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Weekly Internet Poll # 272

Q. Were the political parties right in calling for a Valley banda last week to protest the media ordinance?

Total votes:3,314

Yes 34.3 %

No 63.7 %

Don't know 2.0 %

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KIRAN PANDAY

Taking flight

King Gyanendra leaves on an extended tour as the Maoists and parties converge

ANALYSIS by **KUNDA DIXIT**

The three-way deadlock between the parties, the king and the rebels that has paralysed the country for years is now giving way to convergence between the Maoists and the parties.

Cold-shouldered by the king, the parties have turned to the Maoists and are making progress coaxing them to join the political mainstream. Sources say the rebels have come around to accepting multiparty democracy if assimilation of the rebel rank and file can be guaranteed.

The recently concluded Maoist plenum conditionally approved this strategy despite strong misgivings from the foot soldiers about any compromises with the constitutional forces. This is why the Maoists are

pressing for an outside mediator to oversee disarmament and ensure the army will not sabotage the deal.

The CPI-M partners in the Indian coalition government led by Prakash Karat have been actively lobbying Nepali parties and the Maoists for months and this effort seems to be paying off.

US ambassador to Nepal, James Moriarty, got wind of this and issued a pointed warning on 4 November to the parties to stay away from the Maoists. He even underlined his message by briefing selected journalists that the Maoists can't be trusted and a party-rebel alliance would undermine the king's future role in ensuring stability.

There is now an open rift in the prevailing Indo-US policy on Nepal. A party-king pact favoured by Washington would isolate the

Maoists and keep them fighting. A party-Maoist pact, would isolate the king and may keep the army on the battlefield. Either way, it could mean prolonged conflict unless strong pressure is brought to bear on the warring sides.

At the moment, it seems to be the rebels who are under pressure from Indian communists who have a vested interest in defusing Nepal's Maoist problem through a multiparty solution because of the implications for India's own radical Naxalites. The Iraq oil-for-food scandal that removed Indian Minister of External Affairs, Natwar Singh, this week has also weakened the palace's clout in New Delhi since he was seen to be sympathetic to the February First royal takeover.

The question now is which

option will bring the conflict to an end sooner and determine who will get the credit (and the reward) for restoring peace.

In the short-term the king has the most to lose if the party-rebel alliance goes ahead because it would undermine his ambition to be an active monarch. However, in the long-term it will buffer the king from being directly tarnished by day-to-day politics and may actually help it to regain its shine.

Amidst all this, the king leaves Friday on a three-week tour that includes the SAARC Summit in Dhaka, the UN's IT jamboree in Tunis and an inspection of Nepali troops on UN peacekeeping duty in Africa. And everyone is left guessing about his next move. ●

Editorial p2
Promises to keep



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Thinking the unthinkable

Nepal's identity needs to be re-invented

PROMISES TO KEEP

It's always been trendy to speak disparagingly of SAARC. And ahead of every summit the media ridicule reaches a crescendo: calling it a feeble and pathetic talk-shop from which we can't expect much. All this has become a self-fulfilling prophecy, how can the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation go anywhere if we are so chronically cynical about it?

After all, what the critics of the regional body forget is that SAARC embodies our collective being, its members are our own governments. Every time pundits in Delhi, Islamabad or Kathmandu mock SAARC we are mocking ourselves because SAARC can only be what we allow it to be. If SAARC has failed, it means we have allowed it to fail. It's not SAARC's fault that it is an idea that is ahead of its time.

It goes without saying that after 13 summits, the organisation could have done better in fostering trust, peace and development in the region. But its founding members have hobbled it with a constitution that makes it virtually impossible to tackle meaningfully anything other than tuberculosis. Its exchange of television programs tends to be an exchange of government propaganda, representing the lowest common denominator in creativity. It's also true that the organisation and its summits have been used as political football by some members. But whose fault is that?

The best way for us to approach SAARC is not to expect anything from it until member states individually and collectively develop the maturity and confidence that is needed to make regional cooperation truly possible and necessary. It needs pragmatism, not dogmatism. It needs member governments and their leaders to look beyond their self-inflicted paranoia. Given the state of its member states, the only plausible use for SAARC must be to raise living standards of a region which has three times more desperately poor people than sub-Saharan Africa.

Next week in Dhaka let's hear the Summitters present some real ideas on what they plan to do about the obscene poverty that their citizens live in. But as usual, we're only going to hear fine speeches beamed live lip service and grandiose promises from leaders most of whom seem so enamoured with the trappings of power that they forget the poverty trap that mires their peoples.

As for the media throngs in Dhaka, let's for once see them less obsessed with the photo opportunity handshake between India and Pakistan, and more interested in a substantial analysis of promises never kept.

Back to Nepal after far too many months away and the first thing I notice is the utter mess that is Kathmandu. Jaded Valley dwellers say the city has long been a chaotic miasma but it's now far worse.

When I first started coming here in 1997, there was a mayor and ward chairmen and party politics to press for change. Now an arrogant CDO with no qualifications to run a city and

HERE AND THERE Daniel Lak



no accountability passes his days summoning newspaper editors over slights to the inhabitants of a palace. Ordinary people might have held out some hope that the king's coup would change their lives for the better. Now, they see the reality.

The media is abuzz with a cack-handed quasi-government's attempt to stifle even the mild dissent that has appeared since 1 February. Some of the media

anyway. *Kantipur's* plight is viewed sympathetically in fewer and fewer newspapers these days although the country's main media house is freedom's standard-bearer right now.

Kathmandu's international community is aghast. What the hell is going on in Shangri La, they ask each other. Diplomats work feverishly to find solutions to this country's dire plight. Some want to save the monarchy. Others think the Maoists need to be crushed first. A few see a democratic republic with parties of left and right debating the issues in parliament. In the countryside, the revolution continues unchecked.

Independent, informed military analysts are gloomy. They see Nepal's people caught between an army that has only ever believed in feudalism and insurgents who follow an insane ideology that has killed hundreds of millions around the world. Even during democracy, the Royal Nepali Army officers would tell any foreigner who would listen that they only defended "king and country, in that order". In four years time, a force that was largely ceremonial and had no military experience whatsoever has doubled in size and become a source of fear and grief for the rural peasantry, the urban intellectual. Until recently, the Maoists targeted the same people.

The privileged elite party on. But the hands that clutch napkin-wrapped glasses tremble at the thought of how badly things are going. These comfortable folk with familiar surnames and far too much influence, were foursquare in favor of usurping what was left of democracy. They told themselves that a free press and human rights NGOs were all that

stopped the RNA from crushing Maoism. The dismal record of the security forces belie that claim. History tells us that absolute monarchies do not work. Period.

It's easy to despair, to give up, or flee. But losing hope would be wrong. Instead, I wonder if Nepalis and their international friends don't now need to think beyond long-held nostrums, to forge a future path that is creative, flexible and humane. It's time to start talking about so many unmentionables. Caste springs to mind. So does the role of feudalism in undermining democratic political parties. The national identity of Nepal needs to be re-invented and broadened beyond tales of a conqueror who captured Kathmandu nearly 300 years ago. Nowadays, nations are proud of their current achievements, not of a past so distant that it's often confused with myth. And those achievements involve empowerment and prosperity, not centuries-old military victories.

The immense opportunity of having huge, booming neighbours needs to be emphasized, and the defeatism implicit in being a yam between two boulders discarded. A young urban elite is springing up that has global awareness and many talents. They need to be allowed into politics, business and public life.

Finally, Nepal needs to realize that it's a member of the community of nations with many shared experiences and much to learn and contribute.

Exceptionalism has not served this country well. Having the most number of disappeared citizens and one of the world's worst economies is no way to stand out from the rest.

A lack of imagination is all that's preventing Nepal from moving out of crisis and into hope. ●



With the end of Chhath, the month-long festivity that began with Dasain and continued with Tihar and Id has come to an end. This autumn interlude in the busy life of Nepal's largely peasant population is over. So is the political interval.

A weak monsoon means harvests will be hit in the tarai. The price of rice in the Valley has already begun to climb. The job-market is stagnant, and even for the lucky salaried few there is an erosion in real earnings due to inflation sparked by fuel

price hikes. The Rastra Bank's

national wholesale price index increased by 9.3 percent in mid-August.

The onion has become a metaphor for the complexities of life: you peel one layer at a time and sometimes you weep. The price of onions is also a barometer of public dissatisfaction: its price per kilo has

crossed Rs 40 up from Rs 14 six months ago.

The looming winter power crisis and probably power price hike could be yet another



Omens from Mars

The flyby of the red planet could be a sign for superstitious leaders

woe for Nepal's urbanites. Electricity supply in the country increased dramatically after deregulation in 1990, and for a while power cuts were history. But because there has been no capacity augmentation in the past four years and existing projects are delayed, we are in for a cold dark winter.

The weak monsoon means the Kulekhani reservoir can't generate fullpower at peak hours. Now, more than ever before, NEA needs an experienced chief. But the royal government, as is its wont, has handed the reigns of the electricity authority to a rank outsider with no training or experience in the energy sector. Once more, loyalty has triumphed over ability. It looks like the competent people in this country aren't royal enough.

It's not just because of the power crisis that winter is looking bleak. The regime has thrust a meaningless municipal election upon an unwilling population. The purpose of these polls is still unclear. Since municipal voters constitute less than 15

percent of national electorate, even a successful conduct of these elections can't legitimise the October Four post-modern monarchy.

Then there is the systematic plan to muzzle the media which seems to be aimed at pre-empting criticism of the royal government. The Panchayat experience teaches us that you can gag the press all you want, but the word will still get out. With the internet, wild uncontrollable rumours will fly even faster: about the alleged property of the previous king in distant shores, peccadilloes of past, present, and future royals, and conspiracy theories. The government media's sagging credibility won't help quell the wildfire gossip when they spread.

