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Q. How will 2062 compare with the year that has just ended?



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Q. Would lifting the emergency be a good idea?


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What about us?



Pampha Bhandari of Makwanpur with her two children, Pooja and Puspa, at the Maoist victims' refugee camp at Tundikhel where 300 families have now spent a week to draw the government's attention to their plight.

LAXMI NARAYAN MAHARJAN

Four years later, political parties are still asking: what next?

ANALYSIS by
SHIVA GAUNLE

King Gyanendra may have isolated himself internationally but within the country there hasn't been much concerted opposition to his move.

The people in the country's 4,000 VDCs have suffered nine years of violence and they were told to choose between Maoism and monarchy. The microcosm of this despair of rural Nepal is now at Tundikhel for the rulers in the capital to see.

Partly, the lack of dissent is due to the emergency. The royal commission has politicians in its crosshairs: Prakash Man Singh was forcibly arrested from his

home on Thursday. Sher Bahadur Deuba has also defied summons, and commission sources told us he may be arrested soon.

Ninety days after 1 February, it is clear which way the king wants to go. But the parties seem to be waffling. They could chart a 'third way' but are stuck where they were four years ago. Leaders of the four parties that stand for reinstatement of parliament finally met at Girija Prasad Koirala's house on Thursday and decided to invite NC-D and the UML to join in.

But it's not enough for the parties to say they want democracy restored, they have to show a pragmatic way forward. Koirala spent two months in house arrest and Jhala Nath Khanal

was in hiding but neither seems to have come up with any new ideas during that time.

This week, zonal and regional administrators assumed their posts to take royal rule to the countryside, asserting their determination to "fulfill His Majesty's wishes". Their first job is to monitor and coordinate security activities and start preparing for municipal elections.

Most UML leaders are still in jail, there are no indications of either civil liberties being restored or the emergency being lifted by next week. The ban on mobile phones, news on FM and cable tv news channels stays. Phone lines of politicians and journalists are still selectively

cut. Officials seem to believe that agreeing to international human rights monitors should placate donors for now. But a UN resolution in Geneva on Wednesday called for the immediate restoration of political and civil rights.

In the rest of the country, the 11-day nationwide strike ended but the Maoists are enforcing regional bandas and blockades. Most schools haven't reopened after new year's day and those that did were bombed. Instead of targeting the Maoists who are creating this mayhem, state security seems preoccupied (except for actions in Khara and Bardiya) with harassing politicians, activists and the press. ●

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SAVING US FROM OURSELVES

When revolutionaries start to bomb classrooms, it turns Mao Zedong's dictum 'to rebel is a right' into a farce. Such an awesome display of bravery: to treat the most vulnerable section of society as your enemy! And the only reason the comrades are able to get away with it is the equally shameful absence of the state and its failure to provide quality education for the masses.

Even the victims of Maoist atrocities have given up on relief and are camped out in Tundikhel for the past week from sheer desperation. How can a government that can't even win the hearts and minds of people who have been brutalised by Maoists expect to get the rest of the public on its side?

The outside world is getting concerned about our lack of concern. When the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights who has been



LAXMI NARAYAN MAHARJAN

involved in high-profile war crimes trials comes calling it must mean things are seriously wrong here. The UN has set up a bureau of its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Kathmandu. This week, the UN's special adviser to Jan Egeland, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, was in the country to assess the situation of the internally displaced. Egeland is said to be acutely concerned about deteriorating conditions in Nepal. The fact that his advisers are here during the Darfur crisis shows just how seriously Nepal is viewed.

On Friday, Prof Walter Kalin, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced People completes his fact-finding mission to Nepal during which he visited Kapilbastu, Dailekh and Biratnagar.

These visits come just as the UN Human Rights Commission on Wednesday adopted a resolution allowing monitors and also called on King Gyanendra to reinstate all political and civil rights. All this adds up to rising international concern that the conflict in Nepal is spiralling out of control and the consequences will be untold human misery.

Yet, in official circles we detect a sense of denial. Instead of addressing urgent humanitarian issues, there is knee-jerk defensiveness and wounded pride. Instead of slinking into our xenophobic shell, it will be better to launch pre-emptive intervention to save us from ourselves.

Both the government and the Maoists have said they respect international humanitarian law. The test for the government is how effectively it is going to help the million or so Nepalis displaced by the conflict. The Maoists have to realise that they can't welcome the UN human rights monitoring mission, call for UN mediation to the conflict and in the same breath bomb primary schools.

China's Davos

The Boao Forum takes an Asian perspective on the world

BOAO—Sitting in Nepal, it is hard to gauge China's phenomenal growth. But here in China's eastern seaboard, the changes are visible everywhere.

The booming cities, huge investments in infrastructure, industrial parks that export to the world: the country is being transformed as no other in

GUEST COLUMN
Ambica Shrestha



modern history and at the rate things are changing, our northern neighbour is going to be the world's second largest economy by 2020. China's exports have grown ten fold to \$250 billion since 1980, it is now the second largest recipient of foreign direct investment after the United States.

China's achievement has translated into political influence globally. But Beijing is not trying to compete with Washington on military force projection, it is concentrating

on 'soft power' which analysts have described as a combination of national prestige, economic clout and cultural presence.

One way China is focusing world attention on itself is through events like the Boao Forum for Asia, its own 'Davos'. The annual meeting in this scenic resort on Hainan island is attended by movers and shakers from across Asia and the world.

It is an opportunity for China to exercise its economic and political diplomacy. Boao has a distinctly unwestern, Asian outlook and tries to counterbalance the strategic predominance of America on the world stage. China's strong stand on non-interference in the affairs of other countries is appealing to many.

There is a different focus every year at Boao. In 2002 it was the world economic

downturn after 9/11, in 2003 it was Asian financial cooperation and security. Last year the forum discussed economic regionalisation in Asia and this weekend it will look at enhancing dialogue among Asian entrepreneurs for intra-Asian trade and investment.

The sessions will zero in on two main topics—international cooperation in energy development and monetary policy. CEOs of multinationals and Asian corporate leaders will look into the internationalisation of Asian enterprises, the governance and competitiveness of Asian

corporations in the world market, equity markets and companies' social accountability amid economic growth. The

Forum will also see two symposia on property development and motor vehicle manufacturing.

The program from 22-24



LETTERS

MOU

The signing of MoU with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Editorial: 'Understanding the memorandum', #243) is nothing to be happy about. Nepali human rights activists and western diplomats who think they pursued a rightful cause for Nepal suffer from their own personal aggrandisement. They have scant knowledge on how the international system of human rights works. You in the media also have the habit of looking into things in surprisingly ignorant ways. If you think Nepal has become Somalia, Sudan, Congo, Haiti or Iraq, needing such intervention, then God help you. We have a democratic constitution. We still have a functioning democratic mindset, despite the recent chill, and civil society is more powerful here than in most other places. These factors will guarantee that extremism will never rule. There is also a system of independent judiciary and rule of law which these insurgency-affected countries will have to work for at least two decades to achieve, if not more. Our economy is a guarantee against any further slide into lawlessness. We certainly need UN assistance to meet the crisis situation but the UN OHCHR field presence is not a requisite model for human rights protection in a country like

Nepal. And it doesn't have a better ability than those who are already doing the job. By bringing the OHCHR to Nepal, these petty activists have delivered a serious blow to the National Human Rights Commission and many institutions working in the country to deal with the crisis situation. With the takeover of power by the king, the human rights sensitivity of the Royal Nepali Army has been further strengthened. Local human rights organisations will now have to compete with the OHCHR for money and resources, and will have to deal with an ignorant mass of foreign consultants, who will just end up living in Nepal as tourists. It is sorry to see that we Nepalis know the problem so well but not the solutions. Now it looks like the solution is costlier than the problem.

Sita Dahal, Australia

- Haven't we learnt our lessons of what bloated, overpaid, ignorant UN bureaucrats can do with the waste and confusion they sowed in Congo, East Timor and Haiti? Or stealing money from food for oil like in Iraq? Do we want Nepal to become another hotspot in which fat cat UN types stand idly by with their hands folded?

Oscar Sedlak, email

- Anne Cooper's interview 'One of the biggest press freedom crises in the world'

(#243) misrepresents the scale of the press freedom curbs in Nepal. All she needs to do is refer to *The Worst Of The Worst: The World's Most Repressive Societies* published by the United Nations this year to see how much ahead Nepal is compared to other countries in terms of press freedom. In the same report you will find that Belarus blocks Internet sites that is critical of the government or suspends independent newspapers, in Burma journalists have been sentenced to death for reporting something that the government did not like, in Cuba reporters have been sentenced for years for 'minor infractions'. Do you see these in Nepal? Does Nepal have a problem with allowing absolute press freedom? Perhaps it does but if the freedom of press was as bad as Cooper thinks it is, or one of the worst in the world as she puts it, I don't think her comments would be allowed to be printed in the first place.

Sushil Bogati, Seattle, USA

CK LAL

I have long since given up reading CK Lal, since I found so much of what he wrote to be wrong-headed (eg: India is a lackey of the US?). But the subheader on his State of the State column ('Model multilateralism', #242) piqued my interest. Having read the piece, and as a fellow human being and expat in Nepal, let me say thank you to CK

Lal for giving your pen and your position to express those thoughts.

Charles Sydnor, email

MAHARA

I suggest that you offer a correction. Surely your translation of the BBC Nepali Service interview with Maoist spokesman Krishna Bahadur Mahara should have appeared on your back page?

But more seriously, this was an exemplary piece of obfuscation, the skill with which Mr Mahara avoided answering any question, failed to provide any meaningful information, skirted around challenging probing questions and avoided facing up to the thrust of the argument was, quite frankly, superb. A perfect politician's performance. The BBC should now get him on Hardtalk.

Name withheld, Kathmandu

NEPALI TIME

Abha Eli Phoboo's 'Adjusting Nepali time' (#243) was timely. Here is a suggestion: Bikram Sambat's first day, 1 Baisakh, can be moved each year by one day so that it ultimately catches up with 1 April in the Georgian calendar in 14 years. Our Baisakh will then perfectly coincide with April and other months will match accordingly and days can be gradually adjusted to Gregorian. Meanwhile, there is

April will also look at the new role of Asia, Asia-Europe cooperation, critical business and growth challenges in Asia, economic growth and entrepreneurs, as well as addressing the needs of countries hit by the Asian tsunami in December.

