepal under close scrutiny of international drug enforcement agencies. In the months since Robinson was released, there have been many enquires from

Interpol and other agencies at the Narcotic Drug Control Law Enforcement Unit in Baneswor. They all want to know why Robinson was released and how he was allowed to slip out of the country. Interpol was convinced the evidence was irrefutable and sufficient.

Robinson was acquitted by Supreme Court justices Krishna Kumar Barma and Baliram Kumar

The Robinson case may show why Nepal is still a major transshipment point for international drug trafficking

I-r: sniffer dogs at the Tribhuvan International Airport checking luggage, trafficking convict Gordon William Robinson got off scot free, Supreme Court Justices Baliram Kumar(left) and Krishna Kumar Barma



after an appeal was filed. The Nepal Bar Association and several prominent lawyers have protested the verdict and have filed for a retrial at the Supreme Court. Attorney General Sushil Pant Thursday filed an application at the Supreme Court for a review of the case. It is now up to the Supreme Court to decide whether such a review is necessary.

Supreme Court spokesperson Ram Krishna Timilsina told us it should be kept out of the matter. "We should look for alternatives like the jurisdiction of the Chief Justice or the Judicial Council," he says. Even the royal palace has taken the unusual step of asking the Supreme Court for details of the verdict.

Justices Barma and Kumar are both on leave and not available for comment. When Robinson was acquitted, the justices said that

investigators had not followed procedures properly.

At the drug control unit, Senior Superintendent of Police Hemant Malla, admits that at times there are procedural errors in such cases. "But that does not mean the criminals should be set free," says Malla, an expert on narcotic crimes.

Other sources who declined to be named say the Robinson acquittal has all the hallmarks of corruption and an active drug mafia. Even if Robinson is caught again, it is unlikely that he will be returned to Nepal to stand trial because of the lack of extradition laws. As for now, the police authorities would be happy if there is just a clear verdict that he is guilty. Robinson's release not only humiliated the police authorities and the Home Ministry in front of Interpol, but also demoralised the investigative anti-narcotic personnel.

Saddamised

Those who thought getting rid of Saddam was a good thing are now changing their minds

It must be plain by now that the invasion of Iraq by the United States, Britain, Australia and a few other countries was a huge mistake. Hardly a day goes by without evidence of that.

President Bush and Prime Minister Blair have earned themselves a place in history as either great dupes or liars of gargantuan proportions. As I sit here in

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak



London, awaiting a flight to

another continent, I read the latest revelations. Iran, it seems, fed false intelligence about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to a prominent Iraqi exile leader, who in turn conveyed the information to a Washington cabal hungry for reasons to topple Saddam Hussein.

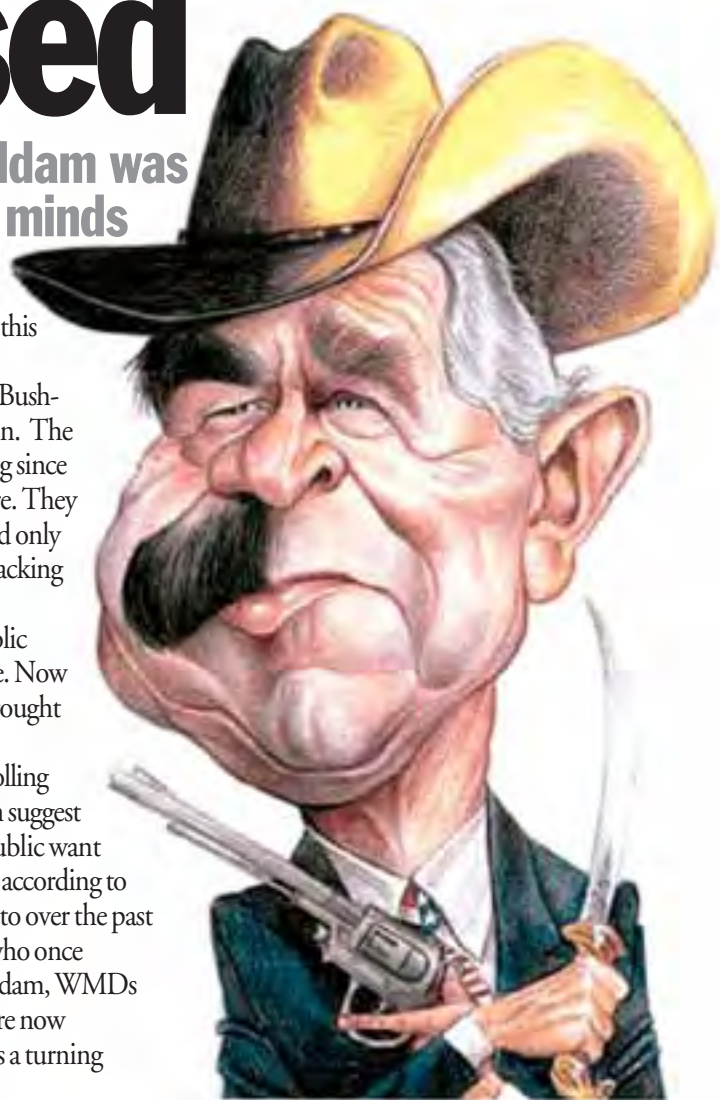
The Iranian mullahs are giggling through their beards. At a stroke, they helped humiliate the Great Satan, America, and its junior partner Britain, while at the same time ridding their neighbourhood of an evil tyrant. Don't forget that Saddam actually used his

chemical weapons against the Iranians in the horrific 80s war between the two countries. Nor should anyone forget that the United States encouraged the Butcher of Baghdad to launch that war against the Ayatollahs because Washington's Axis of Evil didn't include Iraq at that point, just Iran. So intense was the dislike of the Iranian theocracy at the time that American leaders and diplomats turned a blind eye to the use of chemical weapons against Iranian soldiers.

There's a horrible irony to all of this, if only anyone in Washington could perceive it. Worst of all, from America's point of view, there's not really much that can be done about Iran's perfidy. False intelligence fed to a hostile state falls under the category of what's fair in war, so far as I can tell. Not that the US won't be aggrieved and vengeful against Iran, but the fact is that the ayatollahs and the Wolfowitz-Bush-Rumsfeld faction had a lot in common in their hatred of Saddam. So the words 'just' and 'desserts' spring rather quickly to mind.

Coming on top of the prison torture revelations, this information should help comprehensively sink the Bush-Blair war in public opinion. The people of Britain have long since given up on this adventure. They opposed it beforehand and only gave it their conditional backing when British troops were deployed and needed public support to keep up morale. Now they want their soldiers brought home.

In America, skewed polling samples and data selection suggest that just under half the public want more war. That's not true according to all the people I've spoken to over the past few months. And those who once thought getting rid of Saddam, WMDs or no, was a good thing, are now changing their minds. It's a turning point. ●





This is a psychological blow to Nepal's narco cops who are battling the insidious presence of international drug syndicates that use Nepal as a transshipment point because of its lax security, open border with India and corrupt officialdom.

Robinson was not the first international drug trafficker to squirm his way out of jail here. In 1998, Dutchman Phillippus Geesken Eef was arrested with more than 200kg of heroin, but his sentence was reduced to two years. According to court documents, Eef's associates in Nepal were his Nepali wife and 10 other Nepalis, including airline ground staff and hotel personnel. Local contacts helped him store the drugs in safehouses and a carpet factory in the Valley, and the airport and hotel staff helped in packing and facilitating air cargo shipment of drugs.

According to Nepal law, the penalty for those caught with over 100g of heroin is 15-20 years of imprisonment including a fine of up to Rs 2.5 million. Those with over 10kg of hashish face a maximum of 10 years in prison with a Rs 100,000 fine. "Most of the time, smugglers with powerful connections and money are in prison for shorter periods, if at all," a police officer told us.

The only foreigners serving longterm sentences in Nepal's Central Jail are those without international drug syndicate connections. In the last 12 years, about 105 foreign nationals from Romania, France, Germany, Russia, Israel, Poland, Burma, Nigeria, Austria, China, India, Japan, Turkey, Afghanistan, Sweden, the Czech Republic, the UK, Malawi and Canada were arrested. The most notorious



among them are already free or serving light sentences. As of now, only 58 are languishing at different jails in the Valley.

Nepal may not be as important a hub for drug traffickers as Indonesia, Thailand, India, Pakistan or Burma, but it is an up-and-coming conduit. Anti-narcotics agents say Nepal is still primarily a channel for drug flow out of India, Pakistan and Burma to Southeast Asia.

But Nepal is also the source for high grade Nepali hashish which is reportedly in great demand in Europe. Hashish was legal here until the Nepal government was forced by the United States to pass the Narcotic Drugs (Control) Act of 1976. The law just deprived poor farmers of a cash crop, and drove the trade into the hands of the drug mafia.

Most foreigners caught at Kathmandu airport carry only hashish, and not hard drugs. Last year, 54kg of hashish was seized at Kathmandu airport alone. So far this year, more than 51kg has already been caught. The amount and frequency of seizures has risen every year, but experts say this does not necessarily mean smuggling is on the rise. They say it could just mean that police are getting better at their job.

Established in 1992, the Narcotic Drug Control Law Enforcement Unit has a force of 75 agents working in major cities. Although it has a good intelligence team, the unit is handicapped by a lack of communications and surveillance equipment. There is also a need for more training in investigative and surveillance techniques. Another problem is that experienced agents are often transferred from the unit to other departments where their skills are of no use. ●

DOMESTIC BRIEFS

Targeting media

Maoists ambushed a *Himalayan Times* van delivering newspapers from Kathmandu to Pokhara near Damauli on Thursday morning, killing the driver and leaving another staff member seriously injured. The explosion completely destroyed the car. Sources say the Maoists couldn't have been unaware that the vehicle belonged to media and the bombing was a direct attack on the press. The injured staffer was flown to Kathmandu for treatment.

WHO helps?

"You talk, we die," chanted a group of HIV-infected people in front of the United Nations (UN) complex on Thursday. Braving rain, they prevented UN vehicles from entering the building for an hour.

Nava Kiran, the organisation providing treatment to Nepali AIDS patients, planned the protest to highlight what it said was the lack of concern displayed by World Health Organisation (WHO). The group says that despite a Global Fund (GF) to treat 3 million HIV positive people around the world by 2005, Nepali patients have not benefited. "Most of the funds are spent on training, awareness, seminars and printing brochures and posters," says Nava Kiran's Parbat Rana. Only 3.3 percent of the money in the GF is spent on antiretroviral (ARV) and other drugs, that help slow down HIV development to full-blown AIDS.

"If these drugs are supplied and at least one hospice built, it will help a lot of HIV patients live a



MIN BAJRACHARYA

little longer," adds Rana. But the WHO and the government don't seem to consider it a priority. "How can we solve anything? It is up to the politicians," Klaus Wagner (pictured, far right) from WHO explained to Rajiv Kafle, an AIDS activist outside the

UN gates.