The denial of space for lawful opposition is an indirect incentive for armed rebellion. In a country already in the grips of a raging insurgency, suppression of dissent is suicidal. If parliamentary parties are pushed further into a corner jaded mainstream leaders will be unable to



control their increasingly militant cadre. Then the regime's hired hooligans will be no match against ideology-driven youngsters. As that confrontation spreads across towns Maoist control over the countryside will deepen further.

And the midst of all this, the chairman of the council of ministers is off for three weeks. Superstition is the hallmark of authoritarian rulers everywhere. In the absence of any rational explanation for the complacency of the present regime, it's safe to assume that the palace is taking comfort from the closeness of Mars to planet earth. The red planet is believed to be extremely inauspicious for commoners: it's an omen of destruction, death and defeat. But for rulers with right stars in their horoscope, Mars in Aries is said to be propitious. Mars began its flyby two months ago, there are four more months when it will be close to the Earth. ●

STATE OF THE STATE CK Lal



LETTERS

OUT OF AFRICA

It is probably a common feature of countries wracked by turmoil and uncertainty to look for somewhere else in the world where things are worse. Perhaps this explains the habit of Nepali newspapers to regularly juxtapose Nepal with some fictional African land of cannibal kings and semi-dressed savages. "Look!", we can say to ourselves, "things are bad in Nepal but at least we don't wear bones in our hair." Sadly, the *Nepali Times* is not immune to this unfortunate trend, whether it is a CK Lal "Thank God we aren't a failed African state" piece or Robin Sayami's appalling racist cartoon in last week's edition. What I find curious about this smug line of reasoning is that, on balance, things are going a lot better in Africa. Most African countries offer their populations functioning public education and health services. In many of them, the levels of absolute poverty, government corruption, female illiteracy and maternal mortality (to name but a few) are dropping. Interestingly, most African leaders are now democratically elected, including those King Gyanendra will meet during his upcoming tour. Can Nepal say the same?

Brian Gilligan, Patan

BAN BANDAS

While Sagarmatha FM blares out Pro-Public notices against bandas every morning before its "Suchana mulak" information program the seven agitating political parties staged a banda on 28 October, supported by civil society. In the past, when the Maoists were declaring bandas, the same parties and civil society unequivocally denounced it. The political leaders promised that they would never support such an act which caused such arduousness especially to the poor and socially disadvantaged. So, what changed? Why the hypocrisy? How long should the 'silent majority' go on suffering?

The king declares elections and the agitating parties who are supposed to represent the people come up with excuses not to participate. Why can't they come up with their own ideas instead of going on pilgrimages to India or praying to foreigners to interfere. How can such leaders claim to be the peoples' representatives? The common Nepali just want peace and development and is sick and tired of power-hungry hypocrites.

Dr Badri Raj Pande, email

- An excellent editorial ('Human sacrifices', #271) but my reaction to the heartfelt aspiration you express in the penultimate para calling on the king to

'respond to a face saving offer' was: 'Alas, if only.' As you indicate, there is plenty of blame to go round and plenty of people with strong views on who should shoulder it but there is now one question that goes to the heart of it: who now most needs this terrible conflict to continue, and why? Any reasonable analysis leads to a conclusion which reflects dishonourably on those now running the country, and that includes the top brass whose agenda would be seriously restricted by peace. Actions do speak louder than words and it is all too clear that, frankly, those now in charge don't give a damn about the pain and suffering of ordinary people in places like Rukum ('Ceafire or no ceafire', #271). Shame on them, but great credit to the embattled Nepali media who struggle every day in the face of threat and intimidation to keep alive the voice of reason and moderation.

Rob Cheston, email

- Narayan Thapa's well written and convincingly argued Guest Column ('The still silent majority', #270) was a welcome treat after having been bombarded with slanderous self-opinionated salvos from C K Lal, Kanak Mani Dixit and the like for months. Thanks to Dr Thapa for an objective analysis and hope it will inspire others in your profession who pretend not to see the obvious. By giving room to such opinions, the *Nepali Times* will be making a great contribution towards easing things in Nepal.

P R Budha, UK

- After reading Naresh Newar's account from Rukum, ('Taxing times', #271) we are appalled that in rural areas simple villagers, farmers, families of overseas workers, road contractors, road users, are all subjected to Maoist justice and are forced to pay taxes to support their army. But why victimise the downtrodden? Is this what the Maoist revolution is all about? How about taxing the really guilty: sections of the business elite in this country who have usurped Rs 40 million and more from deposits of ordinary people? Does it matter whether they are wilful or unwilling defaulters? It is an open secret that some corporate houses pay 10 percent of what they pay to the government as taxes to the Maoists and they all live happily ever after.

Dorjee Lama, Boudha

- The greatest necessary virtue of His Majesty the King should surely be that he is the king of all Nepalis and dear to every Nepali's heart. Alas, it appears he now belongs to the hearts of just a fraction of the royalists, not even the genuine monarchists. The latest to feel like they are not included are Nepali Muslims who didn't

even get an Id greeting thanks to the influence of people like Bharat Keshariji.

I Pradhan, email

QUAKE LESSON

Kanak Mani Dixit makes an important point about the increasing use of concrete as a construction material ('8/10', #270). It is a death trap, especially in earthquakes-prone mountain areas. Houses in Kashmir have traditionally used wood, for good reason. Light weight materials are easier to use yet provide sufficient structural safety, if properly designed and used. If wood is in short supply steel frames can be used instead. Insulation is the protection from weather. Structural engineering has advanced to a stage that houses and even tall commercial buildings can be made earthquake and wind proof. All that is needed is adoption of new building codes and strict enforcement.

Jan Dayal, email

- C K Lal's opinions have always fascinated me and I admire his writing. But I wonder why he had to borrow the title of his latest State of the State column ('The end of imagination', #270) from Arundhati Roy. I'm sure Mr Lal could have come up with some other apposite title.

Binod Rijal, email



CROCODILE TEARS

Re: Pramod Bhagat's letter (#271) about my Guest Column ('Rock and hard place', #269). I was only arguing about the indispensable need for the political parties to cleanse themselves by removing their corrupt leaders before they can claim to be democratic institutions and face the upcoming elections. What these corrupt parties think is good for them is not necessarily good for the country, and grovelling at New Delhi's feet must not be seen as a substitute for the popular support that the recent EU troika had deservedly advised them to regain.

The recent visit by the Indian politicians would not have been a problem had they not told a reporter at the airport that Bhutan never had democracy and therefore does not need it. And it must not be overlooked that they simply brushed aside NC leader GP Koirala's plea to help solve the Maoist

problem while the rebel leaders have always enjoyed safe haven in their own country. With our politicians in quest of power at any cost, the Indian politicians were obviously on a mission only to shed crocodile tears in Kathmandu.

Bihari Krishna Shrestha, Kathmandu

CHAND

Congratulations, Mr Lokendra Bahadur Chand, you got your son back. Sadly, the same can't be said about the hundreds of Nepali parents who have had their children abducted or disappeared and have no one to turn to help them and no way of knowing where they are, or if they are even alive. Although you fared far better than other parents, hopefully it will propel you into action to make sure no other Nepali parent has to go through what you did.

P Joshi, Kathmandu

BABA SAN

I really appreciated Kunda Dixit's Under My Hat piece ('Driving each other nuts', #271). One of my cousins was pulled over by the revered Kathmandu traffic vigilante Baba San a couple of days before his departure for not putting on his seat belt. When my cousin apologised, Baba San he took out a chocolate bar richly embedded with nuts (that's right Kundaji) and lectured him on the perils of driving without the belt. Mr Baba will be missed as much for his kindness as for his diligence. He brought a sense of relief to our nutty driving habits. Baba San also loved children, often teaching them how to cross Nepali streets safely. Maybe we need more Nepali Baba Sans to turn our country around into a more sane and disciplined future. Come back, Baba.

S Prasai, Kathmandu

- Much to my delight, Kunda Dixit's Under My Hat is a joy each week. But he got it wrong, purgatory and hell are not one and the same place ('Go to hell', #270). Hell one spends eternity in. Purgatory one visits until one has worked off one's sins and can go on to heaven. Or so I understand it. (I do hope he is not right after all!) Secondly, I have long thought that with the official, government position being that FM stations around the world do not broadcast news, *Nepali Times* should run a weekly rebuttal, giving a name of a different FM station around the world and the times it broadcasts news. Because of the sensitivity of this subject, and the fact that I am an expatriate, please do not carry my name if you print this material in your paper.

Name withheld, email

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Nepal exports lokta worth \$4 million a year overseas but Nepalis aren't buying it



MIN BAJRACHARYA

AARTI BASNYAT

'Be Nepali, Use Nepali Paper' read signs pasted all over the recent Exhibition for Handmade Paper and its Products at the Yak and Yeti Hotel.

Ironically, while foreigners needed no reminder of the value of this durable product made from the inner bark of a Himalayan shrub known as lokta, that didn't seem to be the case with Nepalis.

Over the past few years, lokta's uses have branched out way beyond writing paper and envelopes. The group Creative Women's Craft has made clothes out of it, Kanpou-Nepal exports it to Japan, where the fibre is used in making the Japanese currency the yen, World Friendship International makes Japanese fans and exports them to Japan. There are even experiment combining lokta with cotton and silk to produce cloth. Lokta paper is prized as a generator of jobs for women, for its eco-friendly production and even has a longer shelf life than normal paper because of its insect repellent properties.

While lokta products are more in

demand than the paper itself, the home market is still disappointing. Various organisations like Sana Hastakala specialise in promoting lokta products but as Shop Manager Ramila Shakya says, "The lack of tourism hasn't affected exports of lokta but the amount that we sell locally has seen a drastic decline".