The guest list for this year's forum include His Majesty King Gyanendra, the head of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Jia Qingling, Singapore's senior leader Lee Kuan Yew, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi, Australian Prime Minister John Howard and Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel.

Former Philippine president, Fidel V Ramos is the president of the Boao Forum and will also attend as will former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Pakistan's former Prime Minister, Farooq Leghari. Business leaders from all over the world, senior Chinese executives and scholars will be in Boao accompanied by 500 journalists.

Nepal has been an annual participant at the Boao over the years and late King Birendra had addressed the Forum's inaugural ceremony in 2001. This year, the Nepali delegation will be led by King Gyanendra with Vice-chairman Kirtinidhi Bista also in attendance. This is His Majesty's first visit abroad after 1 February and will be an opportunity to clarify the situation in Nepal to various world leaders. His Majesty is due to address the plenary session of the conference and hold talks with the Chinese President Hu Jintao. The meetings are expected to strengthen Nepal-China relations. ●

Ambica Shrestha is a tourism entrepreneur and social worker who has been attending the Boao Forum for Asia since 2001.

Winning back friends

Poor and undemocratic states can't expect respect at international fora

Shunned by benefactors, ignored by well-wishers and barely acknowledged by big neighbours, Nepal is isolated as never before.

King Gyanendra expressed his disappointment at this in his *Time* magazine interview. But there is equal and opposite dissatisfaction from the outside world. Even Nepal's

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



longstanding friends have publicly rebuked our rulers. The fact is that in today's world no one likes to be associated with a regime perceived to be anti-democratic. Despite insistent references to 'the alternative to democracy being democracy', few buy it and Nepal has a serious image problem.

Not that the reality is too far removed from the image. Nepal is a constitutional monarchy but our king has chosen to be chief executive. We are supposed to have parliamentary democracy but there has been no parliament for three years. The prime minister's prerogative is paramount in a parliamentary system, but we don't even have a premier. With the Chief Justice speaking his mind at public fora, the separation of powers is in jeopardy. Checks and balances are becoming dysfunctional as newly-created posts and offices begin to interfere in the functioning of statutory bodies. Nepal's head of state isn't just the head of government, he is being projected by hardcore monarchists as the very state itself.

The spectre of extra-constitutional appointees



Asian and African leaders including Indonesian president Sukarno and India's Jawaharlal Nehru at the historic Bandung Conference in 1955.

mocking the constitution in public is unlikely to make horrified diplomats change their views. Unfortunately, whoever makes our foreign policy these days doesn't seem to have realised the gravity of the situation. King Gyanendra will be among mostly like-minded leaders in Jakarta, Hainan and Singapore this week. But with the events dominated by formal speeches and the media distracted by Sino-Japanese tensions, it is difficult to imagine the Nepali diplomatic team notching up major diplomatic breakthroughs.

The royal trip to the Boao Forum for Asia should be more substantive. The theme of the fourth conference this year is 'Asia searching for Win-Win: New Role for Asia'. Executives of Fortune 500 companies eyeing Asian markets will be the stars of this show, rubbing shoulders with the likes of forum chairman Fidel V Ramos, Lee Kuan Yew, Bob Hawke and John Howard.

We may take ourselves very seriously here, but the cover story in *Time* notwithstanding, Nepal

will not be the centre of international attention. This is a party where the successful look to the future, not at a failing state drifting back to medievalism. Apart from countries that have a direct stake in Nepal, the only international players whose interests in Nepal is on the rise are relief and humanitarian organisations.

The international standing of a country hinges on the relationship between the ruling regime's legitimacy (how it's formed), its efficacy (what it does), its effectiveness (its ability to do things that it wants to do) and its socio-cultural and economic-military might. Poor countries that pursue undemocratic policies, demonstrate an utter lack of respect for fundamental freedoms and universal human rights, and have no patience for dissidents can't expect respect. Burma, Cuba, North Korea and Sudan are all great countries with proud histories. So is Nepal. If we don't want to be treated like them we have to do things differently at home. ●

MEDIAWATCH

Despite signs of relaxation in Kathmandu, crackdowns and intimidation of journalists is continuing.

- Kathmandu CDO summoned Surya Thapa on 18 April and interrogated him for the seventh time over a cartoon that appeared in his paper, *Budhabar*. The district administration said it was acting on orders from the Home Ministry that action be taken against *Budhabar* and *Himal Khabarpatrika*.

- The Supreme Court on Wednesday issued a show cause notice to the government asking for clarification on the ban on news on FM stations by Monday. FNJ and Communication Corner had filed a public interest litigation suit challenging the ban enforced after 1 February.

- Last week's issue of *The Economist* that carries the article 'Himalayan horrors' has been seized,

according to news agents.

- Six journalists working for two Dharan dailies, *Blast Times* and the *Morning Post*, were arrested while covering political protests on 8 April. They were released later after being warned not to report on pro-democracy demonstrations. The day's issues of the two papers were seized and their offices locked out.

- Bheri FM news editor Kamalraj Regmi was transferred on 10 April to a prison in Surkhet after being held in custody for 12 days.

- A three-month detention warrant was issued to *Tanahun Awaj* sub-editor Robin Poudel for covering a pro-democracy protest on 8 April.

- Landline phones of leading politicians and some prominent journalists remain cut, and there are no signs of the cell phone network being reactivated any time soon.



no sole authority in the Hindu religion, so it will be very difficult for the public to accept changes made by unauthorised astrologers.

Gyaneswor Pokharel, West Virginia, USA

- What does Abha Eli Phoboo mean by 'Nepali new year on 1 Baisakh'? I am confused because 1 Baisakh is also celebrated in many countries as New Year's Day. People in Tamil Nadu, Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam celebrate new year on 14 April too. Were they all celebrating

the Nepali new year or what? She also reports that the lunar calendar of the 'Newari' Nepal Sambat was specific to only one community. As far as I know, the Nepal Sambat calendar is based on the same moon orbiting over our heads. For example, full moon day according to Nepal Sambat falls on the same day as in other lunar calendars. The Newars do not have their own full moon days that are different from the rest of the galaxy.

Bhai Kaji Bhaju, Kathmandu

WISE MEN

I refer to Ashutosh Tiwari's Strictly Business column, ('Accidental Businessman', #243) on Karna Sakya reviewing Sakya's book, *Soch*, and why 'Karna Sakya's positive outlook needs to (be) spread'.

An admirable and revealing predecessor to such books is Krishna Bahadur Amatya's *Sansmaran* (Reminiscences) published seven years ago. Amatya represents the dwindling tribe of the previous generation of Nepali (also read Newar) entrepreneurs who operated, diversified and survived in Kathmandu during the stifling autocratic Rana regime in Nepal. One instance: Amatya mentions a

fellow Newar businessman called Gyan Man being subjected to the harsh physical reaction of the then Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher because the jealous ruler happened to see him riding a polished and spacious Victoria in Calcutta! Gyan Man died shortly after the debilitating experience. The government's attitude and practices, then as well as now, can be compared by reading *Sansmaran*, which is finely produced and printed with no glaring typos and bad copy-editing, alongside *Soch*. And both must be read between the lines at places and one must see the fine print as well.

Amatya must be in his 80s now while Karna Sakya is in his early 60s. The 20-year gap in the active lives of Kathmandu's two prominent citizens alone is worth observing by reading their two books in tandem. This way, among many others, one can discern the wise men of Nepal who are in a fading minority while most of our present leaders are poseurs as wise guys. Today's rudderless Nepali youth have their heroes in their own land and can learn from the likes of Amatya and Sakya, in that order, who're still kicking and having their opinions circulated.

Sansmaran was read out and reviewed by Prakash Sayami on Sagarmatha FM when the book was freshly out of the press. Perhaps *Soch* can also be disseminated in

like manner, provided the present dispensation in the country is not inconvenienced in any way whatsoever? After all, we need 'moral science' lessons once in a while, especially when Nepal is hurt in every way for hundreds of years already.

Peter J Karthak, The Kathmandu Post

- In medicine we now talk about practicing evidence-based treatment. Likewise, Fareed Zakaria says in his relevant, ground breaking new book *The Future of Freedom* that almost every democratic success in the developing world in the past 50 years have taken place under a liberal authoritarian regime. If this is true, could Nepal be on the right track? For almost 15 years, I think we have had a sham democracy which fostered disenchantment and violence. Importantly, there were zero financial benefits for ordinary citizens, regardless of whatever other rights we may have obtained.

Buddha Basnyat, MD, Kathmandu

CORRECTION

In 'Tiger at the Top' (#243), the last paragraph should have said Tiger Woods suffered a majors drought after having won the US Open 2002.