Six months ago, the group organised a similar protest that resulted in assurances from the UN that it would act soon to scale up treatment. "They have done absolutely nothing and our friends are desperate," says Rana. Nava Kiran is making its own efforts to provide ARV drugs and treatment services to the HIV/AIDS patients.

Records tumble on Everest

It was a lucky season for most Sagarmatha expeditioners. By presstime Thursday, 161 climbers from 13 different teams had made it to the top of the world and one person even flew over the top in an ultralight (see p16).

Records tumbled: on 21 May, Pemba Dorje Sherpa made the fastest-ever ascent of Sagarmatha from Base Camp in eight hours and 10 minutes. During the Everest's Golden Jubilee last year, Pemba took 12 hours 45 minutes, a record that stood for only three days till Lakpa Gelu Sherpa reached the top in 10 hours and 56 minutes.

Appa Sherpa came out of retirement to break his own record by getting to the top for an astounding 14th time on 17 May. A day earlier, Nawang Sherpa became the first differently-abled Nepali (he has an artificial leg) to reach the top. Then Lakpa Sherpa became the first Nepali woman to climb Sagarmatha for the fourth time.



More than 1,300 people have climbed Sagarmatha since Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary got to the top 50 years ago. Nearly 200 have died on the slopes, most of them on their way down. As the official spring season comes to a close on 31 May, expeditions on other mountains are battling bad weather to reach the summit. There were 55 expeditions in the Nepal Himalaya this year.

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Shopping list



The army's new acquisitions will include (clockwise from above): the Indian Advanced Light Helicopter and Mine-protected vehicle, the British-built surveillance aircraft, the Britten Norman Islander, and the Indian-made INSAS assault rifle.



from p1

Despite reports of chronic friction between the militaries of defence and finance, successive governments have denied that the army is putting pressure on the government for more money. Caretaker Finance Minister Prakash Chandra Lohani told us this week: "We have not spent a single paisa more than stated in the budget for security, the army hasn't made any extra demands."

The army says it ideally needs a 800-strong battalion posted to guard each of the 75 district headquarters, but has to make do with a company of 200 soldiers for each. "Nowhere else in the world are companies exposed like this," says one army officer. The army has tried to augment its strength by setting up a unified command and leaving some of its tasks to the Armed Police Force and regular police. The army brass was never happy about being sidelined from the districts by civilian elected governments post-1990, and reluctantly went along with the decision to train and equip the APF.

For the army itself, there is no shortage of recruits. As the numbers of unemployed youth grows, army recruitment centres were swamped last year by men and women eager to enlist. The army is also looking at the post-conflict scenario when it sees a role for itself in inducting ex-Maoists into the ranks.

But even those who agree that a bigger army is needed for security have misgivings that this may make the military politically ambitious. It would not be new in Nepali history, and there is certainly precedence in

the region. "There should be no compromise in security," says economist Bishwambar Pyakurel. "But money should not be diverted secretly, everything must be transparent."

The government has admitted that it could only spend 30 percent of its largely donor-sourced budget for development in the last fiscal year. Defence Secretary Bishnu Datta Uprety says the military's expansion is going as budgeted, and denies development monies are being rerouted. "We will continue modernising our troops, and ensure they are well-armed and well-trained," he says. However, independent experts doubt that the official military budget alone could have paid for the huge expansion in men and material over the past three years.

Besides increasing troop size, what is costing a lot of money is new equipment, not all of which is coming in as grants. The army is taking delivery of a second Polish Skytruck (\$2.5 million), two Indian Advanced Light Helicopters (\$6 million apiece) and two Pilatus-BN Islanders with short-landing and takeoff capability for surveillance and special operations. Sources said Nepal will only have to pay 30 percent of the cost of the Indian ALHs, and the Islanders are outright grants from Britain.

Given the vulnerability of the forces to Maoist roadside bombs and remote controlled mines, India has already supplied 70 Mine-protected Vehicles (MPVs) to the army and 30 more are expected soon. India is also taking over as the main supplier of standard issue assault rifles and has already handed over 25,000 Indian-made INSAS (Infantry Small Arms System) rifles with 10,000 more in the pipeline. As with the ALHs, Nepal only pays 30 percent of the cost of the rifles.

Meanwhile, there is a puzzling delay in the supply of M-16s, which the Americans had committed two years ago. After replacing 5,000 of

its ageing SLRs with M-16s, the guns suddenly stopped coming. Senior military officers admit privately that they are getting impatient with US dilly-dallying and suspect that New Delhi may have pressured Washington not to go ahead with the deal. The expedited supply of INSAS rifles is seen as confirmation of this.



Army sources we spoke to said the M-16s are much better rifles and its ammunition is more readily available. "The ammunition for INSAS has been a problem," he said.

The Americans get most of the criticism for militarising Nepal, but only a part of the \$12 million for rifles, night vision equipment, body armour and military training that the US Senate approved has materialised.

The army has also expanded its ammunition facility in Makwanpur with another plastic explosives manufacturing unit, and senior sources told us some of it is even being exported. ●



None of the above Nepalis must demand a resolution

From halfway across the world, Nepal's situation looks grim— whoever becomes the next prime minister. The intentions of all the three key political players, the opposition politicians, the Maoists and the king, are driven by power. None of them seems to be bothered that the state is crumbling before their eyes.

If the leaders of the five agitating parties cannot have a united voice even during such trying times, what can we expect from them in future? It is unlikely that they will rule in harmony even if one of them

LONDON EYE
Robin Raj



were to become the prime minister. Handing them power will just intensify their squabbling. Their working unity, even when needed the most, has already

turned out to be a farce. If they can't agree to choose a consensus candidate for prime ministership, can they work effectively in an all-party government and bring the Maoists back to the negotiating table?

From the Maoists' perspective, there is no reason to engage in anything that will help the current regime since what they want is its collapse. They can just sit back and watch it self-destruct.

They exercise authority over the countryside, and what they want now is to paralyse the government machinery in the district headquarters and Kathmandu Valley. They are achieving this not through rational power and persuasion, but through brutal coercion. If a mayor like Keshab Sthapit, known for his bravado, has to resign because of Maoist threats, it is unlikely anyone else can resist them.

The king's haughtiness, on the other hand, has added fuel to the fire. He wants things under his control, but may be losing his grip. Whatever will be his future course of action, he must have realised by now that Nepal cannot be ruled by authoritarian means. The leaders have compelled him to give a collective audience, the youth on the streets are chanting ever more virulent republican slogans, the referendum in colleges are overwhelmingly for ending the monarchy— these are writings on the wall. The only question is, will King Gyanendra now acknowledge that his way is not working and restore power to people's representatives, or will he go down fighting?

Political activists on the streets and a small number of civil society members have played a vital role in stopping Nepal from sliding back into authoritarianism. Had they not consistently struggled for democracy on the streets, Nepal would have probably been under a totalitarian yoke of the left or right by now. But how long can the activists keep up the struggle?

Every conscious Nepali must now exert pressure on the political forces that are struggling in their name to compel them to find a resolution, or else our woes will multiply. People's power is the greatest power. But, sadly, Nepal's silent masses are not speaking up when they need to be heard the most. ●



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NIMA SHERPA

PRAGYA SHRESTHA in THAME

Nepali climbers set new records this season on Sagarmatha and other Himalayan peaks. Forty-three of the 75 people who climbed Sagarmatha this year from the Nepal side till presstime Wednesday were Nepalis. An increasing number of Sherpas do not regard climbing as just a job any more, but as an adventure and a challenge.

Although they appear to be genetically able to adapt to high altitude, most Nepali climbers lack technical training. This is also the reason for the casualty rate among high altitude porters who need to learn more about rope and ice techniques and objective dangers.

Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) set up a climbing school in Manang 15 years ago to conduct regular training. A group of veteran Nepali climbers have also formed the Nepal Mountaineering Instructor Association (NMIA) to encourage Nepal's youth to discover the wilderness, learn basic climbing techniques and undergo survival

training.

Austrian group Eco-Himal has been working with both organisations to standardise and institutionalise mountaineering training in Nepal and promote sustainable and viable eco-tourism models. It just completed a one-month training in first aid, rock climbing, ice techniques and mountain rescue in Thame.

"I have been guiding climbing groups, but was self-taught. It is better to be trained," says Krishna Gurung, who took the course last year.

The course in Thame was designed by NMIA along internationally-recognised norms so that Nepal-trained guides and climbers can now join international expeditions as more than just porters. "This training will give our trainees the same grade as the internationally-recognised UIAGM," says NMIA's Nima Sherpa who has been training Nepali climbers in Thame for the past seven years, referring to the Union Internationale des Associations de

Trained to climb

Guides de Montagne.

"UIAGM-recognised training is a great asset for a Nepali climber or guide," says Herbert Mayerhoefer, a mountaineering instructor from Austria. "This can be a big boost to mountaineering tourism and this training must be recognised by the Nepal government as well."

Four slots in the annual training are set aside for women, and every year all are taken. "My husband took the course last year, and since I am also a mountain guide, I am here to prove myself," says Mendo Sherpa. More and more women are joining the industry as trekking and high-altitude guides. Eco-Himal also organises all-women trekking training camps at Annapurna Base Camp. "It is fantastic exposure for our women guides, and they benefit a lot," says Ngimi Sherpa, who coordinates Eco-Himal's female trekking guides training.

True to its name, Eco-Himal also focuses on eco-friendly trekking and mountaineering: there is a lot of training in toilet construction, alternate fuel use and even development aspects like micro-hydro power, village drinking water systems and suspension bridge-building. "The idea is to make people use income from tourism to plan their own development so they don't have to depend on foreign aid," says Max Santner, Eco-Himal's regional director.

NMIA is translating its mountaineering training handbooks into Nepali so that trainees as well as porters who don't know English can learn technical aspects like fixed rope climbing, glacier traversing, search



Practicing on rock near Thame (left), on a crevasse on the Khumbu Icefall (top right) and the graduating class of the 2004 Mountaineering Training School in Thame.

and rescue and altitude sickness guidelines.

Appa Sherpa, who climbed Sagarmatha for a record 14th time this year, never got any formal training but underlines its importance. The trainees ran into

him at base camp as he was preparing for yet another ascent. He told them: "Unlike us, the younger generation of guides are all very well trained in ice and rock climbing and this is a great help up on the mountain." ●

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Send it by train

The new railway agreement will allow Nepali goods to move cheaper and faster through India

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The biggest dilemma for planners in landlocked Nepal has always been dealing with the burden of geography: how to get goods to a sea port cheaply and reliably.

Transit through India in trucks has made trade expensive, and the goods are exposed to pilferage, damage and delays. Hopefully, last week's bilateral railway agreement between Nepal and India will address many of these problems.

The agreement allows an Indian company to operate a railway service between the container port in Birganj and Indian cities. India's public sector Container Corporation of India has already been selected as the operator and it will have 60 percent of the shares, while the rest will be owned by a conglomerate of Nepali companies.

In two months, when trains start shuttling between India and Nepal, our exports will reach ports in Calcutta within 24 hours—a journey that presently takes container trucks up to two weeks. Officials say trains will also bring transport costs down by 40 percent.