Lokta paper dates back centuries. Earliest accounts from the eighth century record Nepali traders in Tibet manufacturing and selling it to Buddhist monks who used it to write their scriptures. However, when the trade with Tibet diminished, the craftsmen scattered around the country. Since then, lokta has established itself as one of Nepal's leading exports. According to German aid group GTZ, the export market of lokta paper and products is currently worth about \$4 million dollars annually,

Lokta is promoted under the Handicraft Association of Nepal (HAN) and its sub-group, the Nepal Handmade Paper Association (HANDPASS). In fiscal year 2003/2004 the handmade paper sector was ranked fourth among

exports of handicraft products and it's estimated that 500 Nepali organisations and firms produce lokta. Most are satisfied with the export market but are worried that Nepalis are not buying Nepali paper.

"This meet was organised not only to bring buyers and sellers together but also to promote Nepali paper in Nepal. Our

exports are great but we just haven't been able to market our product within our own country," says Kiran Dongol of Lotus Paper Craft.

Raghunath Shrestha of Bhaktapur Craft Paper has a slightly different view. "We need to promote Nepali paper and its use in government offices again. I think Nepalis don't buy the paper not only because it is expensive but also because they like the smooth, slick, cheap Indian paper." Shrestha sells Rs 250,000 worth of paper a month, 80 percent of which goes to Switzerland, 15 percent to other countries and only five percent is sold in Nepal. "Even out of that five percent I think the expats in Kathmandu are the ones who buy it," says Shrestha.

The lokta industry is about more than just an export commodity. Many organisations and companies provide employment to women and local farmers as well. Dongol estimates that almost 80 percent of the people working in lokta are women. Anjana Tamrakar of Creative Womens Craft says, "I decided to open an organisation where a lot of women with skill but no income could support themselves".

The colourful displays and inventive creations showcased by the 26 organisations at the exhibbition was inspiring. Lokta is the future and it's about time Nepalis realised its potential and started buying Nepali. ●

Flowery business

Seeta Gurung of The Himalayan Cottage Industry has found a novel way to make products out of lokta- mixing them with flowers.

The petals embedded in the lokta paper are crafted into photo frames, calendars, greeting cards, notebooks and even paintings.

"When people hear flowers, they assume it's dry flowers," says Seeta, "but I use fresh flowers."

She gets her inspiration from her own backyard and started making flowery papers as a hobby. But after her creations became a hit at a recent exhibition, Seeta hasn't been able to keep up with orders.

Because she needs higher quality paper than is available in the market, Seeta goes lokta shopping herself, carefully choosing each sheet. While she has her hands full meeting local demand, Seeta wouldn't mind exporting her products.

Importers are worried about durability and Seeta says her products have withstood the test of time. "I am still experimenting with the durability but some of my paintings are three to four years old and the flowers have still retained their colours and look fresh,".

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Explore Langtang



Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and the Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Project (TRPAP) are organising the Langtang Festival from 12-18 November to promote tourism in Rasuwa district. The weeklong event aims to promote the Langtang region as a safe tourism destination and will include activities such as an Ekadashi fair, sale and exhibition of various local products, cultural programs, hot spring baths, trekking, home-stays with local families, lodging at a traditional Tamang community lodge, horse riding, archery, tours of an underground hydropower station and of the Himalayan Spring Water Centre. The festival is being held as tourist arrivals continue to grow. The number of visitors arriving in Nepal by air increased 15 percent in October over the same month last year, according to the NTB. Fuelling the hike was a 58 percent jump in Indian tourists. September's figures showed a 47 percent increase in visitors over the same month in 2004.

Herbs hyped

Domestic herbs and herbal products will be featured at a products and trade fair in Nepalganj from 12 to 14 November. Nepal is rich in biodiversity and home to some of the world's most endangered herb species but industry experts say the country has been unable to reap the benefits of these resources. "Due to lack of proper research, adequate publicity and effective conservation measures, those endangered herb species are gradually becoming extinct," said Madhukar Thapa, general secretary of the Nepal Herbs and Herbal Products Association (NEHHPA), as reported by *The Himalayan Times*. NEHHPA is organising the event along with the Export Promotion Committee (EPC) and Herbs and Non-Timber Forest Products Coordination Committee (HNTFPC). Though Nepal produces about 40 tonnes of herbs and associated products from 188 different species annually, it reaps only about one percent of the estimated \$420-million global herb trade.

Biratnagar branch

Laxmi Bank's fifth branch is now open in Biratnagar. The full-fledged office offers a range of services including personal and business loans, trade finance and remittances. Started in mid-2002 as a regional bank headquartered in Birganj, Laxmi also has branches in Pokhara, Banepa and Kathmandu. In July, the bank was recognised for "Best Presented Accounts" by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nepal (ICAN). It is the first time a 100-percent Nepal owned bank has won the award.

NEW PRODUCTS

E-TICKETS ON THAI: Thai Airways is launching electronic ticketing in Nepal on 1 November, 2005 making it the first airline to do so here. As a part of its cost-cutting the airline will also implement E-ticketing with its travel agents from next month.



Blinded by the past

Brass cauldron and glass aquarium

Is a flawed understanding of how Nepal has changed in the last 15 years driving the actions of those in power today? Fifty years ago, for most Nepalis the very name of their country was that of a foreign land.

STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari



At the time, 'Nepal' was used to refer to a few bazaar in the heart of present-day Kathmandu. Forty years ago, college graduates were so scarce that some found it a matter of public pride to write 'BA' or 'MA' after their surnames. Thirty years ago, unless you knew a senior government officer well, getting a passport to go abroad took years. And 20 years ago, if you were a resident of Dharan, Dang or Darchula, all you received clearly on your transistor radio was state-sanctioned Kathmandu-centric news and music from the towers of Radio Nepal in Singha Darbar.

Indeed for much of the past 50 years, Nepal existed like a brass cauldron: no matter what was going on inside, few on the outside saw what was brewing. This opacity allowed the then rulers to maintain a pleasant fiction of 'poor but happy and hardworking' subjects and to continue to stoke the embers of narrow patriotism through various 'soil-appropriate' remedies, which benefited only the thin slice of the country's 'elite' population.

The overheated stew finally bubbled over in 1990. Soon, with a new liberal constitution and the

selection of people's representatives via competitive politics, the days of Nepal as a mysterious Himalayan cauldron had ended. Since then, three factors have coalesced to transform Nepal into something more like an aquarium, making what goes on inside today plainly visible to all on the outside.

First, multiparty democracy made ordinary Nepalis see that they could potentially trust people like themselves to represent them accountably in a national arena. Sure, there were problems. But those problems arose not from the faults of multiparty democracy per se but from the way wrong incentives got



institutionally entrenched in the functioning of that representative system.

Second, technological progress that led to falling communication expenses worldwide made it easy for Nepalis to receive news and views from various sources, only one of which was the state. Once you have people accustomed to discussing and comparing news, it's difficult to force them to

accept only one view. And finally, with hundreds of thousands of Nepalis going abroad to study, work, travel, trade and live, globalisation asserted its influence—connecting them to the rest of the world for contacts, ideas and support for success on their own terms.

This changed Nepal—from an opaque cauldron to a transparent aquarium—is what those in power fail to grasp. They send human rights activist Krishna Pahadi to jail for five months, only to see him emerge as a hero to everyone inside and outside of Nepal. They confiscate equipment from Kantipur FM at midnight, only to see the rest of the world get an inflamed version of their actions against the press. They drape the walls of the aquarium with self-serving Hindu orthodoxy, Panchayat-style patriotism and don't-listen-to-foreigners injunctions, only to find their stature diminished on the global stage. Such tactics would probably have worked 20 or 30 years ago, at a time when teaching typewriting skills to aspiring secretaries was also a viable business.

But the world has changed since. And along with it, Nepal has changed too, irrevocably. That is why the past is best relived through memories and not by forcefully transforming the present into the past. After all, 80 percent of Nepalis (ie, those 40 years or younger and still without power) have grown up relating to Nepal as an aquarium and not a cauldron. ●

“Women and children suffer most in conflict”



Nepal has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with an estimated 4,500 women dying yearly of pregnancy-related causes. Health care delivery has become even more challenging for NGOs and UN agencies like UNFPA during the current conflict, says Sultan Aziz, director of the Asia-Pacific Division of UNFPA, who was in Kathmandu recently.

Nepali Times: Where are we failing in reproductive health?

Sultan Aziz: It's not a question of failure but priorities. Dealing with women's reproductive health is an ongoing challenge even in some middle-income countries. There is no argument that the status of women in Nepal is not where it should be. Clearly, issues relating to governance of the health system are important.

Is it governance or programs?

It is not the lack of programs as many of them have been around for a long time. It is absolutely crucial that the government puts more resources and attention into this. You will find there is a really serious commitment to health services from us but recent events have made it difficult to go to these places where indicators are not improving.

Is it true that the conflict is affecting health care less than other sectors?

No, I completely disagree with that. I think there's a perception that somebody in a dire health situation will get help. But the argument should be that the very structure that supports the health system is suffering. If a particular road is blocked and a woman cannot reach the hospital to deliver, she dies or faces some complication. If health is to become completely neutral, then both sides have to be very clear that they are committed to saving lives, not destroying them.

How about women and children?

The people who usually suffer the most in a conflict situation are women and children. Men have a variety of opportunities to leave the conflict area. But women and children cannot travel like men can. And when they do travel, they end up in

a camp. They are always in vulnerable situations and become easy prey for rape and many other types of exploitation.

Has conflict affected UNFPA's work in Nepal?

I think it's a fact that the conflict has affected all. The professionals whom we have invested in for years in Nepal cannot access certain areas to provide services. We have to train our co-workers to understand what the realities are in a crisis, so they are able to respond. We should no longer pretend that we can continue to do development in a crisis and in the absence of security.

How are demographic pressures changing?