AARTI BASNYAT
in JOMSOM

This time of year, Jomsom should be bustling with trekkers headed down from Thorung La and waiting for flights to Pokhara and pilgrims walking up to Muktinath. This year, all you have are tumbleweeds blown up the dusty banks of the Kali Gandaki by the

fierce afternoon wind. Lodge owners here don't remember things being as bad as this, even in the autumn of 2001. There used to be up to 800 trekkers moving up and down through Jomsom during peak season. These days, there are barely a 100 tourists. If it is any consolation, Pokhara is even more deserted. In fact, the big difference with

previous years is that the tourists who are here seem to have skipped Pokhara completely or just overnighted there. The lodge owners are competing against each other for the stragglers. Undercutting is rife and trekkers have learnt to bargain hard and bring prices down. Jomsom is the air head for trekkers going to Mustang or pilgrims visiting Muktinath and

one wonders why there has been a drop. This is not a Maoism hotspot, it is a tourism hotspot. The stupendous north face of Nilgiri looms over the town, the new airport is clean and efficient, the people are friendly and the food is wholesome. But tourism has hit rock bottom, and so have the prices. Every trekking guidebook about Nepal recommends that tourists bargain because prices tend to be hiked. But this does not refer to the food and lodging rates. "Everyone wants to bargain nowadays," says Pramila Gauchan of Xanadu Hotel in Jomsom, "earlier it used to be only Israeli tourists but now it's the Americans and the Europeans as well. The other day I was shocked when tourists came to my hotel and said they would pay for food and drinks but wanted the rooms for free." Maya Thakali, a member of the Upper House, tells us, "This lack of tourism has affected Jomsom drastically and not only has tourism gone down but due to the lack of tourists even agriculture is suffering. People are not able to cope and so look away when underhanded tactics are used to incite tourists to their lodges." At a time when many hotel owners can barely meet running costs, this is suicide. Gauchan remembers that 15 years ago, she could run a small restaurant easily without having to bother about bargaining or making ends

meet, a time when she would barely have time to sit down and eat, much less worry about having tourists come and eat. And Along the Annapurna trail, hoteliers had agreed not to let prices slide. "The competition is killing," says Gauchan, "everyone is trying to steal guests from each other." They line up outside the airport waiting to pounce at the first possible guest, offering rooms at impossible prices to try and make up their costs. "It's bad for business and they won't be able to keep it up in the long run," Technically, the Annapurna Conservation Area Project fixes all lodge and food prices and this system worked well from Manang to Jomsom. Now, with the numbers falling, it is a cut-throat business. To resuscitate the ailing tourism business, Jomsom Mountain Resort is now trying to promote local tourism, targeting Nepalis and Indians. "Domestic tourism is picking up and they even tip better," says Vinaya K Singh of Jomsom Mountain Resort, "and we are promoting packages to incite local tourists to come to Jomsom." (see below) Because of the army's mountain warfare training camp nearby, security in Jomsom is tight and an unofficial curfew begins at eight each night. But it is the strikes and blockades on the Pokhara trail that affect Jomsom more than what happens here. Gauchan adds: "Most of us have managed to stay afloat." ●

“Get on the next flight to Jomsom”



ANUP PRAKASH

Vinaya Singh has been senior manager at Jomsom Mountain Resort since it started in 2000. He spoke to *Nepali Times* about falling arrivals and what can be done about it.

Nepali Times: Things look awfully quiet here in Jomsom.
Vinaya K Singh: When we set up Jomsom Mountain Resort here in 2000, the flow of tourists was very good. The place sold itself. Now, it's slowed down for reasons obvious to everyone. We have been looking at how to increase visitors to Jomsom again. Cosmic Air helped us with daily flights and other agencies are also promoting Jomsom. The profit isn't for us only but also for the local economy here. But the drop in arrivals has made even day-to-day operations difficult.
But Jomsom looks perfectly peaceful.
Yes, it is the bandas and blockades in Pokhara and Kathmandu that affect the travel plans of potential tourists. Trekkers face problems in Pokhara and turn back. They don't want to come all the way here in case they get stuck. Mustang is a Maoist-free area and we have to spread the word about it.
What about domestic tourism?
Since we weren't able to get tourists from abroad to visit Nepal, we began promoting local tourism. We are targeting Nepalis with packages for new year, Muktinath Darshan and other festivals. From Kathmandu to Pokhara and on to Muktinath is a popular package.

What kind of occupancy rate do you have these days?
We are running on five or six percent but we want to at least double that with special packages and promotions in tie-ups with airlines. The new year Jomsom Jamming was an example of fun events to bring people up here to sample the great scenery and we hope that once they come, they will keep coming. We have also launched campaigns in Germany, Singapore and India.
Do you at least break even?
I don't think it is a big secret that everyone here is running at a loss. We are barely able to stay afloat. The packages are priced at minimum profit, so you need the numbers to be able to generate revenue.
What would help turn things around?
Well, first we need flights that are regular and the frequency of flights have to be increased. Once the road to Jomsom is finished traffic will automatically rise. The potential of Jomsom being the next destination after Pokhara is real. Also, we need to spread the word about what a great destination Jomsom is, there is great accommodation and you don't really have to rough it. Get on the next flight to Jomsom!

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HONDA

WANNA FLY?

Mission statement

Interview with UN OHCHR Secretary General, Nicholas Howen by Yubaraj Ghimire in *Samaya*, 21 April

समय

What is your view on the MoU between the government and the OHCHR?

We look at it positively. This was a response to the pressure that was building up about the human rights situation in Nepal. In that respect this is a step forward. Now the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees will have to be the guarantor of the agreement.

What will be the mission's main activities?

The main goal is to improve the human rights situation. We have made it clear that this entails the immediate release of political prisoners and we hope to immediately find out the condition of detention of prisoners in barracks. The mission will consist of international personnel and experts and will begin its monitoring work right away.

Will the mission also look at the human rights violations that have taken place post February First?

The mission will be looking at human rights violations related to the conflict. But its mandate covers the overall human rights situation. Certainly, we believe that the preservation of human rights is more possible in a democratic society.

When will you begin the work?

Very soon.

How will you take your work forward?

It is important to be clear that the mission will not be superseding Nepali laws. It won't have the authority to prosecute or take anyone to court. The mission is here to make Nepali laws themselves more effective and ensure the rule of law. But it will have the mandate to investigate serious human

rights violations anywhere in Nepal. Especially after 1 February we have found that the National Human Rights Commission and other groups have not been allowed to work. We hope this will now change.

There have been reports of the presence of army and police personnel in the Nepali delegation to Geneva. What is your view?

We are aware that army and police officials were here. But they couldn't play a very effective role against human rights. More than what they did in Geneva, we are interested in the security of human rights activists in Nepal. Last month, in Nepal I met the Home Minister to guarantee the safety of human rights activists. I didn't come away with credible assurances to that effect. Nepali human rights activists played a laudable role in Geneva and they are in the process of returning to Nepal. We will be monitoring their security very carefully. Their safety must be assured.

Do you think the Maoists will take an agreement between you and the government seriously?

This is a big challenge and a test for them. After all, they have been calling for UN mediation. If the Maoists don't cooperate, it will cast doubt on their credibility. We hope that the Maoists will help in the investigation of human rights violations just

as the army and the security forces who are bound by this agreement.

How sure were you that the MoU would be signed?

The government waited till the last moment. It came only after Item 9 resolution was about to be tabled. But at a time when there were widespread reports of human rights violations by both sides, it was the government's duty to address the problem.



KIRAN PANDAY

Student activists from the UML at a torch rally at Naya Baneswor on Monday.

“I won't return”

.....
Kantipur, 16 April

कान्तिपुर

He was drawn to Nepal by its mountains and valleys and it brought him back for the second time. But now, this lover of Nepal says he will never return to Nepal.

“This is my last visit to your country,” said the Russian trekker, Sergei Kyamikali with moist eyes from his hospital bed, “I will never return.” Kyamikali is a radio engineer in Moscow and had come with a friend to Nepal for a trekking trip and was on his way to Kodari in a taxi last week. The taxi ran over a Maoist landmine at Chehere.

“I will tell the world about what the Maoists did to us,” he told *Kantipur*, “and I will tell them not to go to Nepal.” The explosion wounded the 43-year-old tourist gravely on both feet, although his friend and the driver were ok. He was immediately airlifted to the army hospital in Chhauni where he is still recovering. “If the army hadn't airlifted me, I'd not be speaking to you now,” he said.

Kyamikali's wife and two children are waiting for him to get well enough to fly back to Moscow and the Russian Embassy is taking care of arrangements. “My wounded body is in Nepal but my heart is in Moscow,” said Kyamikali, who says he can't wait to get back.

Kyamikali reserves his strongest words for the Maoists. “What had we done to them that we deserved to be bombed?” he asked. The tourism industry, reeling under a serious drop in arrivals, is worried that news of this unprecedented attack on tourists will make things worse.

Terrorising schools

.....
Editorial in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 19 April

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Schools across Nepal were already affected by the conflict. Far from being ‘zones of peace’ they had been turned into war zones for forced recruitment of children, digging bunkers and trenches in school grounds or turned into barracks. Repeated threats and intimidation had already affected school semesters and one-fourth of the classes haven't been held. Now the Maoist's student wing has ordered all private schools closed with the demand that they all be nationalised or turned into cooperatives. It is true that there are complaints about high fees in private schools but that is no

reason to close them all down. At a time when the quality of government schools have been dropping and being affected by the conflict, private schools had been offering a quality alternative. Nepal's schools are now war zones, children are being terroised, forcibly recruited and their classrooms turned into barracks. The latest threats have increased the exodus of Nepali children into India. Aside from the economic cost, this will affect their sense of belonging and narrow their sense of nationalism. The Maoists must seriously re-evaluate their own actions and desist from such irrational and self-destructive acts and leave the school system alone. They must stop the destruction and help build Nepal's future.

Royal rejection

.....
Dristi, 19 April

दृष्टि

The royal palace has rejected the Asian Development Bank's proposal to bring a law through ordinance for the transfer of the management of the Nepal Water Supply Corporation. The rejection comes as a big blow to the donors' desire to enter the drinking water supply business in Kathmandu. For its assistance in the Melamchi water supply project aimed at supplying water to Kathmandu Valley, the ADB had stipulated that the management of the NWSC be privatised. The government had planned to bring an ordinance for the privatisation of the management in a bid to avoid legal hassles. The bank and the government had sent the ordinance to the palace but it was returned because it didn't clearly state details like the fee for drinking water. A revised proposal is being readied.

Jaleswor jail

.....
Kantipur, 20 April

कान्तिपुर

Prisoners in Mahottari district have launched a campaign to reform their prison in Jaleswor. The prison now has twice the number of inmates it was designed for, there is acute lack of drinking water, sanitation and even beds. Since the jail administration failed to act, the prisoners decide to do something on their own. A health program of an NGO run by human rights activist, Ram Adhar Kapar, was their source of inspiration. Kapar is himself in jail now and initiated the program.



Happy new year 2017 BS.

हिमाल *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 14-29 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“(Nepal) is a very serious humanitarian issue for the UN. It is very serious protection issue.”

Dennis McNamara, special adviser to the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator on Internal Displacement in an interview with *IRIN* after his visit to Nepal this week.

Nepali students fleeing to India

Himal Khabarpatrika,
14-29 April

हिमाल

NEPALGANJ—By bombing and threatening schools with closure the Maoists and their fraternal student organisation have once more shown themselves to be an irrational anti-people force. This is not the first time they have threatened to close private schools but an overwhelming public opposition had forced them to back down and this is probably what will happen this time too. In the past, these threats have been linked to extortion drives from schools. Schools that pay them off adequately are spared bombings, however poor their reputation in society.