"The idea is to save time and money," says Surendra Govinda Joshi, senior transport specialist at the World Bank that financed 80 percent of the \$16 million cost of the Birganj container port. "If all goes well, there will be two trains daily carrying Nepali products to Indian ports."



The Birganj container port, operated by the Indian Concor company, is waiting for the first cargo trains of Indian Railways to start services in mid-July.



Container Corporation of India was the only bidder in a re-tender this year. It was one of two bidders in an earlier tender, but a private Calcutta-based company was disqualified. Officials at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry say that the Birganj dry port will be far more efficient than those in Bhairawa and Biratnagar. "That is because those two ports have road connections while the one in Birganj has railway facility. Naturally trains will reach the cargo for shipment faster," said an official.

The dry ports in Biratnagar and Bhairawa were also supported by the World Bank, and cost Rs 500 million each. Private operators who have leased these two dry ports have been paying the government Rs 10 million annually.

The Nepal-India joint venture operator will pay Rs 95 million per year to the government to lease the Birganj container port, which was completed three years ago but couldn't be commissioned because Nepal and India couldn't reach a railway agreement. Nepal was losing about \$7 million a year while the port remained closed.

While officials are quite positive about the impact the railway service could bring to Nepal's export business, the private sector is keeping its fingers crossed. Businessmen say they will have to wait and see how the Birganj port functions and whether they will have the same trouble they faced in the past with the transit of Nepali goods through India.

"Let's wait and see," says Federation of Nepali Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) first vice president, Chandi Dhakal. "We are eager to see if this facility can overcome the unnecessary delays we have faced while transporting our goods through transit before."

The FNCCI says despite bilateral trade agreements between Kathmandu and New Delhi, different rules in various Indian states add complications. "For instance, the Indians levy luxury tax on goods that should have free transit access," they say. "Whether the same story repeat even after the railway service comes into operation remains to be seen."

Another concern traders have is about the reliability and timing of the railway service. "If the railway service operator refuses to wait even for a short duration to accommodate delays at this end, it could cause troubles," says Dhakal. ●

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BIZ NEWS

A star is born

After a nearly month-long search for Nepal’s most striking model in open selections in Dharan, Pokhara and Kathmandu, we have a winner. Priyanka Basnet, 18, of Kathmandu was crowned Lux Beauty Star 2004 and Suchitra Acharya, 23, of Biratnagar was the first runner up in the finals held at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu on 22 May. Basnet won Rs 50,000, Acharya Rs 25,000. Both girls also won an all-expense paid trip to Lakme Fashion Week 2005 in India.

Woman who can

Binita Pradhan is the recipient of the Laxmi Woman Entrepreneur Award 2004, created by Laxmi Bank in recognition of her contributions to the womens empowerment cause. Pradhan is the Executive Director of AVCO International, which is the sole distributor of Hyundai Motor Company South Korea and Hyundai Motor India and also represents a host of other mutlinationals. The award was a part of Celebrating Womanhood 2004.

Inspired change

Since 1991, the Surya trademark, the flagship brand of Surya Nepal, has carved out a strong position in the kingdom’s cigarette market. The trademark sun has been used consistently in all Surya communication and is an integral part of the crest that appears on all packs and cigarette sticks. Now the company has unveiled a new sun mnemonic to ‘encompass values of charismatic leadership, class and international stature’.



NEW PRODUCTS

HOMEMADE GRAVY: At a loss as to what to cook? Home-made Tomato Puree from Dabur Nepal is packaged in TetraPaks and contains no skin or seeds. The 200g packs are priced at Rs 22 and make gravies thicker, smoother and more appetising.



GIN-IUS: For a gin made locally, Ultimate Nepal’s Premuim Triple Distilled Grain Gin has a very international lineage: the botanicals include Italian juniper berries, Romanian, Russian and Bulgarian coriander seeds, Spanish orange and lemon peel and several secret ingredients. The Himalayan Distillery product is priced at Rs 710 for 750ml.

PIC THIS: It is all digital at Studio7, a photo studio and digital photo printing lab under one roof. It represents Konica (Japan) and is the first Konica Digital Photo Express for Nepal and is located in Triveni Complex, Putalisadak.



On the job

Employers exploit the fact that labour supply usually exceeds demand

Some of my friends in private sector firms always complain about their salaries. “We are the real kamaiyas. We work hard, even sacrificing our evenings and weekends. We make money for our firms. But all of it

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



goes to our bosses, while our salaries barely rise to keep up with increases in prices. What’s more, we often don’t get paid for months.”

Do they have a valid complaint? The answer depends on who you ask and on one factor: incentives or disincentives that Nepal’s labour laws allow employers to view their employees as investments, not as costs.

Take the case of publicly listed private sector companies such as joint-venture banks and multinationals. By law, they have to share 10 percent of their annual net profits with their employees. As such, the way these firms recruit entry-level MBAs is by offering a base monthly salary that, in these times, ranges anywhere from Rs 13,000-18,000. They spice up the offer by dangling the prospect of earning year-end bonuses that add up to multiples of the salary.

The bonuses are paid out as a measure not of individual

performance, but of how well the firm does in a given year. In our seniority-obsessed workplace, senior managers, claiming privileges, have every incentive to tilt the scale in their favour by paying themselves disproportionately bigger bonuses, regardless of how much money they individually make for the firm.

Still, those managers remain under pressure from shareholders to post a higher profit every year. And to do that, they pay just



enough to keep their junior officers motivated. Meantime, those junior officers have to put in anywhere from 7 to 15 years of work to slowly rise up through the ranks before their compensation packages start exceeding those of their local counterparts at INGOs. (Is it any wonder, then, that to any Nepali MBA looking to maximise her income in the short run, starting her career by working for an aid-supported INGO is preferable to

working for a publicly listed company?) True, owing to increasing industry-wide competition in sectors such as print media and banking, staff’s promotion rates and salaries have gone up. But in most cases, the story of juniors slogging for years at low base salaries remains the same.

One such case is the small-and-medium-business sector. Here, employees are at the mercy of employers who exploit the fact that for most positions, labour supply exceeds demand. Unless competent ‘knowledge workers’ are what they require (say, dental clinics needing certified dental technicians), they have no incentive to try to keep their replaceable employees. Indeed, it’s often the employees, such as my complaining friends, who hold on to their jobs because, short of leaving for jobs abroad, other alternatives are not attractive.

The challenge for employees is to acquire specialised skills to make themselves continually marketable. But ultimately, it is the government that can push for further economic reforms to reduce the costs of starting and running businesses. After all, it is only a rise in the number of rivals that forces existing firms to start getting serious about making the best of the available resources. And one happy consequence will be that employers will start treating their employees better. ●

Annual 30% growth in the colour tv market



As the global village gets wired, Nepal is not far behind. To launch Samsung’s DigitAll Celebrations 2004 campaign, KS Kim, CEO of Samsung’s Southwest Asia Region, was in Kathmandu this week (pictured above with the executive director of the Golchha Organisation, Shekhar Golchha). He spoke to us about Nepal’s importance as a market, branding power and going green.

Nepali Times: Do you think this is the right time for Samsung to launch the DigitAll Celebrations 2004 campaign in Nepal?

KS Kim: This is the first time we made our IT product dealers assemble to display our new technology products that would be sold in the markets in the region. Our headquarters recently made a decision to set up Samsung Southwest Regional headquarters based in Delhi to cover India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Maldives. That is in addition to our existing six regional headquarters and it recognises the growing potential of this region to expand.

Sounds great, but is the Nepali market big enough?

Even though there is no official data, we have recorded an average 30 percent annual growth in the market, particularly in the colour tv segment.

But the political and economic crisis has caused a slump in the economy.

Overall, we believe the slowdown is temporary. But I believe the market will recover soon after the formation of a new government.

What new digital treats can we expect?

We have plasma and liquid crystal tvs, fully automatic washing machines, refrigerators, digital camcorders, DVDs, laser printers and optical disk drives among others. All of these will be available in Nepal.

Local distributors of electronic goods say their business is hampered by parallel imports.

That may be happening in case of other brands. With Samsung, our distributor is Him electronics. I don’t see any problem with parallel import of our products.

So why are dealers complaining?

This may be happening on a very small scale. We conduct our business through regular channels.

You already have a tv factory in Nepal. Do you have further

expansion plans?

If business grows, there will be further expansion of such facilities. It depends on the market scenario. We may expand such facilities for other products as well.

Have you faced any problem from imitation Samsung products?

This has not been a major problem for us.

Where are the Samsung products imported in Nepal made?

We have many factories around the world. For Nepal, the goods are sent mainly from Korea and some factories in Southeast Asia. High-end products are sent from Korea.

Who is your consumer-segment target?

Through the stable four to five percent economic growth in Nepal, the middle and high-income consumer groups have begun to increase and that is the right market for Samsung. We position ourselves as a prestigious brand, unlike low category Chinese or other cheap brands. Samsung distances itself from them. Our target clients are at the high-end, are highly educated with more exposure to the international market. That is why we are launching the state-of-the-art products.

Doesn’t all this consumerism and planned obsolescence create a branded world?

Man has developed his lifestyle through tools. There were times when we used stones. Now, we are living in the digital era and these tools make our present lifestyle possible. Through the development of digital technology, Samsung believe it is contributing to human development.

How about the environmental impact and the pressure on natural resources?

Samsung does a lot for the preservation of natural resources. We invest tremendously in research and development of technology aimed at reduced usage of natural resources. This company is a pioneer in the support of the movement and campaign for the conservation of the natural environment.

The massacre



DANIEL LAK

“Do countries have karma?” a frustrated Nepali once asked me. “If they do, then we’ve done something very bad.” My friend was speaking after the notorious royal massacre of 2001, but he could have been referring to the apparent death throes of democracy here, a Maoist rebellion or the ever-worsening economy.