In a sense, I'm not so scared about population growth. There are varieties of indicators that you can look at: quality of life indicators, quality of education and reduction of poverty. If you look at them you can say that we can afford to have certain growth in population. In the absence of all those indicators, a 4.5 Total Fertility Rate (TFR) is cause for concern because it squeezes your doubling period and yet you are faced with the challenges of a slow-growth economy and deteriorating infrastructure.

What can we learn from other countries like Bangladesh and Indonesia?

Certain types of integrated services such as quality care, family planning and providing services to youth are needed. Girls get married early in Nepal and so delaying the age of marriage is important. These can all come about through behavioural change using communication strategies. There's nothing magical about it. These are things that only the government can make happen simply because it is in a position to make it happen.

Letter to His Majesty

Himod Pahadi in *Ghatana ra Bichar*, 9 November

गठना र बिचार

Your Majesty, as an aware citizen of this country I am writing to bring to your notice that this voice is not just a personal one but that of all patriotic and democratic citizens of Nepal. According to our Hindu tradition, the monarch is considered an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. That is why the land of Nepal is our motherland and the monarch our father and why the king is considered the caretaker of the people. The Narayanhiti murders on 1 June 2001 ended the lives of the entire family of your majesty's brother and forever vanquished the superstitious belief that the king is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The wound inflicted by this sad incident will pain the nation for many ages. Your Majesty, if the monarchy had remained with the Nepali people this episode that put a black mark on the proud history of the Royal Palace would have never occurred. However, the late King Birendra has now left to you the future of the Nepali people and the responsibility of taking the nation forward. At a time when conflict is tearing the nation apart it is up to you to protect the constitution dedicated to the people by the late king as well as the image of the royal family. Your first responsibility therefore is to provide the country a safe alternative to the fires of the conflict.

Your Majesty, the people are a great force. A nation without its people and a monarch without his subjects are meaningless. These are the same people who faced death to start an armed rebellion to place your grandfather King Tribhuban on the throne and honoured him as the Father of the Nation, bringing an end to an era when your forefathers were merely puppets at the hands of the Ranas. If the people had lost faith in constitutional monarchy, so many would not have shaved their heads when King Birendra was murdered. Today, the rights guaranteed by the constitution to the people are dissolved. In this age of information and communication, the



Nepali people have been refused the rights to use them. Without a free press, democracy is disabled. As though it were not enough to show contempt for the Supreme Court, the court itself is surrounded by armed security forces. Is this not a contradiction to the rule of law? It is not the Supreme Court that has lost but the announcement made by Your Majesty on 1 February in which you promised good governance.

It is wrong to use the army as a security cordon for the palace and the royal family. To conduct your unofficial royal visits by making the army surround villages and towns is an indication of how unsafe you feel amongst your own people. You must to end this distrust

between a father and his children. You must break free from the circle of corrupt politicians like Dr Tulsī Giri, who till a few months back declared that all he had as property was 10 tolas of gold and yet was able to pay back millions in debt within two months, Dan Bahadur Shahi, who ordered armed police to surround the court, and the enemy of press freedom and looter of FM stations, Tanka Dhakal. If you want good governance you must make those on the black list of the Nepal Rastra Bank pay their debts even if they are royal relatives. What is more, if you really desire to earn popularity maybe some of the resources of your late brother's family could be diverted to national development.

You only have to stay within the spirit of the constitution and pay your income taxes. Your kindness and patriotism will transform the present disgust and rage that the Nepali people feel for the monarchy into something more positive. A monarch's responsibility does not end with merely wearing the crown. If democratic norms and values are safeguarded and the peoples' rights secured, the political parties will be the bridge between the monarchy and the people. The roads will no longer turn into battlefields and the people will be forever grateful. The time has come to give back to the nation and the people. If these methods continue and more of the peoples' rights are taken away, a fate similar to revolutionary France awaits us all.

Indian track

Gorkhapatra, 7 November

गोर्खापत्र

Indian union railways minister Laloo Prasad Yadav has called the 1 February royal takeover a selfless act by the king for the nation and the people. Yadav also made it clear that the Indian government had joined hands with the royal regime. The chairman of the Rastriya Janata Dal made the remarks while addressing an election meeting in Saharasa district of Bihar state on 5 November. He said that he had always supported constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy and stressed that law and order should be the first priority en route to real and sustainable democracy. Yadav revealed that the Indian government had allocated more than Rs 500 million for the preparation of a blueprint of the Kosi High Dam. "Once the high dam is built, people of Nepal and India will no more suffer from flooding and farmers from both countries will be able to draw the required quantity of water," he told the mass meeting. Yadav also said the Indian government planned to install a transmission line near Kosi barrage, an investment of Rs 6.2 billion. He said that terrorist activities had hampered development works in both countries. "If the Maoists are really struggling for the cause of the people, they should give up violence and take part in elections," added Yadav. The Indian minister urged Nepal's agitating political parties to hold talks with the king.

Communists?

Nispakashya, 8 November

निष्पक्ष

The man who has been pleading with New Delhi's power brokers to get him reinstated in power here, CPN (UML) General Secretary Madhab Kumar Nepal, has strongly condemned China's recent decision to provide Nepal with arms and ammunition. Nepal has always been critical of China for what he calls its lack of support for the 1990 movement. Beijing has not reacted to the remarks but they have exposed the real face of leftist leaders like Nepal and revealed how communism works in Nepal. While China has stepped forward to help its small neighbour fight terrorism, communist parties like the CPN (UML) have condemned the assistance. Madhab Kumar Nepal's posture proves he will go to any extent to please India, the country that the communists have always criticized as expansionist. The real irony is that a certain section of Nepalīs still believe Madhab to be their leader despite his pro-India stance. Isn't it high time these people knew the real identity of their leaders? Madhab's latest visit to New Delhi has proven one more thing—the expansionists in India are more comfortable with communists than with those

dressed up as democrats. They know that those so-called communists can better serve their vested interests.

Invasion!

Ghatana Ra Bichaar, 9 November

गठना र बिचार

In what appears to be a case of media distortion, a reputable publication in India has published a report claiming that the Royal Nepali Army has occupied thousands of acres of Indian land. Published as if it were an eyewitness account, the report was featured on the front page of *Punjab Keshari*. It said the Nepali army was advancing into Indian territory, taking over several patrolling beats of the Indian Special Security Bureau (SSB) including Balganga, Pasauna, Bhedhari and Susta. The story went on to report that the Nepali government had sent fighter planes to the area and that clashes had occurred between Nepali troops and SSB troops. It reported Nepali spy planes in the Indian sky, taking off from bases at places like Susta. The story was said to be filed by an undercover reporter of *Punjab Keshari* who found more than 20,000 Nepali soldiers in the "Nepal-occupied Indian lands" distributing Nepali citizenship to locals. The story said the SSB had sent an SOS to the Home Ministry in New Delhi, which had referred the case to the Minister of External Affairs. The report is so unconvincing that even the most uninformed readers would realise that there is no truth in it. But the question is: why was it published at all?

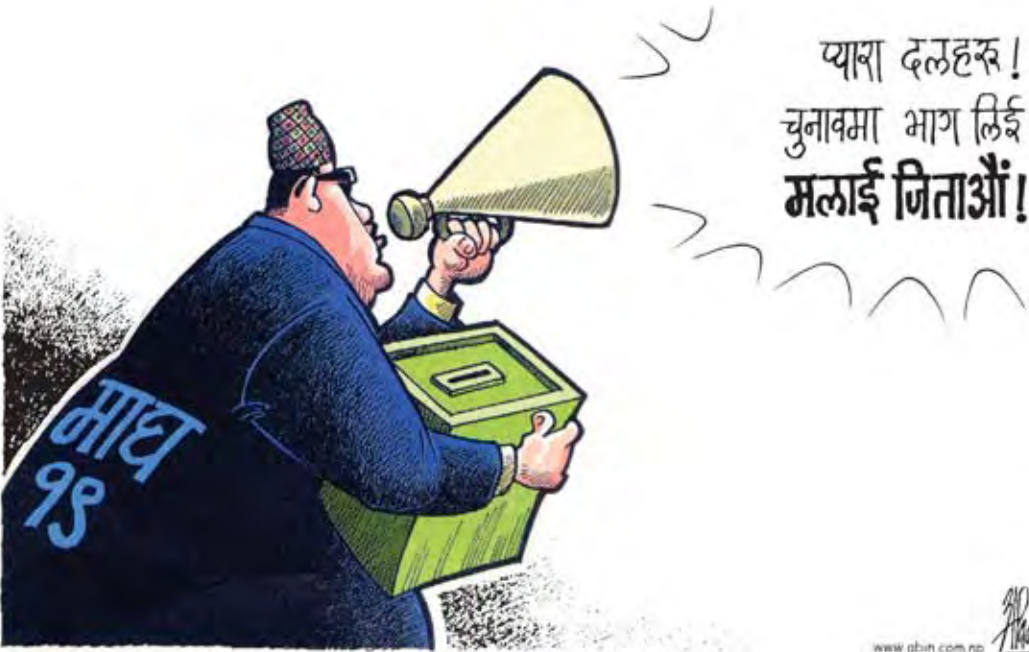
Democracy dawns

Editorial in *Rajdhani*, 10 November

राजधानी

The king's message on the occasion of Constitution Day is especially significant given the different comments circulating about the effectiveness of the constitution. That is because the king has given high importance to the people's opinion that the 15-year-old constitution is still relevant and has made a commitment to reform the democratic system. In line with that commitment, the king has already announced local elections within three months and general elections in the next year. Nepal's constitution has been under attack from several fronts, including from the creators of the constitution who themselves are becoming its enemies. In this context, the only patron of the constitution, King Gyananendra, has urged all to participate in elections in order to fully implement the constitution. The parties have been violating the provisions of the constitution they themselves had once prepared. During their tenure, the country's policies were dictated by foreigners and there was conspiracy to overshadow nationalist forces. Developments after the royal takeover have shown that the patience of the king has led to the dawn of a democratic era in Nepal once again.

