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## BILASH RA

- The UN system in Nepal expressed deep concern on Thursday that 75 polling stations for next week's elections will be located in school buildings. 'If schools become a place where the conflict is fought out, then they are no longer safe as places of education,' the statement said.
- Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, in a statement timed for 1 February expressed concern about the lack of progress in returning democracy. 'The sad failure by the king and his government to declare a truce and to engage in dialogue at the time of the recent Maoist unilateral ceasefire was an opportunity missed,' Solana added.
- The Commander of US Pacific Command, Admiral William J Fallon, met King Gyanendra and senior military and other officials Wednesday. He said before leaving: "Reconciliation between the king and the parties is not only indispensable to bring back democracy but also to effectively address the insurgency by the Maoists."
- President of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Christopher Warren said of the detention of journalists on Wednesday: "The violent intervention of police and the targeting of journalists during peaceful protests is totally unacceptable."
- Amnesty International called on the royal regime to release immediately and unconditionally all those who have been detained for the peaceful exercise of their rights during a crackdown on the political opposition over the past two weeks.





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## HAMMER AND NAIL

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail. The absolute monarchists and the Maoists, who have together commandeered this country, face this dilemma. Neither can seem to extricate itself and the nation from the quagmire it has got us into.

Those who believe in violence as the only way to rise to power have a deeper distrust of those who don't than they do for each other. Hence the mass detentions of party activists and civil society members last week. Journalists and students were baton charged and doused with water cannons because they dared to protest peacefully. The government's defence of crackdowns cited elsewhere in this paper is that the Maoists would infiltrate the dems. But that is disingenuous—if democracy wasn't throttled a year ago there would be no need for pro-democracy rallies.

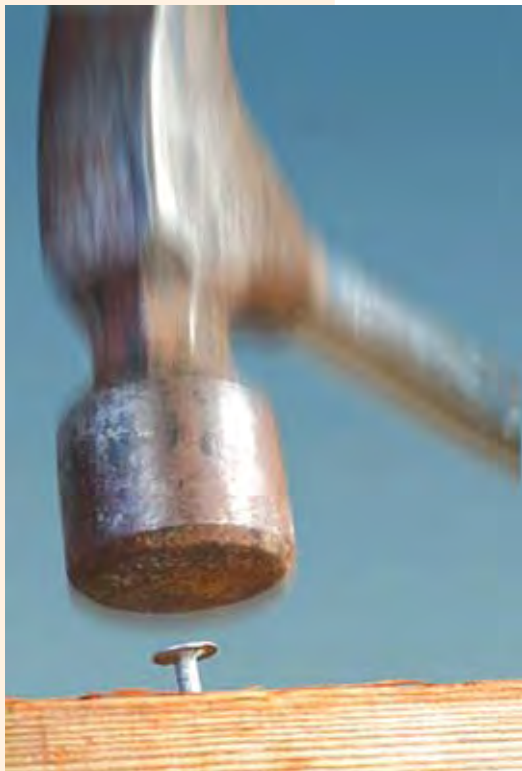
For their part, the Maoists have two options ahead of them: keep on this deadend military path or join the mainstream. Their return to war has eroded the little public support mustered during the ceasefire and it has brought international disapproval. By shooting mayoral candidates they have seriously jeopardised the pact with the parties. But the comrades must be in a fix: they can't threaten the government without escalating the violence but if they do so they will strengthen the king's hand.

By prolonging the conflict, they give the palace-army combine the excuse to perpetuate crackdowns on democratic institutions and the media. And the five-day national shutdown next week will actually help the government conduct a stealthy election.

Assassinating municipal candidates or slaughtering policemen, razing Tansen or burning Sajha buses helps only an interventionist monarchy, no one else. Even the rebels themselves won't benefit from dragging this on.

In fact the comrades may want to consider that the best way to take the wind out of the sails of the royal regime is to renounce violence and steer themselves towards representational politics as they promised in their agreement with the political parties. That way, the army will have no reason to fight and the palace will have no justification for continuing to hound the democracy movement.

Remove the nail, and the hammer will have nothing to hit. It will be purely ceremonial.



# Crisis within a crisis

## Let's look at the monarchy as a countervailing force

Standard international practice of democracy has it that erring politicians yield their place to others more likely to regain people's trust. Not so in Nepal.