Nepal, it seems, just can’t get a break. Good journalism is in short supply. It’s too young, too subject to social and political pressure. So *kegarne* for clear insights into a place that remained off limits to outsiders until 1951? There’s the Internet of course, a masala of dodgy data as ever. With few exceptions, among them Ed Douglas and Charlie Pye-Smith, outsiders who

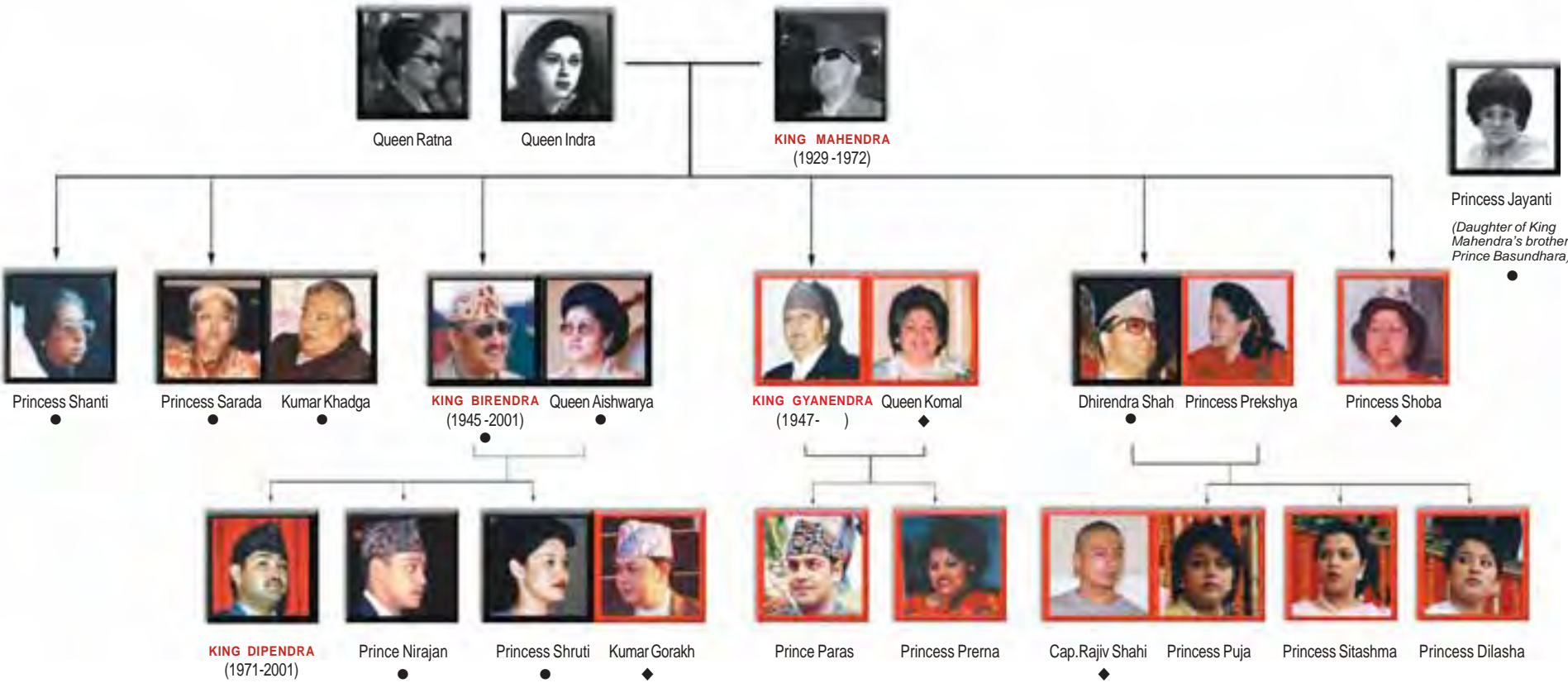
None of the books that appeared in the three years after the royal massacre bring any deeper insight into that terrible tragedy

write about Nepal turn out to be an odd grab bag of chancers, opportunists and Orientalists. This also seems to apply to many of the country’s well-wishers in the world at large, of whom I am one. We are a funny lot, we foreigners who like it here. On the surface, it’s not hard to see why we love the place. It’s physically gorgeous, fascinating and the people are rather friendly. Yet it’s hard to avoid the conclusion that we foreigners focus on the wrong things about Nepal, usually for all the wrong reasons. Just look at the books we produce. Take, for instance, the royal massacre. Kathmandu was jumping with journalists after 1 June 2001. All were intrigued by the most fascinating story of their careers. A few stayed on, hoping to write the definitive account of the massacre. So far, none of the books published about the massacre has added anything to what was presumed to be known immediately after the killings—a love-crazed Crown Prince Dipendra did it. Now I’m pretty sure that he did, and I was as close as anyone to the massacre stories. But I can’t convince most Nepalis about this and a national conviction that the current king was somehow involved.

But this disbelief in official explanations of the massacre fails to excite foreign writers about the event, save as a quaint feeling among superstitious locals. Whether it’s Neelesh Mishra’s *End of the Line*, Jonathan Gregson’s *Blood Against the Snows*, or *Love and Death in Kathmandu* by Amy Willesee and John Whittaker, the conclusions drawn are the same, the sources, insights and anecdotes all similar. Dipendra loved Devyani. He was a weird guy, evidently dangerous to know. He had many guns. He made enemies at Eton and partied desperately hard. He cracked up and killed his family. That’s it. No attempt to examine other explanations, no credible off-the-record information, nothing beyond the norm. Mishra’s book, to do it justice, was prepared within two months of the killings, and can be excused for hasty conclusions and little real penetration into the Nepali psyche. Mishra is a fine journalist who uses his reporter’s skills to seek the most likely explanations. His writing is lively and he offers no less information than any of the other massacre books. By far the most awkwardly titled and disappointing is *Blood Against the Snows*. Much heralded as the Big Book on the royal killings, Jonathan Gregson got a \$100,000 advance for his troubles, which adds to the shame of the final product. I’ve seldom read a more derivative account of the massacre. Gregson’s sources are largely documents that

tell their stories better than he does and it all begs the question, why, oh why, would you buy this book? Instead, buy or acquire the source material—a pamphlet by Ludwig Stiller called *Nepal: Growth of a Nation*, the official government inquiry report, and the BBC Panorama documentary, *Murder Most Royal*. *Love and Death in Kathmandu* is by the Australian husband and wife team, Amy Willesee and Mark Whittaker. In this case, it’s hard not to judge a book by its cover. A lurid gold frame, a crass purple background, the title rendered in fake Devnagari script and a picture of Kali, it could easily win Bad Cover of the Year. Had these two writers produced something worthy, we might have forgiven the lurid packaging. But the writing lives up to the cover. It is adolescent and boastful, breathless and ultimately gives a shallow, derivative account. The authors insist on being jointly present. ‘We’ are always going to see some individual with the goods on Dipendra, or ‘we’ are worried about security when ‘we’ drive to Gorkha. Of course, ‘we’ are married and have co-authored another book together but I respectfully suggest that ‘we’ the readers don’t give a damn about ‘we’ the writers unless we’re being enlightened and entertained. And we’re not. But what annoys me most of all about both this and Gregson’s book is the unabashed Orientalism. Both paint a medieval-style Nepal with a

- ◆ Wounded at Narayanhiti on 1 June, 2001
- Killed at Narayanhiti on 1 June, 2001



e books

callous yet colourful elite. Whether it is royals or the former ruling Rana family, much is made of drinking, partying, hunting endangered species and so on. Now this is, in part, the reality. But neither Gregson nor Willesee see the massacre as anything other than local colour, rather than desperation or decadence. Nor do they seem concerned about what ordinary Nepalis think about anything.

For a truly unique take on the massacre, the reader must be brave, and must speak French. French novelist Gerard De Villiers finds that Nepal's court intrigue fits quite nicely into a paranoid worldview that has made him one of the wealthiest pulp fictionists in France. *Sas La Roi Fou du Népal*, Nepal's Crazy King, was written after De Villiers came to Nepal in July of 2001 and duped an unfortunate French ambassador into thinking he was a journalist. He saw top diplomats from the United States and Britain, and promptly turned them into the spies behind the royal

killings. In De Villiers's 150th book that blames the evils of the world on Anglo-Saxon spies, leading members of the Nepali elite have frequent sex with these diplomats and the massacre turns out to be a plot by the CIA and Britain's SAS commandos. Disrespectful to the victims, yes, but quintessentially French and to be viewed, if not read, in that light.

Nepal and the Narayanhiti massacre remain mysterious to the enquiring mind, ill served by foreign writers. Some comfort looms on the horizon though. Some decent Nepali writers are entering the fray with books due out this year on the country's travails but until then, I'm replaying that Panorama program one more time, and perusing Ludwig Stiller for my insight into Nepal. Oh yes, and talking to the ordinary folk of this troubled land who never hesitate to tell you what they really think about those killings at the palace. And everything else. ● (© Biblio)



Blood Against the Snows: The Tragic Story of Nepal's Royal Dynasty
Jonathan Gregson
Fourth Estate, London, 2002, 226 pp
Rs 520

Love and Death in Kathmandu: A Strange Tale of Royal Murder
Amy Willesee and Mark Whittaker
Pan Macmillan, Australia, 2003, 320 pp
Rs 632



End of the Line
Neelesh Mishra
Penguin Books, India, 2001, 205 pp
Rs 320

The Dreadful Night: Carnage at Nepalese Royal Palace
Aditya Man Shrestha
Ekta Books, Nepal, 2001, 183 pp
Rs 500



"Kay Gardeko?": The Royal Massacre in Nepal
Prakash A Raj
Rupa and Co, New Delhi, 2001, 111 pp
Rs 200

Sas La Roi Fou du Népal
Gerard De Villiers
Malko Productions, Paris, 2002, 250 pp
Euro 8.95



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Stuck

Hari Roka in Kantipur, 24 March

कान्तिपुर

Considering the delay in the formation of the new cabinet and the increasing international pressure for an agreement between the king and the political parties, the latter was confident the monarch’s position was weak and an agreement was imminent. Last Thursday’s meeting at the royal retreat in Nagarjun proved them wrong. King Gyanendra’s first sentences were: “Now that the prime minister has resigned, this is the time to restore peace and hold elections. You have been invited to offer your suggestions on how these two goals can be achieved.”

Before the parties could reiterate their demand for an all-party government and the reinstatement of parliament, the king pre-empted their move. “Don’t ask me to make extra-constitutional moves and don’t assume you are parliamentary representatives at a time when there is no parliament. If a prime minister is appointed just because of the street agitations, it will create a bad precedent and pave the way for an even more difficult crisis the in future.”

It was only after the party leaders heard those words that his view became apparent: their 18-point program and demand for return of people’s sovereignty were not acceptable to King Gyanendra. It was also a slap on the face for civil society, which felt it could navigate a way out of the impasse if the parties united to form a government. Unfortunately, the king’s opening



MIN BAJRACHARYA

statements in the meeting made it clear that parties can offer suggestions but not act on them, and that he wouldn’t hand over state power.

To appease the king, leader of the Nepali Congress, Girija Prasad Koirala, stated it was not the culture of the Congress to chant anti-king slogans and asked his party workers to follow that tradition. Immediately after the Nagarjun meeting, however, Madhab Kumar Nepal issued a statement that the students were responsible for their own street slogans. Clearly, both were trying to convince the king that they had nothing to do with the republican slogans on the streets. But the palace obviously had not softened its stance.

The leaders of the major parties may not have understood the king’s true intentions. But the king himself appears quite clear about his agenda: 19 months ago, the palace recovered the power it had lost 14 years previously. King Gyanendra does not want to lose it again. He will be flexible only with a democracy that he can guide. In other words, he wants to appoint a prime minister and ministers, make laws and rules, implement his plans and programs and be in charge of the country.

The sole reason he talks about democracy is because he cannot fund state-management and the security agencies without the people. He harps on about elections because without it, the donor mantra of democracy, good governance and decentralisation cannot be established. He met with civil society and the parties because if he failed to do so, he ran the risk of being labelled a dictator.

Are the parties unaware of what the king is really up to? Perhaps they just do not want to know. It is hard to believe that these politicians who witnessed so many ups and downs in their political careers fail to see through the king’s stratagem. The real issue is the crisis of confidence between the main parties, especially within the leadership in the Congress and the UML.