MIN BAJRACHARYA



Man: February 1
Dear parties. Take part in the elections and help me win.

समय *Samaya*, 3 November

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Election can never be held independently if conducted under the patronage of the king.”

Former Chief Justice Biswo Nath Upadhaya in *Kantipur*, November 9

Patchy ceasefire



Himal Khabarpatrika, 2-15 November

Maoist activities during the ceasefire have been inconsistent. While the rebels meet political parties at interaction programs in Jhapa and Sunsari, in Ilam they have called for a blockade and are not letting foodstuffs be sold in the markets. Maoists there have ordered locals to remain in their villages and to not indulge in any kind of business. In addition, the rebels have distributed pamphlets in Jhapa's Surunga market calling for tenders for tax collection of the *hat bajar*. In east Nepal, Maoists still collect funds from villagers in public meetings. The abduction of teachers and students has not stopped. In fact, in an effort to increase their activities in public meetings, demonstrations and training programs, the abductions have increased.

The security forces say they have increased operations but when one visits villages, soldiers and police are nowhere to be seen. They can sometimes be spotted patrolling hilly areas but usually they remain close to district headquarters and market areas. In Argakhachi, the army is confined to safe Sandikharka. They haven't dared

to enter Maoist affected villages after 12 personnel were killed and 26 injured in a security operation in June. On the other hand, unarmed Maoists were killed by forces near Limbuchok in Morang on 14 October. A few days later, two more were killed in Dumrise, Taplejung and three more arrested. A week later, another person was gunned down by security forces in Panchthar.

Gopal Prasad Panthi, former president of Nepali Congress (D) went home during Dasain this year for the first time in eight years. But his visit was only possible when he declared he was quitting politics forever. In Argakhachi, you can smell fear on the streets. Many political party leaders have fled the district while those who remain have agreed to live by Maoist rules. When UML leaders visit their local peers they are threatened. Even now, during the ceasefire, all the Mechi level offices in Jhapa, such as zonal administration, police and transportation offices, are planning to move near the army barracks in Charali due to the deteriorating security conditions.

The schools that closed under Maoist threats before the ceasefire remain shut. The All Nepal Student Union (revolutionary) has said the schools that were handed over to the community have not returned the administration to the government. They padlocked the 12 schools in Morang again last week. Sick and tired of closed schools, students of a boarding school in Jhapa held a news conference to demand the immediate reopening of their schools (pictured).

The padlocked homes of 33 workers of different parties in Argakhachi have not been opened. Local party leaders and activists whose movements had been restricted by the rebels are still not allowed to travel and the 'visa system' has not been lifted. Since the ceasefire was declared, 15,000 people have been kidnapped in Panchthar and west Nepal. The Maoists abducted teachers, students and general citizens from five VDCs and forced them to attend their program in Jitpure Market, Jitpur.



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warriors

Female rebels in eastern Nepal are using the ceasefire for training

Comrade Chunauti and Sujata are also sisters. Their only brother joined the Royal Nepali Army and never returned home, so the girls also chose to take up arms. Chunauti is a section commander while younger sister Sujata is a political worker with the self-styled Kirat National Liberation Front.

The proportion of women in the Maoist ranks in eastern Nepal appears to be higher than in the west. “There is growing influence of female members of the Kirat community in the war,” says Ashmita, district secretary of Khotang, “there is no discrimination against women in these areas which is why more women guerrillas.”

In the Salleri, the Maoist 6th brigade is regarded as one of the Maoists’ strongest units, more than half of the militants are women, most from Limbu, Tamang and Sherpa communities. “Women make very good assault commanders, they are more confident and tough,” says political commissar Dipesh of the 16th battalion.

But no matter how tough they appear to be, most of the young women we talked to said they were homesick. That could be one reason why they are granted home leave. Nima was allowed to travel to Bhojpur from Sindhuli to meet her sister Rima, who works in a

different battalion. “I miss my family, but the party has allowed us visits,” says Nima who carries her firearm even while visiting home.

How about sex and marriage? “Although Marxism does not prohibit anyone from falling in love, we believe in sex only after marriage,” says Chunauti, who recently got married to a fellow-fighter from her company.

Maoist commanders have asked rank and file to be very cautious about relationships and not to marry outside the force. “It’s best to find someone who shares similar ideals and thoughts. Your head has to lead your choice for love, sex and marriage,” says Chunauti’s unmarried sister Sujata, adding that she is still looking for a good match for her.

Despite the rules, personal problems have led some to abandon the movement. The district secretary of Khotang, Comrade Hiranaya, recently deserted after being involved with district leader Comrade Bhumika. The chief of the district people’s government from Okhaldhunga, Lanka Rai, also deserted the party and ran away with his subordinate, Comrade Resma.

“They were involved in an illicit relationship and have disgraced the party,” says Comrade Asha, Janakpur coordinator of the

BATTLE READY: Comrade Chuanti is the commander of the Maoists’ 16th Battalion of the Eastern Division (*top, left*). Women warriors in the kitchen prepare food and on patrol (*overleaf*) and Comrade Bihani at left chats with colleagues during a break from training (*below, right*)

MATRIKA POUDEL
in KHOTANG

After walking three days from Biratnagar we reached Bhanjynag Kharkha. From the rebel activity on the pass it looked like the comrades, many of them women, were massing up

for an operation. But there is still a month of the unilateral ceasefire to go and it turned out to be just a regular military exercise. The Maoist training camp was intensive and strict. It ran from dawn to dusk and was led by a female trainer. Nima and Rima are sisters in their teens. With assault rifles slung over their

shoulders and grenades on their belts, the two lined for morning drills. Nima and Rima were 14 and 16 when their parents garlanded them and sent them off to join the Maoist militia two years ago. Since then the two have taken part in famous battles like Bhojpur and Siraha.



ALL PICS: SAGAR SHRESTHA

War correspondent

Comrade Sunita, 18, is a reporter who often accompanies the militants with her tape recorder, camera, notebook and pen. Here she is (left) talking into her cordless phone in front of a *chaitya* that is emblazoned with Maoist graffiti. A correspondent for the Maoist ‘Radio People’s Republic’ and *Janadesh* newspaper, she also has to participate in daily military training. “We live and eat with the guerrillas and also report major battles. That’s why this training is necessary for our own protection,” explains Sunita. Like her, many other young women work for the rebels’ information units. “The party has given special direction to involve more women in production and communication, in both the organisation and the frontline,” says Comrade Srijana, Bhojpur district secretary.



Maoist-affiliated women's organisation.

Three years ago, the Maoists central women's department started surveying women guerrillas to analyse what kind of personal problems could come up. Female fighters answered questions about sexual discrimination by male peers and about difficulties related to pregnancy, contraceptives and other problems. But the survey was never finished. "Some of the forms reached the hands of the

enemy, so it was discontinued," Comrade Asha told us.

The women fighters spoke in revolutionary jargon, but articulated clearly that they joined the movement to "liberate Nepali women". Many of women may not know the intricacies of the political debate in Kathmandu, but they appear convinced that by carrying a gun instead of a doko they will unshackle Nepali women. Says Asha: "The road to liberation is difficult, but we will reach it one day." ●



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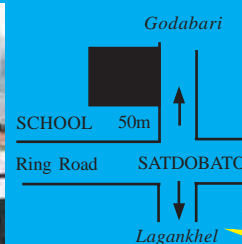
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“Slavery with a capital S”

Nepali girls forced into prostitution in India are trafficked and held by Nepalis themselves

MARTY LOGAN

Lust for money is the root cause for Nepali girls being forced to become sex slaves in brothels in Mumbai and Kolkata, according to a report just released by INGO Terre des homes.

Brothel owners, managers and traffickers are mostly Nepali and can recoup the ‘purchase price’ of new arrivals in up to seven months: meaning the money the girls earn by turning 10-12 tricks a day in their years of bondage that follow is pure profit. “To me the most significant thing we found is that the trafficker is a small player. There is a very lucrative system down there in Bombay and Kolkata for the brothel owners,” said John Frederick, research director of the study, at its release in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

“Client demand could be filled by girls 18 or older but the brothel owners’ demand (for younger girls) is immense, it is a demand for free labour,” he added.

The report, *A Study of Trafficked Nepalese Girls and Women in Mumbai and Kolkata*, is based on interviews in 2004 and 2005 with dozens of female sex workers, their clients, brothel owners, managers and locals living in red light areas in the two cities.

It details the various types of brothel set-ups, clients’ feelings about the Nepali girls and women they go to for sex. There are also stories of their troubled lives from the shocked moment when they realise where they have been taken, right to the end of their ‘term’ years when they must choose the next step in their lives.

“I was very hesitant about using the word ‘slavery’ because it’s a loaded word,” said Frederick, “I had always thought that many girls entered into prostitution willingly (after) they had been thrown out of their houses or something similar but the only incidents we found were slavery, with a capital S.”

The girls are between 14-16 when trafficked and on average spend three to five years in bondage but that can last as long as 10 years and ends at the whim of the brothel owner. This is the most perilous time for sex workers because they have no control over their lives or bodies. For instance, they are often forced to have sex without condoms and if they test positive for HIV are immediately thrown out of the brothel.

Once their enslavement ends (for most women between the ages of 18 and 22) the majority of sex workers exercise their freedom by entering

into a new arrangement with the brothel owner, either renting a room where they live and work or paying to use a room to continue being sex workers or living elsewhere.

By then many have developed a ‘mother-daughter’ relationship with the Nepali owner or manager, someone with whom they share a language and culture amidst foreign people.

The UN’s International Labour Organisation estimates that 30,000 Nepalis work in India’s brothels. Most of those studied in the two Indian cities have passed through slavery to become ‘free agents’, according to Frederick. Many of them told researchers they would like to return to Nepal but knew they would be shunned by their families and communities. Surprisingly, they also feared being rescued by Nepali NGOs and put into what they consider institutional ‘hell holes’.