This time, the effect of the threats is seen more outside the capital and in remote districts. And if the Maoists

want to present themselves as a responsible force in front of the people they have to call off the closure because higher secondary schools are providing special services in remote areas where there are no colleges. There are now about 10,500 private schools all over the country and there are 1.7 million students enrolled in them and some 300,000 teachers and staff are employed. There are another 350,000 students in private higher secondary schools with 20,000 teachers and employees. The Maoist threats have affected 2,300,000 people directly.

There have been bomb attacks on schools that were planning to defy the Maoist threats of closure in Banke, Dang and Nepalganj. The private school association, PABSON, has decided to keep schools open. "The reason for

the present crisis is not the private education systems. Teachers, students, guardians and human rights organisations will use non-violent methods to keep schools open," says PABSON's Hemraj Sharma. This defiance would work if the state acted to protect the schools but it can't defend all schools against attacks. A teacher in Nepalganj says he can't open his school with such risks even though the government is forcing schools to keep their doors open. Some schools have been threatened with cancellation of their registration if they don't open. "We are caught in the middle," says Keshar Bahadur Ale of Gorkha United Public School.

Here in Banke, none of the schools have opened after new year's day. Many haven't even taken in new enrollments because of Maoist threats. "It's



just too risky," says one teacher. The parents and guardians of the children are taking their children across the border to India to study. Parents are even pulling out children from schools in the capital and sending them to boarding schools in India. "There is a real danger that our schools will be empty at the rate our students are going to India," says Bijaya Lama of PABSON in Nepalganj, whose school

Brightland was bombed this week by Maoists.

Of the 2,500 students enrolled in Simant School and Radha Krishna Inter College in the border town of Rupedia in India, 70 percent of the children are now Nepali. Says the principal of Radha Krishna: "In the past two years there has been an unprecedented flood of Nepali children."

Nilambar Acharya
.....
Political analyst Nilambar Acharya in *Deshantar*, 10 April

देशान्तर

There is no dispute about the current state of the political situation in the country. When the king himself says that the democratic process will return to the country within three years, this is a clear admittance of there being no democracy in the country now. But this is a situation that our constitution never envisaged or accepted.



The government has been formed under the chairmanship of the king. The government is in place, not just without the participation of political parties committed to democracy but also at a time when their leaders have been arrested and deprived of their basic rights. The 1990 constitution disregarded the principle allowing the king to take any step on his own judgment. The spirit of the 1990 People's Movement was that the people should be sovereign through their representatives, either good or bad. Sometimes, the people did end up selecting bad rulers. But to rule and decide the nation's fate is the people's work, not of bodies they did not elect.

The constitution recognises three kinds of kings: one who works in line with the

recommendation of the council of ministers, one who looks after the affairs of the Narayanhiti Palace and one who works with the suggestions of the bodies outside the purview of the ministers' council but is within the constitutional domain. We need to accept that the people can rule through representatives. Such representatives are political parties. If their representatives do not perform well, they can refuse to re-elect them. What must also be understood is that the constitution does not allow the king to impose a state of emergency, it is for the council of ministers to take the decision. In the present context, the state of emergency was declared after the king sacked the Deuba government and before the new government was formed under his chairmanship. We can't move ahead without reactivating the constitution.

To do so, we need to establish the rights of the people, parties, press and other organisations. This applies to the people's freedom of movement, communication and rights to expression—not just the freedom of supportive expression but also the freedom to express opposition. These freedoms and rights stem from this very constitution and without returning to it Nepal's problems can't be solved.

Democracy
.....
Kamal Koirala in *Roadmap Weekly*, 7 April

रोडम्याप

Democracy is not just an ideology, it is a lifestyle. Democracy is such a popular word that it is dog-eared with use. Even Stalin used to call his regime a 'people's democracy'. Totalitarian countries of eastern Europe all called themselves 'democratic'. After his military coup, Pakistan's General Ayub Khan called his government one espousing 'basic democracy'. The word 'socialism' was similarly in vogue; Jawaharlal Nehru liked to

call himself a socialist and BP Koirala called his capitalist multi-party democracy 'democratic socialism'. Even Hitler, who was responsible for the deaths of more than six million innocent citizens, was the leader of the National Socialist (Nazi) party. Here in Nepal, for 30 years, our own authoritarian Panchayat system celebrated 7 Falgun as 'National Democracy Day'. None of these were truly democratic or truly socialist.

Just because you call yourself democratic, you don't become one. The human body is made up of many organs, if one fails the others are affected. Similarly, a democracy is made up of many institutions. Democracy is not just an ideology put forward by someone, it is the result of millennia of political evolution starting perhaps from ancient Greece. Along the way it picked up elements of British parliamentarianism, the American declaration of independence, was inspired by Voltaire, Rousseau, John Locke, Jefferson. And this evolution hasn't stopped, democracy is still learning and developing.

Around the world, there are different kinds of democracy: Japan, India, Philippines, Britain, Australia, America all have different models but they essentially share a few common elements: minimum basic individual freedoms, you can't detain someone until proven guilty, you can't arrest anyone without cause, you can't force anyone to change his thoughts and beliefs. Democracy is about freedom but not just about freedom. It must be the same freedom equally to everyone.

There are many who use the word democracy without knowing its meaning. Most Nepalis know it is a system that is desirable. Everyone in Nepal and outside is saying there is no alternative to democracy in Nepal but do they really mean it? Do they really believe it?

The new Panchayat
.....
Hari Roka in *Nepal*, 17 April

नेपाल

Back to the street after a brief stint in the government, the leadership of the political parties, who have been demanding the reinstatement of the third House of Representatives and formation of an all party government, have now got to see the parade of the regional and zonal administrators. They are also getting to see how one after another former army generals are getting appointed as ambassadors.

International pressure, the superpower countries' two pillar policy of constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy, the ongoing UN meeting on human rights in Geneva, were the hopes for the political leaders that regression would be corrected. Instead, they now have to bear with regional and zonal administrators.

If the developments in the past are any indication, very soon district administrators will also be appointed. News about such appointments are already making the rounds. Based on these appointments, a 'parliament' will be formed. Possibly, the 'parliament' will have representations from all electoral constituencies. But all these parliamentarians will be absolutely nominated. These 'representatives' will form a government. Mainly, these people will remain loyal to the king and they will receive royal orders to remain loyal to the people. All these new structures will have the tenure of 33 months and steps will be taken with the commitment on the constitution of 1991, meaning commitments will be expressed on constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy, just like the way it was done on 1 February.

If the speaker without parliament Taranath Ranabhat becomes the speaker of the nominated parliamentarians, that will be no surprise. But it will take time to destroy a system that has already taken root. Even if they think they have destroyed it, shoots will push up from the soil.

A species of pipal grows on another tree and can sometimes smother the host that it once depended on. In Nepali politics, such pipal trees were never destroyed. Those in power never thought of countering the Maoists politically. What they always thought was: the army will kill off the rebels. What they never thought of was the historical fact that whoever struggles ends up winning the rights. They forgot who fought and won in 1990. They forgot history.

What we see now is that those who were all out to save the central power in the past have now become ambassadors, regional and zonal administrators. After all the state power is class-based. The minute changes that have begun to appear in state politics now indicate such change in the state power. This can be called the new version of the Panchayat.

STUDIO 7

DRAMA PERFORMANCE

BRECHT

THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN

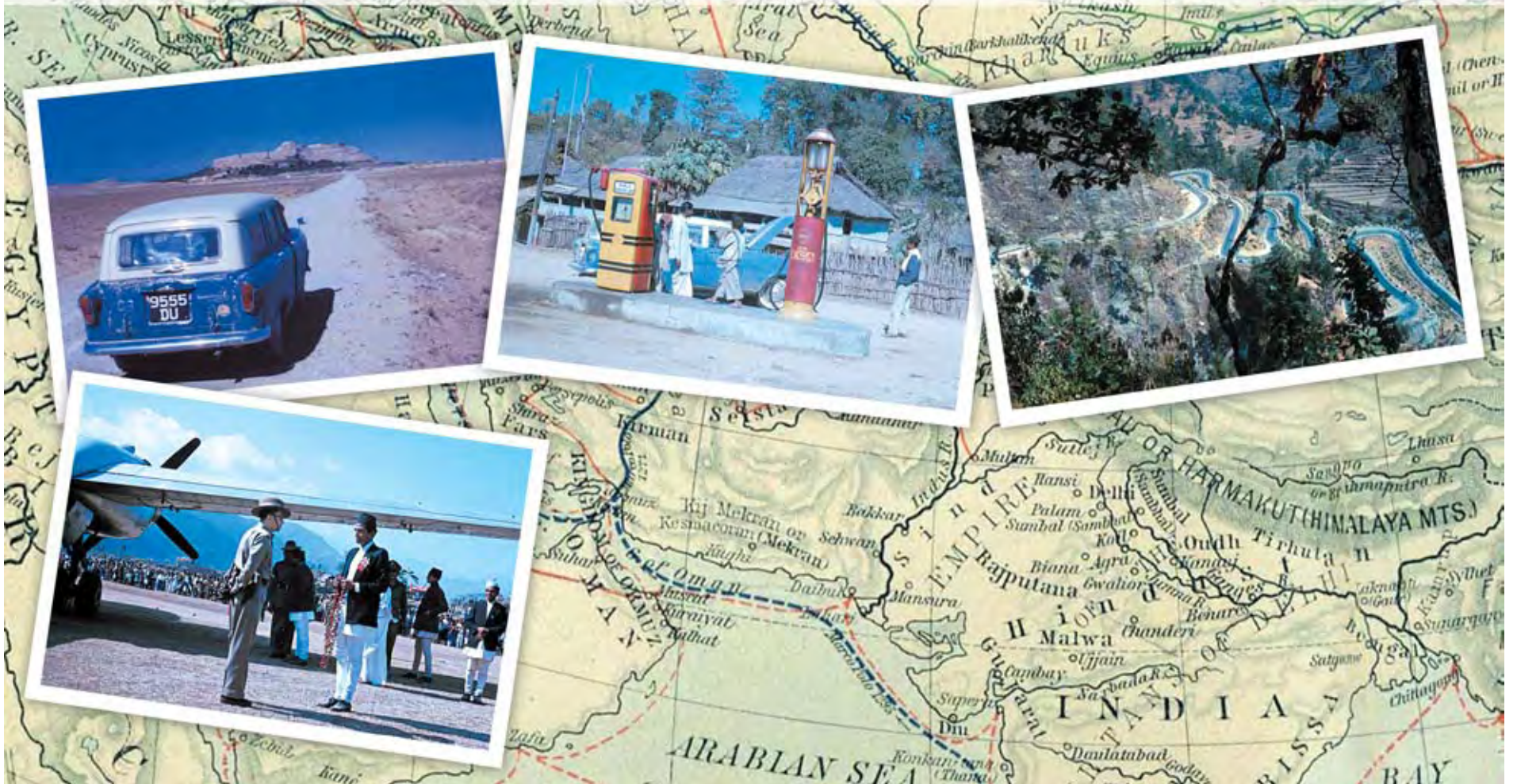
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London-Kathmandu

Forty years later, remembering an overland adventure to Nepal



LIONEL GREGORY

Uile, uile ko palama. That is how Nepali fairy tales start, opening up a vista of magic and mystery in the imagination of children. Despite the changes wrought by time and circumstance, the tradition of story-telling remains.