The UML worries that the Congress, the king and the international community will unite to undermine it. Meanwhile, the Congress suspects that over one late night meeting, the UML will forge an alliance with the king, Deuba Congress, RPP and other smaller parties to leave it out in the cold. These suspicions took root after the UML publicly stated that it would accept the reinstatement of the Sher Bahadur Deuba government. This powerplay among the parties is the greatest obstacle in getting the people on their side. Meanwhile, the fate of the 18-point agenda remains undecided and the party workers’ enthusiasm is dwindling.

Executions

Kantipur, 23 May

कान्तिपुर

SINDHULI – The locals of Tinkanya village are shocked over the killing of two innocents by the security forces. Bal Bahadur Sarki and Gyan Bahadur Karki were at home celebrating Sangranti when some soldiers dragged them away. The next day, the state radio announced that the two were killed when they attacked security forces with grenades. The news was not only fabricated, but the two also had nothing to do with the Maoists. “We tried to discover what their crime was, but found nothing,” says a villager. A team of journalists, human rights activists, lawyers and politicians also investigated the killings. The two were found to be ordinary villagers, shot a few hours after their arrest.

Sarki is survived by three young children and a wife. “How am I going to bring up my children?” asks his widow, Pabimaya. The CDO, Durga Prasad Adhikari, says both were active members of the Maoist local government. The rebel-run FM radio says Sarki and Karki were ordinary villagers and not Maoists.

Surrenders

Samay, 21-27 May

समय

The government says 961 Maoists have surrendered, but less than 60 former rebels live at the Dhakaltar rehabilitation centre in Tanahu (see pic above). Where are the rest? When the government announced amnesty for Maoists who gave up arms six months ago, a large number of Maoists from 68 districts reportedly surrendered. The largest number were from Lamjung, the least from Gorkha. The government



AMAR RAJ NAHARKI

even extended the amnesty from February to June.

So far, only an insignificant number of senior Maoists have given themselves up. Most may not even have been Maoists at all, but ordinary villagers. The economic aid promised by the government was a possible incentive, with Rs 200,000 for rebels with 81mm mortars and a minimum of Rs 400 for number 66 plastic hand grenades. The Home Ministry does not have any record of how many Maoists handed over arms and ammunition. Media reports show that only a few surrendered with arms. The only guns brought in were SLRs. The senior Maoist leaders who surrendered are still in detention. Ex-Maoist brigade commanders like Hom Prakash Shrestha and others have not been sent to the rehabilitation centre. The government has also not fulfilled its promise to find foreign employment for Maoists who surrendered. Prachanda called this government strategy “a humiliating program to conceal its defeat” and threatened those who surrendered. “Now we are more at risk from our own cadre than the security forces,” says Ananda B Shahi, a former eastern military commander. The Maoists confiscated his property

and house in Dailekh when he gave himself up to the security forces.

Investment zones

Spacetime, 24 May

स्पेसटाइम टैमिक

The government is preparing an announcement of special economic areas across the country with an ordinance which has been delayed because of Surya Bahadur Thapa’s resignation. The idea is to declare any potential area as an economic zone where construction, operation and management will be the responsibility of a special economic area authority. The authority is supposed to build the right infrastructure for economic activities, monitor the industries established in the area and provide a one-window service to investors. The authority will also be responsible for creating an investment-friendly environment in such areas and attract both domestic and foreign investors. The idea has also come in line with recommendations made at the non-resident Nepalis’ conference last year where they asked the government to create an environment conducive to foreign investments. The special economic area authority will allow investors to establish industries for 30-year extendable periods. No property in these areas will be nationalised



Left post: Republic
Right post: Royal meet
Car: Anti-regression movement
Man: Party activist

राजधानी Rajdhani, 23 May

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Why should I tell you (journalists) everything I discussed with the king?”

RPP President Pashupati Shamsher JB Rana, in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 26 May

and investors in such areas will enjoy various tax rebates.

Stolen gods
.....
Nepal Samacharpatra, 23 May

The government does not have any proper records of idols stolen from the country. All it has is a record of items recovered. The Archaeology Department says the police recovered 1,300 stolen idols so far and says thefts are still rampant. “It is still going on,” said the department’s director general Kosh Prasad Acharya. “The only difference now is that people are aware about these things.” According to the department, an exclusive program for the conservation of idols and monuments in the country is very necessary. “We working on a plan,” Acharya said. The greatest obstacle is a lack of funds. Budgetary constraints resulted in the demolition of a century old building at T angal for the new offices of the CIAA. “We don’t have the money to conserve the historic building, and it was in a dilapidated state, so we allowed the commission to demolish it.”

Expense account
.....
Bikas Bhattarai in Nepal Samacharpatra, 25 May

King Gyanendra issued an ordinance to increase the expenditures of the royal palace for the fourth time on Tuesday. The Royal Palace Expenditure Management Act 2031 was amended and the right was granted to increase expenditure as desired. The palace purse has already been plumped up by millions of rupees. After the ordinance was first issued in November 2003, the palace funds were increased from Rs 110 million to Rs 620 million. Sources at the Council of Ministers told us that a total of Rs 930 million was sent to the palace in a year-and-a-half, but no data is available. Senior advocate Krishna Prasad Bhandari said this move was an error, especially in the light of the five-party anti-‘regression’ movement. “Issuing an ordinance time and again is simply too much,” added Bhandari. Harihar Dahal, former president of Nepal Bar Association said that the issuing of four consecutive self-benefitting ordinances by the king was “disgraceful”. According to provisions in Section 72 of the 1991 Constitution, any ordinance not approved by the House of Representatives within six months is automatically void. (Nepalnews.com)

Cops and soldiers
.....
Editorial in Rajdhani, 26 May

The Nepali people were shocked by the recent shooting of a Nepal police vehicle at the airport by a Royal Nepali Army (RNA) soldier that severely injured three

policemen. The incident has sounded a note of discord between the two key forces of national security. Citizens are worried about where this will lead to. Both sides are busy playing the blame game by presenting different versions of the incident. We are left wondering who is telling the truth. At a time when the security forces were gradually winning the trust and confidence of the people, this incident has jeopardised their credibility and integrity. Of course, the truth should come out as to what really happened but more importantly, the current rift between the two should not be prolonged. At a time when the country is in a security crisis, their unity is needed more than ever. They should coordinate and communicate constructively to combat terror and violence. The incident is a lesson to both the army and police that they need to work closely together despite their different roles in serving the nation and people. The shooting can be considered a human error, but it highlights the communication gap between the police and the army. This incident cannot be taken lightly and it must not be repeated.

Who reigns?
.....
Ghatana ra Bichar, 26 May

The CPN-Maoist party took the collective resignation of the government-appointed officials as a great political success. On 24 May, acceding to Maoist ‘directions’, Kathmandu Metropolitan City office bearers decided to quit office. After Mayor Keshab Sthapit, along with the deputy mayor and 34 ward chairmen handed in their resignations because of growing Maoist threats, the rebel organisation declared it a victory, a move that boosted its morale. High on this success, inside sources say they are now working towards weakening the state system by coercing more resignations from key people in the government. At a time when ruling the country is entirely in the hands of the king, the rebels’ bold move shows the extent of their reach and influence. According to reports, the Maoists are now aiming at the assistant secretary to the king, high-ranking officials of security agencies and officials at the palace. It is unclear when they plan on starting this campaign. The Maoists, who claim to have complete control over Nepal’s rural areas, asked the people to stop paying any taxes to the government. When this failed to be effective, they decided to force the resignation of high-ranking government officials. This ploy has served its aim—the people now question who reigns over the country, the Maoists or the king. (Nepalnews.com)

Rebelling against rebels

Nepal, 30 May

BIRATNAGAR—The huge madhesi assembly here was armed with traditional weapons like bows and arrows, axes, swords and spades. Despite the Maoist-road blockade, thousands of men and women from villages in south Morang traveled on bicycles, tractors and oxcarts to gather in an open field in a display of solidarity and unity against the Maoists. They are tired of the rebels’ injustice and domination, and decided to publicly protest and condemn Maoist atrocities against innocent civilians who are struggling to survive and overcome neglect by the government. “All we want is to live with dignity,” one participant said. The Santhal community in Sisabani is constantly harassed by Maoists for food and shelter. “We have so little ourselves and yet they demand we feed them meat and rice,” says Biswa Murmu, a local villager who was forced to feed the rebels on two consecutive nights. When he refused, his mother and sister were threatened. “How much longer can we endure this?” asks a



furious young man, a bow and arrows ready on his back. Former vice chairman of Budhanagar village, Tarachand Shah, refused to pay ransom for his son who was kidnapped by the Maoists and they killed him. Since then, people from the villages neighbouring Budhanagar have united against the Maoists. Madhesi security units were formed a while ago for the villages of Pokhariya, Jhorahat, Tetariya, Sisabani, Majhare, Nocha, Budhanagar, Bhajigacha and Kadmahal. They patrol day and night to keep the Maoists away. “There is a limit to our silence and fear,” says Gangaram Rajbhar, who gave up his job in India to join the anti-Maoist campaign in his village. Since the brutal killing of 54-year-old Sampatlal Das Tharu on 7 May, hatred towards the rebels has intensified and now the people are taking the law into their own hands. Four days after the murder, villagers of Tetariya stoned two Maoist activists, Tek Bahadur Rajbangsi and Lilam Adhikari, to death. Ten days later, they killed another young Maoist who constantly badgered them for donations.

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Nepali students from Hokkaido University perform in a cultural program. NESAJ.ORG

Study in Japan

With visa crackdowns on foreign students, it is next to impossible

SUVENDRINI KAKUCHI in TOKYO

It took Chaturani Perera two years to convince Japanese immigration officials to grant her a student visa. The 20-year-old Sri Lankan had to prepare the necessary documents and accrue a hefty \$10,000—her family's life savings—in a bank account "At that time, all I dreamed about was studying in Japan, a vital step for a better career," says the energetic woman, who now speaks flawless Japanese. Chaturani will receive a certificate in computer programming from the college she is attending in March next year, the same month her student visa expires. She then plans on going home. "Life in Japan has been complex," she explains. "While studying here has given me an edge over others back home, it has been tough struggle to survive and many times I almost gave up."

Activists who work with students from other Asian countries agree that studying in Japan presents many difficulties, but they contend Chaturani should consider herself lucky. "At least she got to finish her studies and return home," says Yayori Kosugi, who volunteers teaching Japanese language. "There are tens of thousands of students like her who cannot make it to the end due to financial problems and difficulties in adjusting to Japanese society."

The plight of Japan's 110,000 foreign students, who mostly come from China, South Korea and Taiwan, is worsening. Although their numbers are minuscule, accounting for just 2.6 percent of total post-secondary enrolment, they have once again caused a headache for the nation, which began a campaign in 1983 to internationalise its homogeneous college campuses. Foreign students have sparked a national debate and pitted their supporters against immigration officials, who recently tightened the screening process for students to combat what they say is a wave of crime committed by Chinese students.