Frederick cautioned that a heavy-handed approach, such as the one taken by Mumbai police, is not the answer. “People are terrified, 15 years of HIV/AIDS prevention work has been destroyed. If we bulldoze these brothels we’re going to damage these women and damage their kids.”

Instead, the solution starts



THOMAS KELLY

This young Tamang woman was rescued from a brothel in Mumbai. After three years in servitude, she was sent back to Nepal infected with HIV. She now has full blown AIDS but in spite of her ill health, participates in a border surveillance program.

with encouraging self-regulation in the brothels. In Kolkata, the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) started in the 1990s with an HIV prevention program and now includes savings and credit projects, childcare, healthcare and self-regulation committees that screen each new sex worker to ensure

she is not under 15 or a trafficking victim.

That work has reduced the number of sex slaves in Kolkata’s brothels—but “there is no evidence that trafficking of Nepalese has diminished in India as a whole” concludes the report. That will require further work in other cities. ●

Chronicler of Nepal’s sorrow

Kishore Nepal’s collage of Nepal’s 10 year war

For those who missed episodes of Kishore Nepal’s popular *Mat Abhimat* television show (and those who don’t have the bandwidth to watch its streaming video through the internet) the roving reporter has just put highlights in his English book, *Under the Shadow of Violence*.

In the past four years, Kishore Nepal has toured 70 of Nepal’s 75 districts, listening to

ordinary Nepalis: their fears and hopes, their desires and frustrations and their everyday stories. Many of these sometimes haunting and sometimes uplifting tales of suffering and survival have been broadcast in *Mat Abhimat* on Nepal Television. The program is the Nepali nation talking to itself, the individual sagas of Nepalis whose lives are a world away from Kathmandu’s beauty pageants and fancy parties.

Last year, Nepal transcribed his interviews in a travelogue titled, *Abajhinharuko Abaj*. Under the Shadow of Violence is a rough translation of that Nepali book, some of the episodes have already appeared in these pages in the past three years.

Both books and the tv series are a testimony to the hard work that this tireless journalist has put in to chronicle Nepal’s sorrow. Despite freedoms guaranteed by the constitution, Nepali journalists have for the most part taken the easy way out: with arm-chair analysis, lazy reporting that rarely goes in-depth and a reluctance to look beyond Kathmandu Valley at the real Nepal.

Happily there are still journalists around like Kishore Nepal. In his fifties, Nepal shows energy and drive that would make reporters in their twenties envious. He has walked thousands of kilometers, sometimes up to 16 hours a day and often across war-ravaged districts collecting the oral testimony of Nepalis.

Under the Shadow of Violence may have stilted English but the gravity of the message it carries is so important that it almost

doesn’t matter. In fact, the awkward translations give the prose an urgency and raw edge that would have been lost with slicker English. The author is the medium who brings us face-to-face with ordinary farmers, school children, policemen, young Maoist recruits and civil servants in far-flung district capitals.

“The Maoists threaten the women by saying they will kidnap or murder their children or burn their houses down if they are not fed...the security forces rarely go to the village but when they do local people are caught in the crossfire,” Maya Kunwar tells Nepal in Doti. As usual, it is the women and children who suffer most in this war and it is the poorest among them who pay the price, not the rich and powerful who wage it.

Belauti Khanal in Kawasoti tells Nepal: “The Maoists come and tell us to cook for them, we can’t say no for fear of them killing our children or husbands. Next day the security forces harass us. It is very difficult to convince them that we had no choice but to feed the Maoists. Their behaviour is often worse than the Maoists.”

And that is the recurring theme here, chapter after chapter. Helpless Nepalis trapped in a war in which Nepalis are slaughtering fellow Nepalis. There are also tales of disappearances, displacement and desperation. Widowed women, kidnapped children, demoralised teachers, and a countryside so brutalised by conflict it is unrecognisable.

The last section has a picture by Ravi

Tuladhar of a suspension bridge blasted by the Maoists where villagers have placed a precarious plank across the void. It is symbolic of the state of the country, a broken promise of progress and a people pulling along just to survive from day to day.

Kishore Nepal’s message and the message of almost everyone he has interviewed are that the Nepali people reject the war and they want it resolved through negotiations. Support for the Maoists is mainly because of the threat of violence, and most ordinary people are even more afraid of the security forces. Even if this conflict is resolved, future wars will break out unless devolution disperses Kathmandu’s political and economic dominance.

This book, its Nepali version and the tv series should be mandatory for everyone responsible for prolonging this futile conflict. ●

Reviewed by Kunda Dixit



Under the Shadow of Violence
By Kishore Nepal
CPJS, Kathmandu
2005
pp 156



The Gagan phenomenon

Political correctness and correct politics may be mutually exclusive options for second-generation leaders

It is unfortunate that Gagan Thapa's media image often precedes him. This image unjustly characterises the fiery student leader as a radical when in fact he is a moderate. He is an opponent of absolute monarchy, of Maoist extremism and a critic of democratic mismanagement. As a proponent of peaceful activism, he is atop a political gold-mine. Ascertaining his claim of generational representation is difficult, but

GUEST COLUMN
Dipta Shah



his mastery of channeling discontent qualifies him as an accredited envoy of a significant population of young, eligible voters, disgruntled by the prospect of an uncertain future. But Gagan Thapa's stance is wrought with political minefields. The fact that his ideology doesn't fully comply with the leanings of any single political group is more of a calculated risk and than a carefully planned hedge.

Gagan Thapa could be an asset to the palace since his particular brand of activism plays well into divisive politics. He could be an asset to the

Nepali Congress as leverage against the palace. But as a focal alternative, Gagan Thapa is a risk to the Maoist insurgency. As a rebellious student icon, he is a liability to the UML. And somewhere in this fray, Gagan Thapa is a god-send to extremism because the perception of an expanded extremity implies sustenance to a countervailing force.

Gagan Thapa's otherwise zealous advocacy is therefore also an impassioned plea for support. Republican politics has captivated the minds of young Nepalis at home. And, if audience response at Gagan Thapa's recent tour in the US is an indication, it is also the rage among Nepalis abroad. The man seems to understand this and appreciates the value of a differentiated political platform.

Gagan Thapa must know that the utility of a republican line is limited to its application as a potential bargaining chip (as opposed to an executable strategy in the immediate future). The struggle for evolutionary political transformation is inherently more logical than an attempt at radical change.

One of the pitfalls of Thapa's game plan is that although it is born of frustration with the NC party leadership, his annoyance is

for past actions against the education system. Whether one 'demands' or 'requests' disruptions in education for political purpose is not relevant, both are morally wrong. The politicisation of higher education has consequences for the future that Gagan Thapa and other student leaders may ignore but the repercussions will be borne by future leaders.

From a party perspective, one of Gagan Thapa's goals is internal reform. As a move toward fulfilling this goal, it would be encouraging if he were to steer his political capital at participating in the upcoming elections. This could help cleanse the Nepali Congress of its corrupt, inefficient and nepotistic image, and resound across Nepal's entire political spectrum. The future course that energetic and newly-elected officials chose (with full electoral legitimacy) would be in the true interest of their electorate. Whether a constituent assembly or a referendum, the pursuit would ultimately be part of an evolutionary political process as opposed to a revolutionary nightmare.

Should splinters from existing parties choose to participate in the upcoming elections, the frustrations borne by an emerging leader-base would be compounded. After all, electoral legitimacy is driven by evidence of participation, not by rhetoric. Hoping for low voter turnout or predicting fraud are not substitutes for not partaking in the process.

Second-generation leaders like Gagan Thapa are in a dilemma. Moves that would otherwise be politically sound may not sit well with the elite minority, and political correctness and correct politics may be mutually exclusive options. Regardless of whether he follows the NC party line or opt to lobby for NC participation in the elections, the fact that he is inherently a "good guy" will remain. And with gradual maturity the vision of an alternative future will draw support for Gagan Thapa and other young leaders like him. ●

(Dipta Shah is a graduate student of international affairs in New York)



ANUP PRAKASH

Maoists because his leadership of street protests provide a platform for infiltration, even though he may wish them to be peaceful. He could be an asset to the UML because it is Gagan Thapa's republican agenda that fuels the prospects of a potential leftist merger. He is already an asset to his parent party, the

focused against the monarchy. Galvanising disgruntlement against the king is shrewd but one that is not free of cost. This is painfully evident when we see that Gagan Thapa's political vision dates 236 years into Nepal's history, but does not extend very far into Nepal's future.

Gagan Thapa must also answer



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Multiple identities at the Summit

South Asia’s leaders meeting in Dhaka should learn from the region’s freshwater dolphins

The prime ministers, presidents and kings gathering at Dhaka this weekend must learn a bit from the region’s dolphins: the fresh water kind.

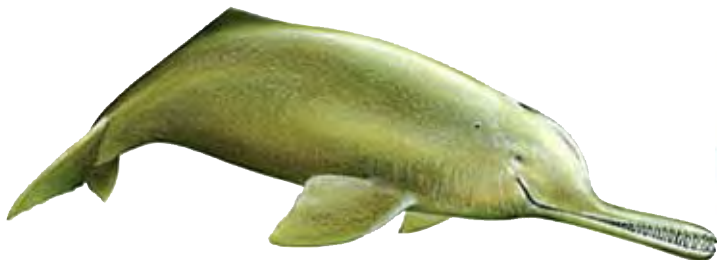
Dolphins are mammals and not fish and a geological and morphological phenomenon relating to freshwater dolphins might actually teach us something about conducting

SOUTHASIA BEAT
Kanak Mani Dixit

ourselves as humans.

The Gangetic Dolphin is called the *susu* and the Indus Dolphin is called the *bhulan*. Once abundant enough in these rivers to be included in environmental edicts promulgated by Emperor Ashok (he called them *puputaka*), today dolphins are gravely endangered species of our Southasian waters.