This is one such story. I had long nurtured the dream of travelling overland from the oldest democracy in the world to the largest. The opportunity to travel from Britain to India along ancient trade routes came in 1962 and I set off in a reliable old Vanguard Estate car 9555DU. The registration number being divisible by seven was considered lucky.

The war had long since ended and as the curtain came down on the British Empire there was an urgent need to keep alive the comradeship that came off the battlefields and channel it towards the spirit of adventure.

We all have our dreams and mine was 'to restore old friendships eroded by time and neglect' using the Commonwealth as the ideal starting point. And although Nepal is not a member of the Commonwealth—although in my view it should be—a journey to India would have been unthinkable without first calling on Nepal where so many of my old friends lived.

By the time I got to Bazagan on the Iranian side of the Turkey-Iran border within sight of Mt Ararat, I was half way there. This was where the United Nations Asian Highway began, following the line of the old Silk Route between Venice and Hanchow. Alexander the Great had come this way in the 4th century and Marco Polo in the 13th. And there was room for me in the 20th!

I often slept under a canopy of stars in the deserts of Iran, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and never dreamt that I might be

harmd in any way or have my possessions stolen. It would not be quite that way today, such is progress. What made me persevere was not only the prospect of meeting many of my old friends in Nepal but also the inspiration I would imbibe from them to



carry me on to my journey's end. These were the thoughts that encouraged me to compose a little verse that would lend itself to juwari treatment when the madals began to play in Pokhara.

9555DU entered Nepal at Raxaul, continued along the single lane asphalt road across the Char Kose Jhari, stopping at Amlekhganj for petrol, then on to Hetauda and up the serpentine hairpin bends of the newly completed Tribhuban Highway.

In Nepal, I was to meet many of the Gurkhas I had known and served with in the army, among them my orderly Pumaram Gurung.

We sang some of the old songs together and they were surprised I could still remember the words and the melodies. Why ever not? These are just a few of the threads that bind old friends and I had travelled 6,000 miles to prove it. The thought pleased them. And if it could be done on a personal level then why not on a national level, sweeping aside bureaucratic

OVERLAND TO NEPAL:
(clockwise from top left)
9555 DU approaches the Afghan border from Iran on its 10,000 km journey from London to Kathmandu 43 years ago
Refuelling at Amlekhganj in Nepal.
The formidable hairpin turns on the newly-built Tribhuban Highway on the road to Kathmandu.
The author photographed King Mahendra being felicitated at Pokhara airport in 1962.

barriers and the polemics that feed on them.

From Kathmandu I flew to Pokhara (the road hadn't been built yet) and managed to take a photograph of King Mahendra being garlanded at the airport under the wing of his plane, a Russian Ilyushin-14. I had met His Majesty when he was Crown Prince at a reception given by the British Ambassador during a visit that my brother of the 10th PMO Gurkhas and I made to Nepal in 1951.

I flew back to Kathmandu, upto Sim Bhanjyang and back to

'The Nepaulese Polka'

When he sailed off to Europe in 1852, Jang Bahadur Rana became the first royalty from the subcontinent to visit Britain.

He had just seized power by massacring nearly the entire Nepali nobility at the Kot. He was suspicious of the intentions of British India and was curious to see if the Angrej were as powerful as they made themselves out to be.

He was taken on conducted tours of cannon factories and naval dockyards and got his hosts to organise military parades. He was suitably impressed with British military might. But it wasn't all business, Jang also savoured the delights of Bohemian London and Paris. He attended operas, lived lavishly and flamboyantly and showed a surprising adaptability in dealing with the London paparazzi of the day.

Watching a ballet one evening, Queen Victoria noticed Jang swaying with the music. She was surprised and asked him if he understood the music. Jang replied through his Hindi interpreter: "Bulbul ke gan hum nahi samajhte, agar achha to lagta..." Queen Victoria told everyone later she was impressed with the soldier poet. In

Paris, Jang was so moved by a ballerina that he immediately took off his diamond studded gold bangle and gifted it to her on the spot. The Paris newspapers the next day couldn't get enough of it.

Many books have been written about Jang Bahadur's Europe visit but one fact that hadn't come to light till recently was that a member of the Johann Strauss family composed a 'Nepaulese Polka' in Jang Bahadur's honour. The British media had gone wild about the visit of the prince of Nepal and Jang's famous portrait and the score for the polka appeared as the cover story of the *Illustrated London News*. This would be the equivalent of Robbie Williams launching a hit single called 'Nepali Dream' on Mtv to mark the visit to London by a modern Nepali royalty.

The 'Nepaulese Polka' played by Michael Kuhn is a lively and happy tune that can be downloaded on mp3 for listening from the website of German musician Johannes Bornmann.

<http://www.bilder-aus-nepal.de/Pages/Geschichtsseiten/Strauss-Polka.html>





The author (centre) with his Gurkha friends at a recent get-together and (left) Purnaram Gurung

the Indian plains to keep an appointment with Jawaharlal Nehru. That happy event led to the setting up of a committee to host a Commonwealth Youth Festival in order to organise a new consciousness in the Commonwealth. It was an inspired initiative. But after Nehru died, enthusiasm began to wane (a not uncommon phenomenon) and the idea of the festival was dropped.

But in its place a Commonwealth Expedition, known as Comex, was launched under the patronage of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. Made up of five contingents of 42 each, from the universities of Cambridge, Cardiff, Edinburgh, London and Oxford, Comex 1 set off from London on 31 July 1965. There were 14 expeditions in all, the largest of 500 dubbed 'the Commonwealth on wheels' by the *Kabul Times* as it passed through Afghanistan. They were distinguished by the

symbol of a little green pennant bearing Prince Philip's cipher and the Asoka wheel in gold.

Those green pennants were to become the Green Pennant Awards 'identifying the spirit of adventure with crossing the barriers that divide people' inaugurated by Prince Philip in London on 18 December 1980, endorsed at the 1995 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in New Zealand and most recently presented at the Edinburgh summit of 1997.

It is a matter of special significance and not only to me, that my journey to Kathmandu in 1962 should have reached its own *summit* in this remarkable way. ●

The 40th anniversary of Comex 1 will be celebrated on the Internet on 10 May.
Comex40.org.uk

Lionel Gregory OBE is the founding Commanding Officer of the Queen's Gurkha Signals.

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

Witness to history

A revealing blow-by-blow account of how the 1990 constitution was crafted

Senior advocate Mukunda Regmi was one of the members of the 1990 Constitution drafting committee from the Nepali Congress quota. Others came from the palace and the left quota (including today's Maoists in the persona of the late Nirmal Lama).

Regmi has taken eight years to collect all necessary documents as well as archival tapes and transcripts to produce this massive two-volume work which will stand as *the* seminal reference long into the future not only for scholars but also politicians and others debating Nepal's governance.

The first volume begins with the rare 1948 'constitutional arrangement' promulgated by Rana Prime Minister Padma Shumshere and discussions and statements related to it. It is followed by an account of the events and declarations related to the collapse of Rana rule and promulgation of the interim constitution of 1951. The author traces the origins of the 'constituent assembly' concept to Nehru's proposal and not of King Tribhuban, the Rana prime minister or the NC.

Much of both volumes consist of

BOOK

Dipak Gyawali



accounts of the 60 meetings

held by the 1990 Constitution drafting commission transcribed from tapes preserved at the National Archives. They are supplemented with the author's commentary essays on the matters raised and discussion of previous constitutions. Since many of the other members of the commission and the interim cabinet of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai that ultimately finalised the draft are still alive and active in public affairs, Regmi's opinions can hopefully be challenged by these eminences if he has digressed from the truth.

The second volume contains the 1958 and 1962 constitutions but commentaries associated with them, except for bringing to public domain the otherwise unavailable comments of Sir Ivor Jennings, disappoint. If 1990 was a 'restoration' of the multiparty democracy of 1958, there is little explanation of its positive and functional features that needed retaining in the 1990 version. Also, if the aim of the new constitution in 1990 was to do away with



Author, Mukunda Regmi, and (above) a pro-democracy rally in 1990 and (right) the Constitution Reform Commission poses at the City Hall.

the 1962 Panchayat system, it was essential that some of the positive features of the Panchayat that lasted all of three decades should have been better analysed and retained with improvements. Especially inexplicable is why the decentralised village and district units of governance of the Panchayat constitution were done away with in 1990 and not replaced by anything legitimising local self-governance.

The two volumes also contain documented response from political parties, civil society groups as well as the Royal Nepali Army to the request from the commission for suggestions regarding the future constitution. They contain views and arguments on many issues still debated today, from the word 'Hindu' (which Regmi says refers to the king but not the nation which is *de facto* secular) to the question of provisions for a referendum (which those who today clamour for a new constitution seemed to be against then). The tapes containing the commission's discussions regarding the army (its 44th session) are currently missing from the archives but he has provided invaluable service to future scholars by bringing transcripts made then into the public domain.