In April, when the new screening process was implemented, visa approvals fell by nearly 50 percent—only 10,657 overseas students were accepted to study in Japan, down from 19,777 accepted in the same month last year. The Justice Ministry reports it received 23,285 student visa applications in April. Of these, 16,188 were filed by Chinese nationals but only 4,302 were approved.

"The new checks are aimed at weeding out students who are coming here to work rather than study," a ministry official said in a statement released last week. "For that purpose, it is important to find out their financial means and Japanese language ability. Checks on the applicant's background are also emphasised to prevent fraudulent cases and protect domestic security."

Students and activists, however, are alarmed. They say that while the need to prevent crime committed by students is understandable, the government must take pains to protect opportunities for foreigners who want to study in Japan. At the root of the new policy of clamping down on foreign students are crime statistics released by the Justice Ministry. They indicated that 28 percent of the foreigners arrested for crimes last year, or 2,468 people, were in Japan on student visas. Chinese nationals topped the list.

Research shows that students from other Asian nations are eager to enroll in courses such as computer programming, graphic design, law and medicine due to the higher academic standards Japanese universities maintain. The trend will grow, experts say. They point out that the growing affluence in Asia and one-child policy in China have helped parents bear the cost of sending their children to study in Japan, where it is almost 10 times more expensive than elsewhere in Asia. Even so, according to activists, most parents and students cannot cope after a year in Japan. Chinese students cannot survive on the paltry scholarships provided by the Japanese government, which average \$500-700 a month. They are forced to take jobs—Japanese immigration laws allows students to work 28 hours a week—to pay their bills, leaving them with insufficient time to study. ● (IPS)

Starring roles

Bollywood heroes in the Indian government

NEELESH MISHRA in MUMBAI

A few of the new members entering India's parliament have unique experiences under their belts. One can claim to have streaked across the barren hinterland on horseback with a gun and holster, followed by some 20 muscular men, dressed like a Robin Hood-style bandit. Another of these lawmakers once climbed a huge water tank in a drunken state and remained dangerously perched there, refusing to come down until a lady in the village agreed to let him marry her daughter. Yet another is known for India's longest kiss.

All of this, of course, was on screen. These heroic acts can be claimed by Sunil Dutt, Dharmendra, Vinod Khanna, Govinda and Jaya Prada, all hugely popular movie actors who—after last week's stunning election upset that swept Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government out of power—are new members of the Indian parliament.

The journey to Indian politics from the glitzy world of Bollywood, the world's most watched movie industry, is not a new phenomenon. In fact, this Indian tradition predates famous actor-turned-politicians like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Ronald Reagan. For years, various movie actors have

tried their hand at politics, with mixed luck. But the latest elections have witnessed a record number of actors running for office: more than 15 across India. The success rate has also been enormously high: only three of them lost.

Movies are one of the two great passions, along with cricket, of this billion strong nation. Film songs have shaped social mores. Popular actors are idolised and their mannerisms, hairstyles, clothes, gait, famous dialogues and romantic songs can become the inspiration for several generations. In south India, temples have even been built for them.

It was only natural, then, that ambitious actors would eventually try to apply their mesmerising hold to politics. Actors ran governments for several terms in at least two southern Indian states, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Even Tamil Nadu's current chief minister, Jayaram Jayalithaa, who's also an ex-convict, was once a hugely popular actress who danced and sang in films and frequently played the role of Hindu goddesses.

In 1984, India's brightest star tried his hand at politics. Amitabh Bachchan, India's iconic entertainment legend, who was later voted the world's most popular actor of the 20th century in a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) poll, agreed to run for parliament. He did so to oblige his friend Rajiv Gandhi, who was soon to succeed his mother, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi,

who had been assassinated that year. Bachchan defeated his rival Hemvati Nandan Bahuguna, then one of the top politicians in north India, getting more than 68 percent of the vote. That drubbing ended Bahuguna's political career, but Bachchan's also ended three years later when he said he realised politics was not his cup of tea.

Clearly, India's new generation of actors does not agree. Some 30 actors joined different parties in the run up to the recent election and campaigned for their friends and other politicians, traveling to remote parts and traffic-clogged streets on jeep-top. They would appear at press conferences, eagerly responding to almost identical questions on why they liked the party they had chosen.

As politicians and actors use many of the same skills, the political newcomers slipped easily into their new role. "Politics is an intoxication, just like films. Once you have tasted it, you don't want to let it go," said Dharmendra, the aforementioned hero who climbed the water tank to obtain his sweetheart. Dharmendra (who only uses a single name) travelled to remote villages in his Bikaner constituency in the desert state of Rajasthan as a member of Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He often enacted his famous water tank scene from "Sholay" in which he played the role of a convict hired by a retired police officer to fight a bandit leader.

The other election hero was Govinda (*see pic below*), who also uses a single name and has won over the masses with dances involving pelvic thrusts and funny, though lewd, dialogue delivery. He contested from Mumbai, where the Bollywood film industry is based. Govinda stunned passengers during the campaign when he humbly lined up to buy tickets and traveled in local trains and buses. A nominee of Sonia Gandhi's Congress Party, he defeated political giant Ram Naik of the BJP, who was undefeated in several elections.

The actors also tried to reach out to voters by touching on the very real issues that this election was fought on—road construction, electricity and poverty—rather than the divisive issues of caste and religion that often dominated India's politics.

These Bollywood stars may have in part seduced the voters with their glamorous image—especially the poor, who turned out in large numbers this election. But the next few months will show if these actors can be heroes in real life as they were on screen. ● (@AW57)



Is war obsolete?

The saddest of the books on my office bookshelf is an old one published nearly a century ago: Norman Angell's *The Great Illusion: A Study of the Relation of Military Power in Nations to Their Economic and Social Advantage*, which tried to prove that military conquest was obsolete.

COMMENT
J Bradford DeLong



Angell's argument was simple: in all prolonged modern industrial wars, everybody loses. Losers lose the most, but winners also are worse off than if peace had been maintained. Many fathers, sons and husbands are dead, and so are many mothers, wives and daughters. Much wealth has been blown up. Much architecture has been turned into rubble. Confiscation damages the rule of law on which modern industrial prosperity rests. The most that even the winners can say is that they are little losers rather than big losers. Modern industrial war is, as the computer in the 1982 movie *War Games* put it, a very peculiar game: "The only way to win is not to play."

At the time that Angell wrote, some people argued that war was an important means to promote

national prosperity, that commercial prosperity was the fruit of military power. Angell puzzled over how pre-WWI pan-German politicians could believe that German prosperity required a big battle fleet when the absence of one made no difference to the prosperity of Norway, Denmark or Holland.

He was, of course, right in his judgment that the only way to prevent any modern industrial war from becoming a destructive tragedy for all was to quickly conclude a ceasefire. Governments that view aggressive war as a means to prosperity have been rare since the end of World War I: the Imperial Japanese government that launched World War II in the Pacific and Saddam Hussein's two grabs for oilfields are examples that spring immediately to mind.

But what makes *The Great Illusion* the saddest book on my office bookshelf is that we have found other reasons to fight wars: to preserve colonial domination and wars to end it, civil wars, ideological wars, wars of extermination. We have seen ethnic wars and wars fought to make governments stop killing their citizens. Indeed, we have seen more religious wars than at any time since the end of the

Losers lose the most, but winners also are worse off than if peace had been maintained



Thirty Years War in 1648.

Yet there is cause for hope. Academic foreign policy "realists" (who somehow strike me as not a very realistic bunch) attributed the end of Franco-German antagonism to the fact that they had something bigger to be scared of: Russia, which was terrifying under Stalin, frightening under Khrushchev and worrisome under Brezhnev. Let the Cold War end, they said, and then we will see France and Germany begin to rattle their sabers again, for that is

the tragedy of international power politics. Yet the Cold War has been over for 15 years, and military conflict between France and Germany today seems as unlikely as military conflict between America and Canada.

I hope that it is the fact of European interdependence—an interdependence carefully constructed by Jean Monnet, Robert Schumann, Konrad Adenauer and those who followed in their footsteps—and not the memory of the horror of

World War II that has caused the armies that used to cross the Rhine in arms to vanish. If so, there is a chance that the globalised economic age to which we look forward will be a more peaceful age than the 20th century was. If not, then Angell may well continue to be as irrelevant as he was right. ● (*© Project Syndicate*)

J Bradford DeLong is Professor of Economics at the University of California at Berkeley and was Assistant US Treasury Secretary during the Clinton Presidency.

DAHR JAMAIL in HADITHA, IRAQ

Two pictures put up in an internet café in Baghdad make for a vivid statement on how Iraqis have come to see US occupiers. One shows a woman in the United States hugging her dog. The second shows a hooded Iraqi prisoner sitting on the ground, hands tied behind his back. A soldier holds a gun to his head.

The picture seems to get worse in Iraq every day, and it gets worse for the United States in Iraq as well. Iraqis are already incensed over widespread damage caused by US military operations to their mosques both in Fallujah and southern Iraq, and by the photographs documenting torture in Abu Ghraib prison. The killing of 40 wedding guests, mostly women and children, in a military helicopter attack have enraged people further.

"The Americans must have no religion," Hashmiya Al-Abdulla, a housewife in Baghdad said of the slaughter at the wedding. "Anyone with religion cannot torture people, destroy mosques and homes, or kill people at a wedding ceremony. They worship force, not god."

In Haditha, a small city northeast of Baghdad on the banks of the Euphrates river, shop-owner Ali Zamhuir speaks of the consequences for the United States. "US companies will never be able to work in Iraq after what their military has done here. The mujahideen will never allow it."

US actions seem to have improved Saddam's image. "Even Saddam wasn't as cruel as the Americans," said Tassin Awad in Haditha. "Even he didn't torture like the Americans. Everyone in Haditha believes Saddam was a criminal, but would prefer him over the Americans." Iraqis are less than optimistic about the "transfer of sovereignty" on 30 June. "The Americans have fulfilled

none of their promises," said Sa'adoun Aziz, an unemployed construction worker. "Where is the rebuilding?"

Many people want Saddam back because the present situation is terrible, he said. "After 30 June the oil, finance and trade ministries will remain in the hands of the Americans, and we will have no army of our own." Aziz pointed across the Euphrates to a damaged electricity tower. "This is freedom."

At his home in Haditha, Hammed Abdulla believes the attack on the wedding party was intentional. "The Americans are provoking people on purpose to get a reaction," he said. "Iraq is sitting on top of a volcano." He added angrily, "I would like to see Bush and tell him that Saddam is better than he is." Schoolteacher Mohammed al-Hakim says, "The Americans are speaking of freedom and democracy while they are the cruelest, most brutal army ever."

Sitting nearby, an unemployed school manager agrees that 30 June will bring no change. "They will not pull out," he said. "But the Americans cannot control Iraq. America promises so many things, but has fulfilled none of them." Several men and women around him nodded in agreement as he spoke. "They promised prosperity, yet they have destroyed everything. They shot up the wedding party because they are the terrorists."