In India, the best place to see them today is from a boat off Patna at the point where the Gandak comes in from the north to meet the Ganga. Here, the creatures frolic. But elsewhere on both basins their habitat has been destroyed by barrages, canals,



INDO-PAK MAMMALS: The Gangetic fresh-water dolphin, (left) with its Indus cousin.

PCBs and DDT. Today, there are said to be no more than 2,000 of the *susu* on the Ganga-Brahmaputra (extending up to Nepal and as far downstream as Bangladesh) and 500 on the Indus (all within Pakistan).

The grey-brown mammals average two metres in length as adults, have evolved blind due to the natural turbidity of the Southasian rivers, and prefer to swim on their sides, with their lower fins possibly used to trawl the muddy river bottoms. The specie(s) use sonar to travel and to track prey (small fish and prawns).

Till the 1970s, these two pointed snout creatures had been considered the same species, though inhabiting different river basins, one emptying into the Bay of Bengal and the other the Arabian Sea (thus the two species are today separated by thousands of kilometres). The

world’s other two species of freshwater dolphins are found in the Yangtse and Amazon.

After the 1970s, the distinction between the two species, primarily in the shape of the skull, made scientists separate them into two sub-species know as *Plantanista gangetica* and *Plantanista minor*. Since the late 1990s, once again scientific opinion is drifting towards regarding them as one and the same species of the genus *cetacean*.

So here we have a species that clearly evolved in the one and the same Tethys Sea, somewhat before geological forces created the Himalaya-Hindukush, and even as the silting created the Indus and Ganga plains and the rivers which began to flow on them. In this fresh water evolved the Southasian dolphin, which represents together with whales and

porpoises the mammals that decided to return to water (rather than the fish which had always remained there).

At some point, there must have been a geological cataclysm which separated the water courses of Southasia, so that the Ganga flowed southeast-ward and the Indus went south-westward. This might have been the moment when the two species got separated by habitat, which isolation helped them evolve separately.

But it has not been such a long separation that they have diverged in any noticeable way. If the two species were to be put on the same muddy river course on either side of the Line of Control, they would probably say hello as they passed each other in the murk.

We, thus, have species of creation divided by geological time and yet we are confused

about what to call them. Are they the same species? Are they separate species? The answer is that they are both! Together, these two dolphin species make up the Southasian Freshwater Dolphin. And separately they are the *susu* and the *bhulan*.

The same should hold true for the people within the different nationalities of Southasia. Rather than regard our identities more rigid and separate, we must try to consider ourselves as having multiple identities. The fact is that the Westphalian tradition did not prepare us for this concept of grey zones where identities meet, whereas our past did cater to this uniqueness of Southasia. Only the acceptance of multiple identities is feasible for the multi-layered demography that makes us proud to be Southasians. Let us learn from the dolphins, even at the SAARC Summit. ●

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Stand for success

A good posture is vital to improving your game

Do you have the right golfing posture? Maybe. But how often do you check to see if you have been standing correctly?

Most weekend golfers I have come across ignore the significance of a good posture. This leads to a sloppy stance, which becomes a major hurdle to improvement and results in their performance spiralling downwards until they eventually require some serious repair work.

In every sport, sound basics are a must before beginners can make steady progress. In golf, once new players graduate from the practice range to the golf course they get too focused on scoring and pay little attention to the basics. Gradually they lose those much-needed fundamentals.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



A proper posture is the key to producing a good swing plane, along with a fluid body turn, power and most of all, balance. Creating sound swing speed without a proper posture is a distant dream. Similarly, your swing will never travel the right path if you do not stand correctly.

How to build good posture?

Step 1: Stand upright. Hold a club across your body, along the tops of your legs, with your palms facing your legs.

Step 2: Push inwards gently with your arm. You will feel the club shaft push your hips out behind you. As you feel this, bend your chest forward to counterbalance. Hold your chin up off your chest. As your rear moves out, add a gentle flex to your knees.

Step 3: Maintain your body in this new position. Take a club, form your grip and drop your arms in front of you until the club head rests on the ground. Let the club fall naturally, do not bend further to help the club down. You're in the right position if your hands are positioned below your chin. Your weight should be on the balls of your feet.



Developing your posture this way might seem too technical but it is in fact a very natural sporting position. If you play tennis, you'll almost certainly come to it naturally when waiting to receive a serve—back straight and at an angle, knees flexed, weight on the balls of your feet. If you at all struggle with the club shaft routine explained above, try imagining that you are waiting for a tennis serve.

Building a correct posture is vital if your goal is to constantly improve your game therefore when you visit the practice range from now on, follow the above drill and repeat it after every five balls. You will find yourself turning better, hitting stronger and more balanced on the follow through. And your swing will start to look great in those first photos from the tee! ●

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



The Lahan Open

Hospital staff in Lahan improvise tennis on a cowdung court

LAHAN—Tennis lovers in this central tarai highway town have got together to construct a tennis court from local material, which includes cowdung paste and clay. And the result is perfect.

“Earlier I was the only player, now we have several players and I am trying to be on the court every day for at least an hour,” says Albrect Henning, a doctor who works at a hospital here.

Henning first built a concave practice wall in the hospital premises and when some of his colleagues showed interest he decided to make the tennis court. However, red clay needed a lot of water so the doctors hit upon the idea of surfacing the court with clay and cowdung paste, which did the trick.

Cowdung paste mixed with clay and water is used in traditional Nepali houses to cover verandas and doorsteps. Besides giving houses a soft clean look, it is supposed to be antiseptic. The technology was there, it was just a question of using it on a tennis court.

The advantages of a cowdung court are that the ingredients for the surface are locally available and it is an income generator for local women, who need to resurface it once a month. They are experts because they smear cowdung paste at home all the time. Unlike a red clay court the surface does not need watering, it is softer than a hard court and thus causes less strain on ankles and knees—and on tennis balls so that they last longer.

“During monsoon when the grass is growing quickly on the court, you get a feeling of Wimbledon,” jokes Henning. Its maintenance depends on use.



SOFT COURT: Women putting a layer of cowdung on the court and in the practice area with its concave wall (top) and the participants of the 1997 ‘Lahan Open’.

Normally it needs a new layer once a month.

After the necessary practice, the hospital staff arranged the ‘First Lahan Open International Tennis Tournament’ in 1997. “Since Boris Becker couldn’t attend, I was the winner,” Henning says modestly, “but I was very much familiar with the bumps in the court and knew exactly where to play the balls.”

“Tennis keeps me fit

physically and helps me remain mentally relaxed and happy,” he adds. Henning also won the 1998 Lahan Open but since then the hospital staff have been too busy to play tournaments.

Henning and 120 local and international staff work at the Lahan eye hospital which performs more than 50,000 eye operations per year and is the second largest eye hospital in the world. ●



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Dolpo in Time** personal photographs and paintings by Tenzin Norbu Lama, 29 October – 11 November at Banana Cat Café, closed on Wednesdays. 5522708
- ❖ **Around Annapurna** panorama photographs by Andrea Stimm at Indigo Gallery, 18-27 November.
- ❖ **Photographs** by Susan Griffiths Jones, 20 November-7 December, Lajimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Art Walk** Traditional artworks at Hotel Yak and Yet. 4248999

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

- ❖ **Tiger Karts Tourism Cup** at Tiger Karts Racing Track, 12 November. 4361500
- ❖ **REIKI 1** at HBMC 15 and 16 November, 9AM-4PM. 4414843
- ❖ **Himsa Birodh** candle light ceremony at Maitighar Mandala Circle, 16 November, 5.30 PM
- ❖ **International Day of Tolerance** 16 November.
- ❖ **HELP/ Nepal** fundraising program for children at Patan Museum, 18 November.
- ❖ **3rd SIRC Charity Golf Tournament** at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort, 19 November.
- ❖ **Asman Mela** at Hyatt Regency, 19 Nov, 10am-6pm.
- ❖ **Universal Children's Day** 20 November.
- ❖ **Africa Industrialization Day** 20 November
- ❖ **World Television Day** 21 November
- ❖ **Ride and Rage** bikers ride up to the Last Resort and party, 25-26 November.
- ❖ **Mean Streets with De Niro and Scorsese** film festival at Lajimpat Gallery Café, 9 – 30 November. 4428549

MUSIC AND PERFORMANCES

- ❖ **Supper Club** the best of Jazzmandu at Shangri-La, 11 November.
- ❖ **Jazzmandu All Star Fever** at Summit Hotel, 12 November.
- ❖ **Jazzmandu Peace Parade** at Lajimpat, 1-2PM.
- ❖ **Ritu Shrawan - 5** a musical performance by Sukarma at Gurukul, 13 November, 5.15 PM. 4466956
- ❖ **Traditional Newa Music Concert** by Tanani Bajan Khala from Jyapu Tole 13, 20 & 27 November at Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** at Dwarika's with Maya Mantra, 15 November and 1 December. Rs 1000 per person, 7PM-10PM. 4479488
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** music at the bar, Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Ladies Night Wednesdays**, free cocktails to the ladies at Jatra.
- ❖ **Musicians Night** every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 PM. 5526212
- ❖ **Cadenza Live!** at Upstairs, every Saturday and Wednesday.
- ❖ **Live Jazz** by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272

FOOD

- ❖ **Kebab & Biryani Festival** cuisine from the house of Mughals at Hyatt Regency 5-20 November, 6.30 PM . 4491234
- ❖ **Tapas & Margaritas** at Hotel Yak & Yeti, 10-22 Nov, Rs 699. 4248999
- ❖ **Thanksgiving Dinner** with free Irish Coffee at K-Too! 24,25,26 November. 4700043
- ❖ **The Sidewalk BBQ** with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Ciney and Par-e-jat** every Friday 7PM at Dwarika's.
- ❖ **Sushi and Saki Promotion** at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **BBQ Dinner** at Summit Hotel, Fridays, 6:30-9:30 PM. 5521810
- ❖ **The Chimney Restaurant** Signature dishes at Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **BBQ Ban Bhoj** at Godavari Village Resort, Saturdays. 5560675
- ❖ **Jazz Gourmet** fine dining redefined at Hotel Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Autumn Chill out Moments** at 1905 Kantipath, delightful entrées and lounge grooves by DjPj. 4225272



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, call for reservations. 4361500
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After fighting to help California become the 31st state of the Union, Zorro has to keep the promise he made to his wife Elena- to give up his secret identity and live a normal life as Alejandro de la Vega. When he hesitates, it threatens to tear them apart. Now, the same forces that conspired to keep California from becoming a part of the United States are plotting to unleash a threat that has been 500 years in the making, a threat that could change the course of history forever. And only Zorro can stop it.