Even as the disgraced stubbornly cling on to what they probably see as potentially lucrative positions, party members instead of getting rid of their tainted leaders, continue to render them their near-servile obeisance. So much so that even leaders incarcerated for

**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Bihari K Shrestha**



corruption are unanimously re-elected to their former positions.

For many party workers too, the incumbency of their party in power has meant they can scramble for crumbs tossed to

them by their leaders in the high table. For the people in the streets, however, this considerably blurs the distinction between an ideology-based party and a mafia operation. While such political behaviour has been the mother of all problems in Nepal, surprisingly we still see a knee-jerk adherence to keeping these crooks around.

As King

Gyanendra mentioned in his address to the nation on Wednesday, the February First takeover came only after the monarch's attempts to give clean administration to the country through these very parties failed due to the latter's intransigence. Even before Sher Bahadur Deuba was appointed prime minister in January 2004 the king had met the leaders of all the then agitating parties and presented them a seven-point agenda comprising of consensus on national issues, peace and security, curbing of corruption, people-oriented system of governance, national unity, holding election and an all-party consensus government.

But what the parties wanted was an immediate return to unbridled incumbency even without popular mandate in elections, which due to their reckless misconduct during their dozen years in government could no longer be held.

As if the Maoists have not done enough already through their safe havens in India, the seven party alliance leadership is now engaged in inviting Indian interference more or less in the same manner as that of the Sikkimese leaders in the buildup to 1974 when India swallowed up the country. Holding rallies of thousands of party cadres cost huge sums of money. But since the parties are not given to transparency in their financial dealings, among other things, one is bound to lend credence to the rumour now making rounds in Kathmandu that the money after all did not come from their earlier earnings.

Instead, millions of rupees have since made it from abroad to help finance the jamboree of their paid party workers to create an illusion of popular support, whereas the disturbances it creates only incense the vast silent majority even more against them and their egregious acts of foolhardiness.

The spontaneity of popular support is shown more by the thousands of people who mill around the king and queen for their darshan during their visits to the districts. Since the political parties in Nepal still have to evolve as instruments of total and genuine democracy and good governance, people do look up to the monarch as an indispensable countervailing force not only against the indiscretions of the parties, but also against the evil designs of foreign powers.

There is, however, no denying the fact that the present interim government could have done much more to translate the monarch's patriotic intentions into concrete programs and achievements. For one thing, the present government continues to stick to the same unproductive if not counterproductive development planning and highly-centralised implementation system.

The present government's task, therefore, should be create new conditions of development so that people begin to look to the post-Maoist future with a sense of optimism and enthusiasm. Not doing this will let the people down as well as the counterbalancing role inherent in the Nepali monarchy. ●

# Ask not for whom the poll tolls

## Once more we got faulty premises, empty promises and lots of doublespeak

A day before it was to be telecast, the palace secretariat promoted King Gyanendra's impending speech as a royal address. Naturally, public anticipation was high. Political activists were rounded up across the country and the army presence on the streets was stepped up.

Fortunately the king didn't do any of the things that we have come to expect of him. He didn't announce a new constitution for monarchical democracy. The army didn't arrive at our newsrooms. People checked their post-paid mobiles and they were still working. There was no new state of emergency. Mercifully, the king's address turned out to be a damp squib.

Like the February First address, the speech this year also consisted mainly of faulty premises and empty promises. It was all double-speak about authoritarianism being the mainstay of meaningful democracy. However, compared

to his grave composure last year, the king looked relatively calm this time around.

Some of his self-assessments, however, sounded outrageous. Even as the king was pronouncing that the security situation in the country had improved, the Maoists had just finished sacking the capital of Palpa district. He claimed that in the past year corruption had lessened, the administration de-politicised, fiscal discipline enforced, decentralisation strengthened, and a balance between security concerns and human rights established. Nepal, he said, have wholeheartedly embraced municipal elections. Err, not quite, Your Majesty.

Any independent observer can see the municipal polls have degenerated from being a farce because of the political party boycott to a tragedy because of assassinations by the Maoists. Hazards for candidates remaining in the fray, dangers to officials assigned to election duty, and risks for voters making the trip to polling booths remain as high as they were before the royal address this week. The king studiously avoided criticism of

mainstream parties and censure of international community, but he came across as a man still determined to play the game by his own rules.