One man added, "They said they would bring real freedom but we see our people tortured in prison, looted and their homes raided." Daily attacks on US forces in Iraq remain high, and many Iraqis believe this number will only increase as 30 June approaches. The highway through the desert to Haditha bears several scars from improvised explosive devices that have detonated under US military vehicles patrolling the area. They are only one sign of Iraqi anger with US forces. ● (*IPS*)

"Saddam was better"

The Iraqi people speak



“We were not fighting for our own country”



Victoria Cross winner Ram Bahadur Limbu talks about fighting in Malaysia, Queen Elizabeth and the options of retired Gurkha soldiers in this condensed account. His story is included with those of other Gurkha soldiers in *Lahurey ka Katha*, translated by Dev Bahadur Thapa for *Nepali Times*.



My father had been in the army and fought in World War I, but after that he came home on leave and never went back. I remember him showing us a bullet scar on his throat. Since I was very young, I don't remember anything else he told us. I enlisted in the British Army at Pakliha in 1956 and, after a week in Kolkatta, went to Penang in Malaysia by ship. I underwent 10 months' training and then was posted to second battalion, and stayed for two years in the Malaysian city of Johore. In 1958, we went to Hong Kong and in 1965, I was posted to Singapore. There was a conflict

between Indonesia and Malaysia and we fought on the Malaysian side in Sarawak, where the Indonesians had a strong defence. The C Company and some reinforcements from the artillery reached the site, approximately 150 people. When we attacked, I was in the middle with a small group. Bullets felled my companions on the left and right. The enemy had taken position in the bunker. I aimed at that and fired. When the enemy firing stopped, I assumed everyone inside the bunker must have died. One of my companions, Bijuli Prasad Limbu, had been hit in the head and died instantly. Khark

Bahadur Limbu had been wounded in the stomach, and I dragged him to a safer place, but he died a day later. The battle continued, with heavy artillery bombardments. When the fighting was over, eyewitnesses claimed 24 on the enemy side had died compared to the three dead and three wounded on ours. I could operate all kinds of weapons—machine guns, automatic rifles, grenades, rocket launcher and a gun that could destroy bunkers and trenches. We fought for two months in Malaysia. Although the full-scale war between Malaysia and Indonesia ended in 1965 or 1966, skirmishes continued inside thick forests until 1968, when the armistice was signed. Mosquitoes and wild animals caused us a lot of trouble in the Malaysian jungles. One serviceman was dragged by an elephant and had his ribs damaged, but he survived. Rumour had it that there were two brothers in another unit, and the younger one was being devoured by a python when the elder one cut the python into pieces and took his brother out alive. I was given the Victoria Cross for valour in battle. However, I didn't even know about this till two years later. That morning, high-ranking officers

congratulated me and said I got a very high-class award, but I still didn't know which award it was. Later, the commanding general made an announcement about the award during a ceremonial parade. Although I'd never met any of them, I'd read about several Gurkha soldiers who had received the Victoria Cross during the first and second world wars. One was Ganju Lama, and when people passed by his house in Sikkim, they used to point it out and talk about his award. There were quite a few others who fought with courage and deserved an award, so it would be unfair to say that only I had been heroic. Yet I did my little bit, and I was proud and happy. I was 29 years old at the time, and since then, no other Gurkha soldier has been awarded the Victoria Cross. I travelled to London, where Queen Elizabeth presented the medal to me at Buckingham Palace. A citation is made prior to the pinning on of the medal, stating that so and so did such and such a deed. The queen congratulated me and said well done, and then shook hands with me. I thought about how I'd seen a large number of dead Indonesian soldiers as I carried my two wounded comrades away. It is impossible to say how many I killed, and how many my comrades killed, but in all, 24 enemy soldiers

were dead and it was certain our group was responsible. We brought back our wounded and dead companions, and all of our weapons, so I suppose that's why I was awarded the medal. At the time, I was a lance corporal, and had risen to the rank of captain when I retired after 28 years of service. Sometimes we old timers would meet each other and recall the days gone by. While fighting we were aware that we were not fighting for our own country. In a sense, we fought for our living. For over 200 years, our forefathers had been involved as soldiers and warriors, so in a way, it was like carrying on a family profession. Today, two of my sons are in the army. One has earned a pension, but the other is still serving. In some families, four or five generations have been serving in the army. Recently, we had an audience with His Majesty the King. We often talk about the lack of opportunities for ex-servicemen in Nepal. We have a number of important skills, and a few have even had training in engineering or communications. It is a shame these talents go to waste, when they could be used to help Nepal.

BIGBEN



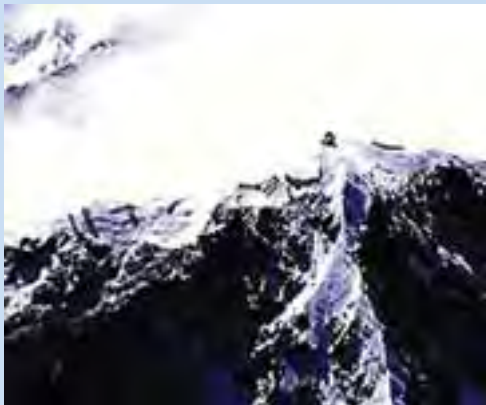
Two smugglers arrested at the airport, the third one escapes detection...

Ultralights over Everest

On 25 May, Richard Meredith-Hardy made history: the former world microlight champion became the first person to successfully fly over Everest in a microlight aircraft. Taking off from Syangboche airfield, Hardy approached the summit from the south side and passed the Khumbu Icefall as well as Lhotse and Nuptse on his way to the top. The most difficult part of the climb was near the summit, where he encountered severe turbulence and downdrafts. Over the summit he saw a group of Italian climbers nearing the stop, and they waved at each other. Just like in mountaineering attempts, going down was actually harder than going up. On return, his engine froze and visibility was low in Syangboche, but Meredith-Hardy managed a safe landing. Monday's flight was actually not meant to be a serious attempt, as morning weather conditions were not in Meredith-Hardy's favour. However, the weather cleared up as he was testing the microlight, so he decided to risk it. Flying over Everest has been Meredith-Hardy's dream for the past 10 years but he began planning and preparing only in 2002. This not only involved many trips to Nepal but



also testing equipment. A normal microlight cannot handle extreme conditions, so a lot of modifications were called for. Specialised equipment was built and tested extensively, particularly for the cold, high altitude takeoffs. Along with the microlight, a special suit allowed engine heat to circulate inside and Meredith-Hardy also had artificial oxygen. "This is not so much an item of clothing as an engineering marvel," claimed Meredith-Hardy in his online journal. Accompanying Meredith-Hardy on his journey was



Italian hanglider Angelo D'Arrigo. The Italian was trying to fly over Everest in a hang glider, also custom built for the attempt. However, the towline connecting his hang glider to Meredith-Hardy's microlight snapped near the summit, but he managed to land safely near Lobuje. D'Arrigo points out that the hang gliding effort is not just for fun. It is part of Project Metamorphosis, a worldwide study on migratory patterns of birds of prey. In the Himalaya, he was following the migration of steppe eagles. ● (Milan Wagle/www.flymicro.com)

Perfect putting

Sharpening your putting stroke

Ever played snooker or pool? Had an easy shot on the black and missed it? That usually happens because of bad technique. Listen to a group of golfers discussing their game after a round. They rarely talk about the bad drives or iron shots they've had that day. However, they will always mention the missed three footer for birdie, or how all those three putts cost them the game.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



I'm no different, and there's a reason for that. Once you start to reach a reasonable level of competence, your scores are ruined more often by poor putting

than any other reason.

To be honest, putting may look easy, but in practice it isn't. This covers all levels of player, from the club golfer, to even top professionals, who can often be heard saying, "If only my putter had worked better today!" Phil Mickelson, the current Masters' Champion, 4 putted from 8 feet in a PGA tour event last year. So we can imagine how difficult putting can become, especially under pressure.

Thousand of words have been written over many years on this subject. Looking at the number of successful individual styles of putting underlines the fact that putting is a game within the game.

Irrespective of what style you employ, there are basically two correct putter head paths:



a. Square to Square – where the putter head is taken straight back, kept square to the line of the putt, and the same square plane is followed on the through stroke. This is recommended for shorter putts, let's say inside 10 feet.

b. In to Square to In - This method is used for longer putts, the reason being that as the length of the putting stroke gets longer, the putter head starts to move naturally on a slight inward path on the backswing, then comes back square at contact, and then goes slightly inwards again.

Most amateur golfers are inconsistent putters, and we return to the number one reason why: they just don't practice enough. Even those who practice to achieve a

repeatable stroke end up trying various styles and often reach nowhere.

Some drills to improve your putting action.

a. For short putts

Find a reasonably straight putt on the practice green. Place two long clubs on either side of the hole, using them as guide rails. Allow the putter head to run straight back and through between the two shafts. The putt might be a small one, but you will be surprised at the different feel you get. With this drill, your wrist is forced to remain locked if you want to repeat the Square to Square stroke over and over again.

b. For longer putts

Leave the clubs on the ground where they are and move a few feet further. As the length of the putt increases, the putting stroke subsequently becomes longer. In this cases the putter head starts to move slightly inside the target line on the way back, returns to square at impact and back inside after stroking the ball. Roll the ball through the shafts towards the hole and you will get instant feedback on whether you are stroking correctly or not.

Practice your putting this way, and join in the 6th Gokarna Open on Saturday. Sink all those 3 footers and you'll probably be a winner.

Deepak Acharya is a Golf Instructor and Golf Director at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa, Kathmandu.
prodeepak@hotmail.com



SURYA

STATUTORY DIRECTIVE : SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH



Pump it up

International football's second biggest sporting event is finally here! Portugal plays host to Euro 2004, and here in football-mad Nepal, we'll be watching the some of the best players work a little of their magic in the beautiful game, broadcast live on ESPN. The official fixture sheet below will make keeping track of matches a breeze. Keep your eyes on the ball.