Two controversial 'palace drafts' of the constitution that were at variance with what the commission produced, including the critical article in *Gorkhapatra* that made

it public are included. What exactly transpired between the palace and the interim Bhattarai government will probably be known as more of the actors involved in the high drama publish memoirs. But Regmi clearly outlines differences in the final constitution and the commission's draft. While it is wholly understandable that the palace would do everything it could to maximise its prerogatives, what is inexplicable are some of the changes introduced by the interim NC-left cabinet that so militate against a decent democracy.

For instance, the commission's draft had a provision (Article 120(2)) that required political parties to submit annual audited accounts to the Election Commission: it was removed in the promulgated version's Article 113. The draft also envisaged an upper house that would not only have a significant voice in framing legislation but also required that it have quotas reserved for three women, three *dalits* and nine *janjatis* not represented in the lower house. In the final constitution, the powers of the upper house were massively curtailed and only the quota for three women was retained.

Similarly, given the controversy surrounding Article 126 and the subsequent Tanakpur/Mahakali treaty, it is a surprise to learn that the original draft was more stringent: it required all such resource sharing treaties be ratified by a two-third majority. The promulgated version eases matters, allowing any government to do so with a simple majority if matters were not of 'a serious, grave or long-term nature'. Sadly, in the 12 years that the parties concerned were in parliament, no attempt was made to define this provision, thus leaving water resources development cooperation with the lower riparian in a limbo.

Regmi is strongest in the last chapter where he argues against a constituent assembly. First, everywhere in the world constitutions were made, not by representatives elected to draft them but by representatives elected to legislatures as happened in India under its 1935 Act. Second, the Nepali people have already given approval to this constitution by participating in three general elections under it, thus requiring no further popular endorsement. Finally, in all these three elections, no political party ever went to



the people requesting a mandate to amend this constitution or any of its provisions.

One only wishes Nepal's political movers and shakers would listen to these arguments so that the rest of her citizens could move on with the country's development. ●

Dipak Gyawali is an academician with the Royal Nepal Academy of Science and Technology.



Sambaidhanik Bikas Ra Nepal Adhirajya Ko Sambidhan 2047

(Constitutional Development and the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990)

By Senior Advocate Mukunda Regmi

Published by Sita Devi Regmi et al, Kathmandu 2004

Volumes 1 and 2, 2320 pages

Rs 2,200 (soft cover) Rs 3,000 (hard cover)

Rugs for walls

Now that Nepali carpets have floored most homes, let's decorate walls



Raju Tuladhar (left) with John Allen.

KIRAN PANDAY

ABHA ELI PHOBOO

When John Allen went flying over Nepal, the texture and colours of the landscape stayed in his mind, filtering into a design that he translated on to a carpet.

This artwork of meandering rivers and rolling uneven hills woven in inspiring colours is on display at *Spirit of the Place* exhibition with other design experiences. John has been to Nepal nine times but this is his first exhibition here. His carpets based on Australian aboriginal beliefs are intricate and beautiful but even more fascinating is Raju Tuladhar's translation of these carpet designs into tapestries.

Raju gives John's carpet designs a new life, sometimes destroying colours or creating shades as appropriate. Taking the aboriginal base, Raju twists them at a tangent sometimes adding a hint of Nepali-ness. The Dhaka background in the tapestry

version of 'Lady in Black Dress with Zip' is an example of Raju's fusion creativity.

"I was a bit shocked and thrilled, his interpretations of my designs are amazing," says Allen. A first for both artists, this collaboration has encouraged them to explore more possibilities. "Even when I use somebody else's design, I revisit the idea so it looks good as a tapestry," says Raju.

Having started out with weaving Picasso's paintings into tapestry, Raju's 'Curtain' now hangs in the VIP lounge at the Tribhuban International Airport. He teaches tapestry at Kalaguthi on Mondays and Thursdays, believing that tapestries will be the next Nepali handicraft to take on the market. And his belief is not unfounded, take one look at his work and you'll know why.

The rich, finely detailed works have shades that make the

tapestries, from afar, look like paintings. These shades change slowly and meditatively unlike brush strokes. "Mixing colours is a challenge because it takes a lot of careful calculation, knowing when to add the right thread and when to change," says Raju, "but it's a joy when it turns out right."

Functioning within the limitations of tapestry work, Raju experiments to find expression through detailed intricate weaving. Changing the consistency of tapestry designs found in the market, he creates techniques to skirt shortcomings adding to the feel of the design itself. The result is not just a rug, it is a work of art.

John markets his Nepal-made carpets in London but is frustrated with the static carpet designs from Nepal. "Nothing can compare to the Nepali carpet weaving skills but lack of creative designs is shutting the market. For the last 10 years, every time you scout the carpet shops in Nepal, it's always the same designs, the same colours, the same thing. Carpet industries here should hire creative designers who think outside the box."

John plans to showcase his carpet designs based on his Nepal experience in 2007 in London. Raju exports his tapestries through friends in Canada and elsewhere. ●

Exhibition at Susan's Collection, Kathmandu Guest House, 10AM-5PM. 4700632

Amrit Medhasi

The soul of a Nepali soldier

PRAVIN RANA

Since Homer, stories have been written about the life, loves and courage of soldiers like Captain Amrit Medhasi. The media in the United States, tough critics of the Iraq war, nevertheless publish stories that give a human face to the soldiers that have served and fallen in combat.

Our media and some human rights group's coverage of a soldier's bravery comes with caveats like 'if only the rest of the RNA were like this man' or the obligatory coupling of Maoist atrocities with 'both sides are massively violating human rights' as if hundreds of summary executions, systematic political killings, drilling holes in pregnant women, and their crackpot vision of a communist State are equivalent to the army's mission whose aim is to restore conditions for a return to democracy.

The Army has had its share of troubling human rights violations but has never embraced a policy encouraging torture and indiscriminate killings. The work of fine soldiers during a war not of their making have been obliterated by relentless ankle-biting and the self-serving agendas of shrill activists and, even worse, our own confused political leadership who slur these soldiers even as they shamelessly crave to command them.

Amrit Medhasi was a soldier's soldier. In World War II, he might have been an outnumbered Gurkha beating back a Japanese onslaught but perhaps more appropriately he might have been the tragic platoon leader fighting a brutal house-to-house campaign in Vietnam, only to be portrayed by activists and the media in his own country as a drug-crazed baby-killer.

He probably had the same reasons for joining the army as most young men: the attraction of genuine camaraderie, an opportunity to tour the world, to challenge one's physical limits and pursue a relatively decent career track.

Born in Parbat district in 1980, Amrit Medhasi came from a military family. I never had the pleasure of meeting him personally but from a brief encounter with his father, one can extrapolate that he must have been similar in character: the characteristic military bearing, the frugality of words and the steady confidence about his identity.

He excelled in academics and was a natural leader, nominated as an outstanding student and also a school captain. Blessed with a sinewy and lanky frame, he was an excellent athlete. With these attributes, a comfortable career probably awaited him in civilian life but he joined the army despite objections from his family.

After receiving his commission, he was assigned to an infantry battalion in the east followed by duty in the west. Unlike most soldiers in other countries that have the luxury of being rotated back home after a year or so of duty, most Nepali soldiers move from one trouble spot to another. Many soldiers have gone years without visiting families due to Maoist threats in their own villages.

Several successful missions followed where he earned the respect of his men by using the only credible method in combat, by directly engaging the enemy and demonstrating results. On 9 December during an offensive operation, his platoon was ambushed while clearing a pass in Mathura Danda in Argakhanchi. He was injured in the initial firefight and despite continuing to draw fire, he had the presence of mind to order a tactical withdrawal, securing his men's safety but perhaps slowed by injuries, he was eventually overwhelmed and died instantly in a second hail of gunfire. Less than four years into a promising career, his body lay broken on that mountain pass.

Thanks only and only to soldiers like Amrit, there is still a semblance of a country remaining where our politicians can even today indulge their self-importance at the expense of their constituency and our activists pen therapeutic elegies.

Yes, this conflict has had tragic consequences for all Nepalis—not just for soldiers and their families. But when we think of soldiers like Amrit Medhasi, let us not patronise them by casually calling them martyrs, slur their work or view them from the reductionist lens of leftist intellectuals, unprincipled activists, the creepy Maoist leadership and some in the media, as a band of monarchy-groveling rapists that need to be locked up.

Let us remember such men as professional soldiers that lived their life tragically and practically amidst the pathologies created by others. To honour them, let us remember their mission is not the moral equivalent of the empirically discredited ideologies of their enemies.

The souls of good soldiers like Captain Medhasi will fight again in another lonely mountain pass, a windy desert or jungle as they always have through history. Let's try to understand, respect and celebrate this spirit. ●



Keeping the spirit alive

Susan's Collection is a gallery in the ballroom of the historic Rana palace that is Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. It has a rare collection of antiques, arts and crafts of Nepal, masterpieces such as the Blue Tara carved in turquoise and the crystal Swayambhu with fine engravings of silver and stones. The gallery itself is a work of art with ancient candlelight chandeliers the Ranas brought over from Belgium.



The New Delhi media was breathless in its coverage of the India-Pakistan Cricket Summit, but it started inauspiciously enough when the pilot of the PIA Airbus got the Indian tricolour downside up as he came in to the apron at Jaipur airport.

SOUTHASIA BEAT
Kanak Mani Dixit



Television reporters barely into adulthood (they pick them young, the Indian channels) were wondering whether a president known for his ambush diplomacy was not sending a message even before he deplaned. Was the visit doomed even before the blessings of Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti had been received at Ajmer Sharif?

But no, it was an unremarkable mistake promptly corrected and the rest of the visit went swimmingly. General Musharraf received blanket coverage in the Delhi dailies, with only the RSS-favouring columnist Tarun Vijay seeming to raise a diffident finger of skepticism in the Chandigarh *Pioneer*.

'Lahore' and 'Kargil' were not even in the memory bank and even 'Agra' and that vainglorious televised meeting with Indian editors seemed to have been forgiven. Unlike the handlers of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the aides to Manmohan Singh were obviously taking no risks with a general who likes to make unscripted handshakes ('Kathmandu') and dyes his hair just right ('New Delhi').