Call 4442220 for show timings www.jainepal.com



KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

According to air-quality monitoring stations, the pollution level in the Kathmandu Valley rose steadily last week. In the first three days, the average concentration of PM 10 (harmful particles small enough to lodge in the lungs) was within the national standard of 120 micrograms per cubic metre but in the days that followed it reached unhealthy levels. The increase was especially high along busy roadsides. Compared to previous weeks the PM 10 concentration in all stations has increased. The reason for the sudden hike in pollution is not clear.

30 October - 4 November 2005 in micrograms per cubic metre.

Source: www.mope.gov.np

Hazardous >425
Harmful 351 to 425
Unhealthy 121 to 350
Ok 61 to 120
Good < 60

221

145

98

40

57

39

Putalisadak

Patan H

Thamel

Kirtipur

Bhaktapur

Matsyagaun

NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



The persistent presence of the high pressure system over North India and the Himalayan foothills is especially significant this week. Credit for the recent sunny days goes to this phenomenon, which is also pulling in dry and cold air from the Tibetan plateau bringing down temperatures in Kathmandu. This satellite image taken on Thursday morning indicates that the system is being nudged by a westerly front that is already over Kashmir. This may bring in some high clouds but otherwise the Valley will continue to see sunny skies and early morning mist. Humidity levels have gone down to 40 percent.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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KIRAN PANDAY

LET ME TALK: NC leader Girija Prasad Koirala deep in conversation with UML leader Bamdev Gautam and Pashupati Samsher Rana of RPP at an event organised by Ganesh Man Singh Adhyayan Pratisthan on Wednesday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

DECORATED RESCUER: Prabin Bikram Rana receving La Médaille de la Valeur Civique (Gold Medal of Civic Value) from French Ambassador to Nepal Michel Jolivet. The medal was awarded to the first aid instructor by the French Federation of Rescue and First Aid.



KIRAN PANDAY

CONSTITUTION CROWD: Pro-democracy activists gathered at Maitighar's Shanti Mandala for a rally organised by Nagarik Samaj on Constitution Day on Wednesday.



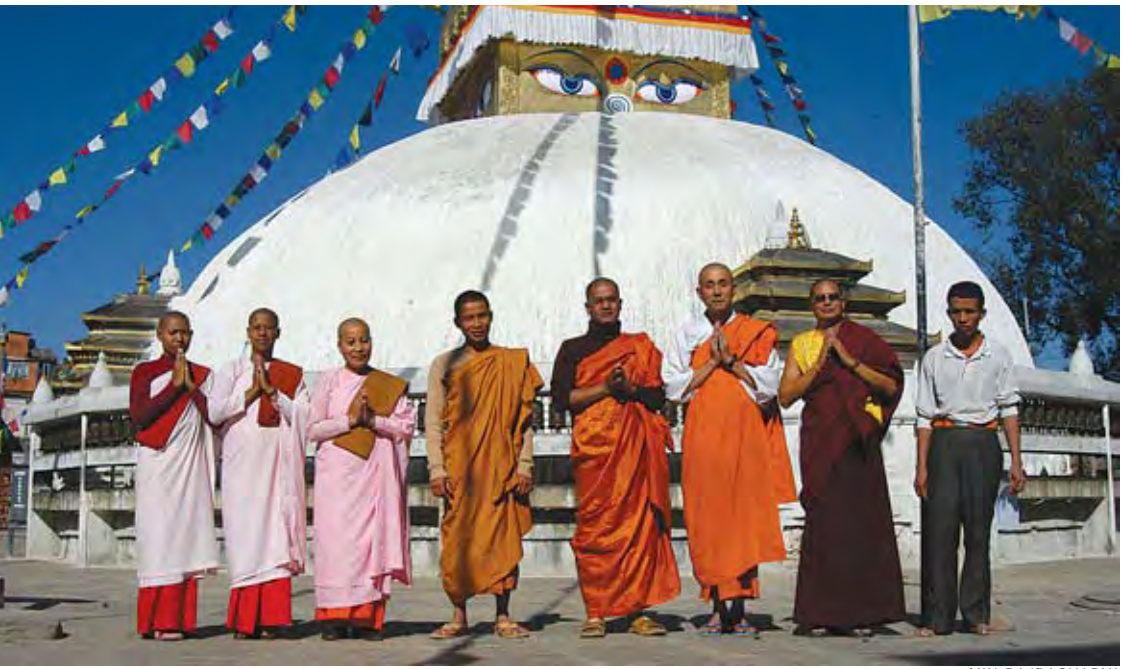
ANUP PRAKASH

CHA, CHA, CHA: Couples take to the dance floor to show off their moves at Jazzmandu's Red Hot Latin Jazz in the Yak & Yeti Hotel on Monday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

SOLAR DRIERS: Despite the short monsoon season, farmers in Bhaktapur got a golden harvest of rice which they were drying on the asphalt road this week.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Walk for peace

As you read this, a group of 35 people is setting off from Namobuddha on a peace walk that will end 25 days and cover more than 500 km later in Lumbini. The occasion is the completion and inaugural ceremony of the Vietnam temple at the birthplace of Buddha but the walkers' goal is much larger: to help bring peace to this troubled land.

The first such walk was held in 2001 to mark the establishment of the Japanese Shanti Stupa in Lumbini. Beginning from Namobuddha, where the Buddha in an earlier life fed himself to a hungry

tigress and her cubs, the participants will walk through Banepa, Patan, Bouddha, Swayambhu, Balambu, Naubise, Baireni, Richoktar, Kurintar, Abukhaireni, Dumre, Damauli, Dulegauda, Pokhara, Phedikhola, Rangkhola, Waling, Galyang Bhanjyang, Arya Bhanjyang, Tansen, Kerabari, Butwal, Bhairahawa before arriving in Lumbini.

The 35 walkers will include monks, nuns and lamas from the three different sects of Buddhism—Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana—representatives of other faiths and common folk.

"It is ironic that the land where the Buddha—who taught the world the middle path of peace—was born, is today being torn apart by violence. The main objective of this walk is to promote peace and harmony in society," says 22-year-old Bikkhu Tapassi Dhamma who joined the Sangha at the age of 12 and was educated in the path of the dharma in Sri Lanka. He was the moving force behind the restoration of the Ashoka Charumati Stupa in Chabahil, built by Emperor Ashoka in the name of his daughter Charumati. Tapassi Dhamma is also assistant general secretary of the World Buddhist Sangha Youth, an association of young Buddhist monks worldwide.

So if you see the peace walk passing by, wave. Or better yet, join in. ●

Alok Tumbahangphe

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From the Kingdom of Amnesia to the Republic of Insomnia

Now that Nepal will soon be gaining honorary membership of the Axis of Evil in recognition of our achievements in turning all the clocks in the country back by a century, it's about time we brought ourselves up to speed on the strict Code of Conduct that governs the behaviour of such states.

If we are serious about being becoming a pariah nation and remaining one, we can't pussyfoot around anymore. Membership of the Axis of Evil means that with absolute power comes absolute responsibility to adhere to some of the basic norms of naughtiness. No one is going to take us seriously if we are half-hearted about repression and just go around pretending to be bad.

There are countries that are far ahead of us in tyranny and have decades of experience in thumbing their noses at the international community and getting away with it. Some of

them are hermetically sealed nations in our own vicinity, and we need to learn the tricks of the trade from them.

For example, it is no longer sufficient just to make a token gesture like moving our zonal headquarters from Nepalganj to Surkhet. Look at how far ahead Burma is: this week it shifted lock stock and barrel its entire capital from Rangoon to Pyinmana to thwart an imminent foreign invasion. That is the kind of steadfastness, determination and foresight we need if we want to be card-carrying members of the League of Failed States. Let's ask ourselves: are we determined to wreck this country or not?

If we are really serious about being taken seriously by the international community, therefore, we need to emulate North Korea and Iran and begin plutonium enrichment at the Radiology Department of the Ministry of Information Warfare at Khumaltar. That way no one can kick us around anymore.

Then there is the whole continent of Africa that we have ignored for far too long. It is the region with the most failed states in the world, and we have to figure out how they did it. The first step towards being a failed state, of course, is to set up a Nepal-Zimbabwe Friendship Society if there isn't one already. Then we right ahead and establish full diplomatic relations with the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Insomnia and the Kingdom of Amnesia. Then we dispatch a fact-finding mission to Bujumbura to see how one can be a failed state in ten easy steps, and while we are at it earn bonus airmiles on Royal Nepal Airtight Corporation. This will also give RNAC the necessary experience to establish direct air links between Timbuktu and Kathmandu in future so the national flag carrier doesn't waste any more taxpayer money flying unprofitable sectors like Kathmandu-Hong Kong and Kathmandu-Delhi during the peak tourist season.

Being such an active member of the Axis of Evil will mean that we face the looming danger of being invaded. That is why if it were up to me (hint, hint) I'd immediately relocate all government offices from Kathmandu to Rasuwa with immediate effect. ●

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