Date	Time-NST	Group	Team A	Team B	Result	
12 June	22.45	A	A1	A2	Portugal	Greece
12 June	1.30	A	A3	A4	Spain	Russia
13 June	22.45	B	B3	B4	Switzerland	Croatia
13 June	1.30	B	B1	B2	France	England
14 June	22.45	C	C3	C4	Denmark	Italy
14 June	1.30	C	C1	C2	Sweden	Bulgaria
15 June	22.45	D	D1	D2	Czech Republic	Latvia
15 June	1.30	D	D3	D4	Germany	Netherlands
16 June	22.45	A	A2	A3	Greece	Spain
16 June	1.30	A	A4	A1	Russia	Portugal
17 June	22.45	B	B2	B3	England	Switzerland
17 June	1.30	B	B4	B1	Croatia	France
18 June	22.45	C	C2	C3	Bulgaria	Denmark
18 June	1.30	C	C4	C1	Italy	Sweden
19 June	22.45	D	D2	D3	Latvia	Germany
19 June	1.30	D	D4	D1	Netherlands	Czech Republic
20 June	1.30	A	A4	A2	Russia	Greece
20 June	1.30	A	A3	A1	Spain	Portugal
21 June	1.30	B	B4	B2	Croatia	England
21 June	1.30	B	B3	B1	Switzerland	France
22 June	1.30	C	C4	C2	Italy	Bulgaria
22 June	1.30	C	C3	C1	Denmark	Sweden
23 June	1.30	D	D4	D2	Netherlands	Latvia
23 June	1.30	D	D3	D1	Germany	Czech Republic

Group A								
	P	W	L	D	F	A	GD	Pts
Portugal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greece	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Spain	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Russia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Group B								
	P	W	L	D	F	A	GD	Pts
France	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
England	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Switzerland	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Croatia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Group C								
	P	W	L	D	F	A	GD	Pts
Sweden	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bulgaria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Denmark	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Italy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Group D								
	P	W	L	D	F	A	GD	Pts
Czech Republic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Latvia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Germany	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Date	Time	Group	Team A	Team B	Result
24.06.04	19:45	QF1	1GA	2GB	
25.06.04	19:45	QF2	1GB	2GA	
26.06.04	19:45	QF3	1GC	2GD	
27.06.04	19:45	QF4	1GD	2GC	
30.06.04	19:45	SF1	WQF1	WQF3	
01.07.04	19:45	SF2	WQF2	WQF4	
04.07.04	19:45	FIN	SF1	SF2	



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ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Finland in Nepal** Art exhibition till 29 May at Gallery Moksh, Pulchok.
- ❖ **Infinity's Journey** from 28 May-15 June at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Aama's Journey, Between Cultures and Continents** by Broughton Coburn. 7PM on 29 May at Indigo Gallery, Naxal. Entry: Rs 200



EVENTS

- ❖ **8th Nepal Education & Book Fair 2004** 22-30 May, Bhrikuti Mandap.
- ❖ **Film Club:** Before Night Falls directed by Julian Schnabel, 2000, Cuba. 5.30PM on 30 May at Baggikhana. Rs 50. 5542544
- ❖ **Summer of '61** with young ASMAN, 6PM onwards 29 May at 1905, Kantipath. Tickets: Rs 750 with dinner 4471342
- ❖ **New Shakespeare Wallahs** of the Nepal Britain Society performs Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit* on 1 and 3 June at Hotel Soaltee.
- ❖ **Monsoon wine festival** at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 250440

MUSIC

- ❖ **Ani Choying's Concert** for the Nuns' Welfare Foundation and Arya Tara School. 6PM on 5 June at Bluestar Hotel, 4484959
- ❖ **Full Circle** 7PM Fridays at Bakery Café, Jawalakhel. 4434554
- ❖ **Deo** at Not Just The Jazz Bar Fridays at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat.
- ❖ **Nepathya Tour 2004:** *Santi ko Lagi Sikchya* reaches Kathmandu. 28&29 May at BICC Hall. www.nepa-laya.com. 5542646

FOOD

- ❖ **Caribbean BBQ** on 28 May at Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Dosa Festival** till 5 June at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Summit's Barbecue Dinner** with vegetarian specials. Summit Hotel.
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **Organic Market** every Saturday at Baber Mahal Revisited.
- ❖ **Sunny Side Up Weekend BBQ** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vajrayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** weekends at the Godavari Village Resort.
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 01 4361500
- ❖ **Bardia National Park** with Jungle Base Camp Lodge. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Golf** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort & Spa. 4451212
- ❖ **Weekend Special** at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
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- ❖ **Summer in Shivapuri**, steve@escape2nepal.com



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NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



The pre-monsoon showers this week exceeded averages for May and were caused by low pressure troughs over northern India that injected moisture into our region. Pre-monsoon showers are common, but this year's have been heavier than usual. This satellite picture taken on Thursday at midday shows that the low pressure area wants to linger over Nepal a while longer. We can expect more hefty showers next week with snow flurries down to 4,800m. The increased cloud cover will bring maximum temperatures down a notch, but the humidity will make up for it.

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BOOKWORM

The Underdevelopment of Development: Essays in Honor of Andre Gunder Frank Sing C Chew, Robert A Denmark (eds)
Vistaar, 2004
Rs 472

Today, when we are experiencing a powerful comeback of the 'modernisation agenda' in the name of 'globalisation' and a near ideological consensus on the policies of liberalisation, this book engages the reader in a debate that sharpens understanding. This collection has been organised with care, attempting to present a synoptic view of Gunder Frank's own thought over the decades.

Courtesy: Mandala Book Point, Kantipath, 4227711, mandala@csl.com.np



JAI NEPAL CINEMA



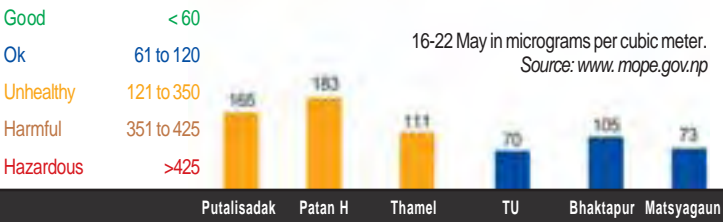
Yuva

From 22 May.
Bookings open 21 May.

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Mani Ratnam's production banner Madras Talkies comes up with its biggest multistarrer *Yuva*. As the name suggests, this is the story of three young men who are brought together by an accident on the Second Hoogly Bridge. Their change, conflict and interaction with each other lies at the crux of the film. Ratnam's favourite AR Rehman composed the music for *Yuva* and the film stars Rani Mukherjee, Esha Deol and Kareena Kapoor paired opposite Abhishek Bachchan, Ajay Devgan and Vivek Oberoi. This could well be the hit that eluded Ratnam with his last Hindi film *Dil Se*. That is, if it succeeds in striking a chord with a wide audience, both old and young.

KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY



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If successful, you would be based in the IUCN Nepal Country Office in Kathmandu initially on a 2-year contract but with a possibility of extension.

IUCN is an equal opportunities employer. Interested candidates should send their CV, the names of three referees and a cover letter explaining their interest by 15 July 2004 to: Human Resources Unit, IUCN-The World Conservation Union, Asia Regional Office, # 63 Sukhumvit 39, 10110-Bangkok, Thailand. Tel: ++662 662 4061; Fax: ++662 662 4389; email: iucn@iucn.org

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HAPPENINGS



MIN BAJRACHARYA

FINNS: Finnish charge d'affaires Pauli Mustonen speaking at the inauguration of an exhibition by a trio of Finnish artists in Moksh Art Gallery last Friday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

PILGRIMS PROGRESS: A traditional Buddhist festival at the Hiranayavarna Mahavihar in Patan on Monday was turned into a 'peace puja'.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

WATER FOR ALL: An exhibition of models and photographs of traditional stone spouts at Kastamandap on Tuesday organised by Kathmandu 20/20.



GALAXY OF STARS: Contestants of the Lux Beauty Star 2004 competition line up for the grand finale at the Hyatt Regency on Saturday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

NEW FOR OLD: A car exchange mela organised by Hyundai at the BICC last week for owners to trade in their old cars for newer models.

NEPALI SOCIETY

Democratic granny

She participated in anti-Rana protests in 1950. She campaigned on the side of multiparty democracy in the 1980 referendum, she was at the barricades in the People's Movement of 1990. This year, 87-year-old Chhaya Debi Parajuli left her home and dozen grandchildren in Sunsari and travelled to Kathmandu at her own expense to join the demos against the October Fourth royal move.

"This is the third war that I've participated in," she says proudly. Draped from shoulder to feet in Nepali Congress flags, she is now a celebrity figure in the crowds. Without hesitation, she climbs on the shoulders of a young man willing to act as her mobile podium. Her strong clear voice

risers above the babble of slogans, louder than that of other protesters. "Come on, your voices are not loud enough," she shouts, rallying a group of demonstrators at Putali Sadak. When riot police charge with their sticks, Chhaya Debi rides into battle.

Tear gas canisters exploded around her, bricks and sticks rain down nearby, fellow protesters retreat but Chhaya Debi leads the charge. She is hit by a police baton and is injured in the head. While she bleeds, she curses the police. A quick first aid, antiseptics and bandage on her head, and Chhaya Debi is on her feet again. But she is quickly carried away by

policewomen into a police van—her seventh arrest so far. These days, Chhaya Debi is so well known among riot police that she is taken into custody before she even gets to the barricades.

Chhaya Debi has no interest in a political career, all she cares about is inspiring the politically indifferent young in Kathmandu to join the movement. "If I can come all the way from my village, why can't people here just take that little step?" she questions. We ask her how long she is going to go on. "Till the king backs down," she answers. ●



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More important tips for visitors

Due to overwhelming popular demand to excommunicate this scribe from the All Nepal Non-working Journalists Union for causing several readers to throw up while reading last week’s episode, today’s column comes with a statutory government health warning that it should not be read while partaking of food in the presence of unattended minors. That said, we can proceed now where we left off



UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit

with our next and final installment of important tips for visitors to Nepal so they can cope with cultural shock when they arrive on our shores.

One of the best ways to get the most out of your brief sojourn in Shangrila is to carefully observe the gestures and manners of the inhabitants and imitate them so you can blend in. And one of the first things many outsiders notice on arrival at Tribhuban Incontinental Airport these days is that commandos guarding the perimeter have been issued shoot-on-sight orders at all departing passengers.



WHAT IF I AM ITCHY?

Despite such heavy security, one notices that airport staff risk life and limb to scratch themselves in public. In fact, if we didn’t already have a national past-time (protesting regression), attending to a bodily itch could well be it. I know from personal experience that in some primitive cultures scratching and sniffing private parts in public is frowned upon. Not so here. Nepal is a safe haven for itchy persons and visitors can scratch away to their heart’s content and no one will bat an eyelid. In fact, one can poke around in one’s toolbox without let or hindrance in most public sector places in Nepal, beginning with the arrival parking area.

WHAT IS NEPALI TIME?

Nepal Standard Time is plus-minus two hours of whatever is indicated on your wristwatch. Nepali Time is elastic and it is one of the few places in the solar system where Einstein’s Theory of Space Time Continuum can actually be scientifically demonstrated since time can actually be observed to bend. This is why Nepalis will never do today what should have been done three weeks ago. They will wait till next Friday, according to shaman Ashok Bajracharya. In fact, we are a nation state in such an advanced stage of repose that we will not do in this life what can be accomplished in our next.

WHAT ARE THE RULES ON TIPPING?

Yes, I’m afraid you’d ask that. Tipping is mandatory in Nepal and, unlike most other places, is given *before* a job is done. For instance, if one is a convicted international narco-terrorist, one tips the judges to let one off. Nepalis aren’t so crude as to call it a bribe, we call it a Facilitation Fee. Never, never offer a bribe with the left hand since it is considered an impure part of the body. When offered a bribe it is considered rude if the recipient doesn’t eat it immediately. In fact, a common form of greeting in the corridors of power in Nepal is: “*Ghuskhanu bho?*” Luckily, you don’t have to answer, it’s just like saying “Good morning”.

CAN I DRINK THE WATER?

Ha! Ha! Ha! What water?

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