The return of romance

The general sahab met the doctor sardarji, setting off positive vibes in New Delhi and Karachi

With Gen Musharraf playing by the rules and Indian officials clear about what they wanted, everything went just right. In fact, the *bhai-bhai* vibes are so too-good-to-be-true that it had one worried about how to make this trend stick. The people-to-people contact so heroically promoted by the members of the Pakistan-India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy over years of non-stop cynicism has finally borne a little fruit. It must now be allowed to ripen, to the full extent that the visa regime is flung open for all Indians and Pakistanis, with restrictions only to prevent mass migration from one side to the other.

The possibilities of a Southasian peace opened by human contact can't be sustained unless there is rapid movement to spark trade, commerce and economic integration. While New Delhi was still acting host to the president general, this columnist flew over the desert to Karachi. The purpose was to understand what the businessmen of this commercial hub thought of the India-Pakistan rapprochement and possible future economic linkages. Would they be wary of an Indian swamping, or were they enthusiastic entrepreneurs hoping to reap the advantage?

PIA Flight 273 was full of exuberant Pakistanis returning from the resounding victory of the One Day International, their excitement enhanced by the fact that cricketer Shahid Afridi was ensconced in the executive class section up front, feigning sleep to keep off excited autograph seekers. A gaggle of young Anglophone socialites seemed to have been doing their own people-to-people contacting the night before. "My, the parties in Delhi! ... did you see those farmhouses in Gurgaon? ... Let me sleep, I was dancing all night ..."

In Karachi, the sober people in business were indeed looking forward to what the future might bring. A cotton producer was hoping for across-the-border trade of the white fluff, so that his customers in 'Eastern Punjab' did not have to be supplied from the ginning factory in 'Western Punjab' by going through the port in Karachi, down to Bombay by ship and up to Amritsar by rail. "This makes no sense, and how long will we keep at this?"

A garment exporter said he was willing to allow the law of comparative advantages work in the India-Pakistan sphere, even if his industry suffered somewhat though he did not expect it to. "If

we are willing to be swamped by cheap Chinese goods, what could be so bad about Indian imports?" said a broker. A former chief of the Export Promotion Bureau believed that the blessings of regional trade would raise the entire ship of Southasia. An entrepreneur with heavy investment in port infrastructure believed that "things have gone so far ahead that the hawks on both sides will not be able to derail this peace train".

Back at Rashtrapati Bhawan, President of India Dr APJ Abdul Kalam was giving the visiting head of state a PowerPoint presentation on rural development. When the subject turned to bilateral relations, his advice to Gen Musharraf was: "Place all CBMs in one incubator or good basket and then watch the eggs nurture in this basket of goodwill." What Dr Kalam probably meant to say through the mixup of metaphors was probably this: "Do not put all your eggs in one basket, general. People-to-people contact is only one confidence-building measure, which has to be followed fast and furiously with the creation of new economic facts on the ground." That at least is what I would have said, and the Karachi traders would have agreed. ●

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BBC's radio rise

BBC World Service has stemmed its declining radio audience in India, according to an independent audience survey. BBC Hindi has grown by 4.3 million, taking its audience up to 14.5 million. The survey, conducted in the states of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Jharkand and Rajasthan, revealed that weekly listenership to the BBC confirms the BBC as India's number one international radio provider. The BBC captures 40 percent of all those listening to the radio in Bihar and a third of radio listeners in Jharkand. In the remaining three states, just under one in five of radio listeners turn to the BBC Hindi Service every week.



South demands more say

WASHINGTON—Developing nations have issued a statement strongly condemning the 'democracy deficit' in two of the most powerful wardens of the current global economic system, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). During the joint meetings of the governors of the two Washington-based institutions, the Group of 24, which operates as an association of minority shareholders in the IMF and the Bank, said that the lack of representation of poor nations and developing countries was alienating the two financial institutions from their clients. Ministers note that the BWIs' (the Bretton Woods Institutions) governance structures have not evolved in line with the increased size and role of emerging market, developing and transition countries in the world economy, said the statement by finance and economy ministers of the G24. The role of small and low-income countries in the decision-making process is extremely limited, said the statement.

The ministers complained that the current under-representation of developing countries in the IMF and the World Bank Executive Boards undermines the legitimacy and effectiveness of these institutions. Decision-making in the two financial bodies is far removed from the principle of one country—one vote. The 46 sub-Saharan African countries, for example, have only two executive directors representing them at the World Bank and IMF, while eight northern nations have one executive director each. The G24 ministers urged that the two institutions develop a new quota that would give greater weight to measures of gross domestic product in terms of purchasing power parity and take into account the vulnerability of developing countries to commodity price movements, the volatility of capital movements and other external shocks. (IPS)

Smooth finish

To keep you from falling off balance

Starting something is a lot easier than finishing it well. And this applies to every golf swing. The smooth finish of a golf swing is reflected in a proper follow through. If you end well balanced and in the right position, chances are, you've made a reasonably good effort at hitting the ball.

Watch weekend golfers and you will see what I'm talking about. At the end of their swing, most of them finish in all kinds of strange and awkward positions. Some even topple over or wobble frantically after impact. Unfortunately, this is the exact opposite of what should really be happening.

Not being able to finish with the weight significantly on the leading foot is a sure sign of trouble. It affects distance and accuracy, almost always leaving the golfer hopelessly off balance.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



Ever watched a Karate exhibition where a player seemingly breaks through layers

of bricks and ice without much effort? Rest assured, there is more than just power at work. It includes a seamless combination of technique and balance. Finishing a golf swing with the weight on the leading foot requires a similar application of these elements.

Recreational golfers usually use their hand to swing the club rather than their shoulders and hip muscles. Those who swing the club with their hands only will almost naturally have an 'out to in' swing path. This style in itself promotes resistance to finishing on the forward foot.



Yes, it's back again to that ideal 'in to out' downswing, it's a big step towards getting that perfect position on the follow through starting at the beginning of the downswing. Quickly clearing the left shoulder while rotating the hips simultaneously promotes the club-head staying well inside, providing plenty of room to throw it out later. This helps keep both arms straight at impact. Go through the swing, if the right leg has been used properly you should end up with your right heel well raised and most of your weight on a solid left foot.

During your swing there are stages of transferring weight from one side to another. An example is, at the address position of a tee shot with a driver, your weight should be about 60 percent on the back foot. By the top of the back swing, 90 percent of your weight should be on that back foot. Back at impact, you will return to the address position weight distribution and then on the follow through it is shifted almost completely to the forward foot.

In any sport, balance is the key to better and consistent performance. Want to be a well-balanced golfer? Try following the tips above or better still, schedule a lesson with your favourite golf professional and get it perfected. With a good follow through and finish, not only will your game improve tremendously, you will even look great on those first tee memento photographs. ●

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



The Three Star Club team practicing for the President Cup tournament at Buddhi Bikas Mandal field.

KIRAN PANDAY

All the President's men

Kathmandu prepares to host the first international football tournament of the year

ABHA ELI PHOBOO

As the temperatures rises, the football scene in Kathmandu is also heating up again with the first President Cup international tournament to be held here next month.

The 10-day event, which begins on 4 May, will see Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Cambodia, Chinese Taipei, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan pitting their league champions against each other. Organised by the Asian Football Confederation, the President Cup will be an annual event hosted in various member countries.

"To have the first match hosted in Nepal is a very good opportunity for us," says Ganesh Thapa, chairman of the AFC President Cup organising committee. There are only eight countries participating this year because the criteria says league champions of each country can participate. Not all interested countries had their league matches, Thapa explains.

Nepal had its league tournament in June last year when a draw between Mahendra Police Club and Patan's Three Star Club decided the latter as the winner on overall points. "It was a crucial match," says

Upendra Man Singh, captain and goalkeeper of the Three Star team, "but we knew that a draw would qualify us for the President Cup. Now, the responsibility of playing for the country in an international match is weighing on our shoulders. We are taking things very seriously and concentrating on our training."

The Three Star team has played with some of the other teams before but as Upendra says, "it won't do to underestimate your opponent. We know there won't be much difference because we are all in the C category."

The teams have been divided into three categories according to their financial and playing standards. C is where the teams from developing countries have been grouped. "There's a good chance we might win," says Lalit Krishna Shrestha, chairman of Three Star Club, "we have had a lot of support from our community. People have raised funds for us to buy uniforms and further our training."

The coach of the Three Star team is Dhruba KC but other senior coaches of Nepal such as Shyam Thapa and Bhim Thapa are also helping the boys overcome their weaknesses and focus on their strengths. The league tournament and initial

training left some players injured. "We fear that the training might not be adequate for some of the players because they missed out on a lot," says captain Singh.

Dasrath Stadium is seeing a major facelift to prepare for the matches. "We are doing all we can and the government has been very supportive," says Narendra Shrestha, vice-chairman of All Nepal Football Association. "The President Cup is important to us not just because it is an international event but also because it could direct the future of football in Nepal and sports in general."

As the opening date nears, the organisers are running over some last minute details to clear out hassles. "Security will be very tight, AFC officials themselves came over to check and they have approved of our system," says Shrestha.

Singh says this is a great opportunity for his team to build experience, adding: "But we have our eyes on the prize because it could change the face of football in Nepal and the region." The President Cup winner gets \$50,000 and the runner-up gets \$25,000. Each participating team takes home \$15,000. ●

Congratulation to the winners of the 6th Nepali Times lucky draw (April 21, 2005)

<p>Prize New Formula 1 Watch Dr. Upendra Devkota Golfutar, Bansbari</p>	<p>Prize-2 Nos. SKATE trolley cases THE VIP QUALITY ADVANTAGE Casino Everest, Everest Hotel National Democratic Institute, Lazimpat</p>	<p>Prize-3 Nos. SPECIAL EDITIONS SHORTS & T-SHIRTS Anju Khadka, Jwagal Karma Gurung, Thamel Physical Fitness American Embassy, C/O Ajay Rana</p>
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GOLF

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#65 2062 by jigme gatton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **This is Today** Paintings by Mukesh Malla at Gallery Nine, until 26 April.
- ❖ **A Peaceful Nepal** Photo exhibition at GAA, Thamel, 15-30 April, Sunday-Friday, 10AM-4PM, proceeds go to Habitat for Humanity.
- ❖ **Thalara Framed** Black and white photographs by Devendra SJB Rana at Siddhartha Art Gallery, until 30 April.
- ❖ **Magic Pencil** Artworks by Britain's best children's illustrators at the British Council, Lainchor. Until 6 May. 4410798

EVENTS

- ❖ **The Good Person of Szechwan** Staged by Studio 7 at Hotel Vajra, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 22 April-8 May. 4271545
- ❖ **Toyoto Women's Motor Rally** on 23 April. 4478301
- ❖ **How can spirituality change your daily life** Talk by Nun Anila Tenzin Namdrol on 23 April, 10AM-4PM at HBMC, Thamel. 4414843
- ❖ **Temal Jatra** at Boudha and Swayambhu, 23-24 April. 4435454
- ❖ **Teen Art Workshop** at The Bluestar Hotel, 23-24 April. 4471957
- ❖ **Balaju Bais Dhara Mela** on 24 April at Balaju Bais Dhara.
- ❖ **Gori Vatra** Film by Pjer Zalica, Bosnia at Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap on 24 April, 5.30 PM. groeli@macyeti.wlink.com.np
- ❖ **World Book Day Exhibition** for children, 23, 25-29 April, 8.30-5.45 PM, British Council, Lainchaur. 4410798
- ❖ **Tibetan Education in Exile** Lecture by Mati Bernabei on 29 April, 9.30 AM at Shankhar Hotel, Lajimpat. Entrance Rs 100 for non-members.
- ❖ **Tai Chi** Free classes at Baber Mahal Revisited. 4256618, 4256693
- ❖ **1905 Sundays** Pet practices and more. www.extreme-nepal.com
- ❖ **Fun in the Sun** at Club Sundhara, Hotel Shangri-la. 4412999
- ❖ **Rugby Practice** Every Saturday. 4435939, citygymltm@hotmail.com
- ❖ **Sanibaar Mela** Saturdays at the Dharahara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.



MUSIC

- ❖ **All Star Jam Session** Moks re-opens on 22 April, 7PM. 5526212
- ❖ **Full Circle** Live at Indigo Gallery on 29 April, 8PM, Rs 750. 4413580
- ❖ **An Evening with Manose** at Patan on 29 April, 7PM, tickets Rs 650.
- ❖ **Rock Thru' The Ages** at New Orleans Café, Thamel on 30 April, 7PM, tickets Rs 200. 4700736
- ❖ **Live Jazz** by JCS trio and Peter McTwister, Thursdays at Full Moon Bar.
- ❖ **Ladies Nights** Wednesdays at Jatra, Thamel, with live music.
- ❖ **Fusion Time** Mondays at Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Lajimpat, 7PM. 4410438
- ❖ **Live Music** Everyday at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **The Heart Breakers** at Rum Doodle, Fridays, 7PM onwards. 4701208
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 7.45 PM.

FOOD

- ❖ **Marhaba Mediterranean Cuisine** at Hotel Shangri-la, 15-30 April.
- ❖ **Sekuwa Sanjh** on 29 April at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Great Value Lunches** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza for Rs 299. 4273999
- ❖ **Sunshine Weekend Brunch** Free swim at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Barbeque Lunch** Saturdays at Club Himalaya, Nagarkot. 6680080
- ❖ **Sekuwa and Momo Revolution** Saturdays at the Tea House Inn. 6680048
- ❖ **Arniko Special Lunch** at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **Barbecue Dinner** Every Friday at the Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Exotic Seafood** at Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Delicacies** Pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café, Jawalakhel. 5521755
- ❖ **Earth Watch Restaurant** at Park Village, dine with nature. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari cuisine at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vijayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. Junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Stay One Night** get one night at Shangri-la Village, Pokhara. 4435742
- ❖ **Wet Wild Summer Splash** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
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JAI NEPAL CINEMA

Aditya (Salman Khan) is the son of an Indian ambassador in an eastern European country. Lucky (Sneha Ullal) is a 17-year-old girl fascinated by Aditya's charms. When a civil war breaks out, Lucky lands in severe trouble and Aditya is her only hope. Enter Colonel Pindidas Kapoor (Mithun Chakraborty) who helps them escape. Directed by debutante director duo Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru, the film has been beautifully shot in Russia.

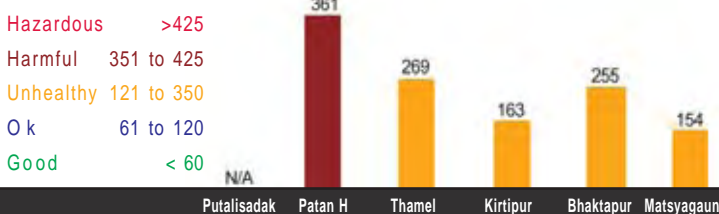
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Just when we thought Kathmandu's air was getting a little cleaner, the pollution level suddenly shot up. Last week, the concentration of PM10 (particles less than 10 micron in size) in the Valley was 60 percent higher than the previous week. In places with heavy traffic, the pollution levels reached hazardous levels on 12 and 13 April. Even in rural areas like Matsyagaun, PM10 concentrations exceeded national standards in six of the seven days. The reduced visibility is affecting international flights.

10-16 April 2005 in micrograms per cubic meter.
Source: www.mope.gov.np



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



A prominent feature of this week's weather is the lowest ever record of humidity: 24 percent on Tuesday afternoon. The same westerly breeze that is bringing in desert dust from Rajasthan that has reduced visibility is also bringing in dry air. The result is that in the absence of moisture there is cloud buildup on thermals along the mountains. A reduction in the haze level due to a change in wind direction raised the maximum temperature to 30 degrees this week but the haze is back and we will see a commensurate reduction due to filtering action. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning indicates nothing of significance on the horizon, just the chance of a passing low pressure area that may trigger localised storm systems along the midhills early next week.

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BONSAI DIPLOMACY: Japanese Ambassador, Tsutomu Hiraoka, inaugurating a bonsai exhibition in Kathmandu on Monday.



SEE YOU SOON: King Gyanendra chatting with British Ambassador Keith Bloomfield and Australian Ambassador Keith Gardener at TIA before his departure for the Asia-Pacific Summit in Indonesia on Wednesday.



POETIC LICENSE: Govinda Bartaman, Avinash Shrestha, Tirtha Shrestha, Boond Rana, Bhuwanhari Sigdel, Symal and Bhuwan Dhungana at a year-end poetry reading organised by Himal Association at Yala Maya Kendra on 13 April.

Picturing peace

An unlikely amateur photography duo of teacher and student, Fr Greg Sharkey and Alok Tuladhar, have been taking pictures for over 20 years and a selection of their work is on display at *A Peaceful Nepal* photo exhibition at the Godavari Alumni Association (GAA) in Thamel.

Alok is an IT specialist who owns nepmed, a medical transcription company that is outsourced work from hospitals abroad. Greg is the moderator of GAA and director of the Jesuit Research Centre besides being an anthropologist who specialises in Newari culture and Buddhism.

Their portraits and landscapes, mainly

from eastern Nepal, bear testimony to the fact that the two take their hobby very seriously indeed.

"Faces are my favourite though Nepal is so photogenic I enjoy taking pictures of landscapes too," explains Alok. Greg is also inspired by Nepali faces: "Most of the people I photographed had their lives disrupted by the insurgency but it is Nepali resilience that keeps them smiling through such trying times."

The photographs are priced at a moderate Rs 300 for reprints and Rs 500 including frames. Money from the sale of pictures will go to the Habitat for Humanity program which will build houses for the homeless at minimum

costs. Alok and Greg hope to raise enough money from their exhibition to further subsidise building costs. Greg also wants the exhibition to promote the GAA complex as a cultural and artistic haven for ex-Xaverians and Marians.

Says Alok: "This exhibition is a chance for the Nepali people to communicate with fellow-Nepalis through their smiles. We are just the medium."

(Aarti Basnyat)

A Peaceful Nepal at GAA Hall, Thamel, until 30 April, 10AM-4PM, Sunday to Friday, proceeds go to Habitat for Humanity. 4414785



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What's so funny?

It has come to the notice of us high-up authorities that despite the state of national urgency, there is still a lot of uncontrolled and spontaneous laughter going on in isolated parts of the kingdom. There is clear and present danger that such unrestrained mirth could spread and be detrimental

to national security, and therefore should be nipped in the bud forthwith. This is no laughing matter.

Our founding fathers, in their wisdom, promulgated the Laughter and Satire Act 2017 which categorically states that in times of grave national crisis the state can for a limited and stipulated period temporarily suspend an individual's perfectly natural urge to giggle, snigger, chuckle, chortle, twitter, or all of the above.

Since such a crisis is now at hand and considering that wild guffawing could be infectious and spread by word-of-mouth thus lowering the morale of our civil and uncivil servants, the state is now invoking Article 27 of the Laughter and Satire Act and banning all unauthorised laughter until further notice. Guards! Take that chap who has fallen off his chair to the dungeons and tickle his armpits until he laughs his head off.

Where were we? Oh yes, compared to Burma, we are a civilised and democratic society and therefore realise that there is a need to make exemptions. For example, those of unsound mind who need to laugh at regular intervals for medical reasons can do

so in designated sound-proof Laughing Clinics. But they must bring their shrink's prescription in triplicate duly notarised by the Anchaladish stating the psychosomatic and physiological reasons why the said patient needs to chuckle gustily, and more importantly, whether there is actually still something to laugh about. These strict regulations are required to thwart abuse, and to prevent the entire country from pretending that it has gone insane.

Non-Nepali residents and diplomats are also exempt from the laughter ban since their conduct in the host country is governed by the Vienna Convention and its Annexe 13 (d) which states: 'In cases where the recipient state has suspended its sense of humour, consular missions and their resident staff may on occasion enjoy diplomatic impunity and be allowed to vent off a little steam as long as they don't indulge in boisterous jocularity in public.'

In case you hadn't heard, Nepal Telecom has been given the go-ahead to resume its hitherto immobile phone service (oops, did I just say something funny?) after all subscribers were fingerprinted and had to sign written affidavits declaring that they will send only officially-sanctioned jokes to each other via SMS.

Despite such a draconian crackdown it is inexplicable that some miscreants insist on defying the regulations and staging laugh-ins at Ratna Park. In all seriousness, what is there to laugh about? Don't they know that under the state of urgency, he who laughs best laughs last? ●



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