To his credit, the king admitted in his Wednesday speech that history is the judge of the people's conduct during times of crisis. Someday when a free and independent historian will sit down to appropriate the blame for the murder of Bijay Lal Das (a restless youth who wanted to be mayor of Janakpur), it's very unlikely that he will assign all the guilt upon Chairman Prachanda alone. The confrontational politics of Chairman Gyanendra has also deepened the country's crisis even if he doesn't seem to see it that way.

Pashupati Shumsher is the chairman of an avowedly royalist political outfit but even he has been compelled to call these polls "a joke". Unfortunately the joke is on common Nepalis, a group that hardcore monarchists don't consider worthy of any respect.

Experiences throughout the world have shown that history doesn't always move in

the direction desired by princes, potentates and other pretenders. On 11 February, the Iranians will be celebrating the 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the overthrow of their 2,000 year-old-dynasty. Lessons of the Iranian uprising are salutary for Nepali political parties. But the international community may need to revisit its complacency towards the Shah of Iran and revise its strategy towards Nepali monarchy.

During the last days of the Shah, a relatively soft and accommodative Mehdi Bazargan was leading the pro-democracy movement in Iran. However, like in most monarchical societies, his support base was relatively weak. That inspired the regime in Tehran to ignore the demands of representative politics. The stage was thus set for the decisive showdown and the ascendancy of extreme revolutionaries.

No two countries are ever exactly alike but parallels between Iran and Nepal should be frighteningly unnerving. For our collective survival, let's hope King Gyanendra's assessment of historical processes are more astute. ●

**STATE OF THE STATE**  
**CK Lal**



the things that we have

## LETTERS

1 February 2005

1 February 2006



## IGNORANCE

This is in response to Dr Jacob George's letter 'Thugs' (#283) in which he shows his ignorance about the ground realities in Nepal. I fail to understand what his concept of freedom is. And what restraint is he talking about? To make sweeping arrests, cutting phone lines and imposing an unprecedented dawn to dusk curfew is restraint? If he thinks that the previous regimes were corrupt and incompetent he should see what the current regime is up to. The people of Nepal have suffered enough at the hands of an obdurate monarch and it is ridiculous that there are still some misled people in the world who would support such a rule.

**Dr Pranabh Shrestha, Bansbari**

● Kunda Dixit's 'Red alert' (#283) gives an indication of the growing international concern over Nepal's political process and warns us about our own future. Despite international observation, suggestions and pressure over the political crisis however, the condition in Nepal is worsening. At this point, we Nepali people and the king have to ask ourselves whether some irrational part of our souls is ruling over the rational part to lead the country ultimately into chaos. Let's wake up before it's too late.

**Samjhana Pokharel, email**

● I read, with interest, comments by Stephen McClelland, head of Asia Directorate DfID ('Donor's dilemma', #282) and interview with Jean-Marc Mangin, Canada's first secretary in the same issue concerning staff security in the delivery of development activities in Nepal. As a development project implementer, I welcome the priority given to employee's safety. However, one important question arises: while donors accept responsibility for the safety of their own staff, who is responsible for the safety of partner organisations staff?

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**Bhai Kaji, Kathmandu**

● Re: your editorial 'Regime change' (#283). The only thing we need in Nepal is editor change of your publication then the rest will work out fine. King Gyanendra is a godsend to Nepal. In these difficult times the true people of Nepal are behind him. May Lord Vishnu protect him and show him the path as is required.

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**Harka, email**

● After reading all the doomsday scenarios in Nepal, I'm tempted to look at the silver lining, if it is any consolation. Political analysts are by definition pessimists and the ones in your stable seem to be no exception. The direst predictions rarely happen because there are natural brakes in society: tribal, family, community links that prevent people from going to the brink. These brakes are more effective in soft states like ours where there are ways to let off steam. It is when there is nowhere to let off steam and the frustrations get bottled up and grievances spill over that things fall apart. But I think all Nepalis have to tap into our innate resilience and good sense. I predict that the Maoists, the king and the political parties will react only

when pushed to the brink and they will pull back once they see the chasm below.

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Kanta KC, email

## TGIF

It was distressing to read BP Gurung's 'Tough English' complaint in your Letters section (#283). The comparison with BBC, CNN or AP is unwarranted, as those are mass-circulation media targeted at quite different audiences. True, some NT headings may seem obscure—they are full of puns and allusions, in the great tradition of *The Economist*. But, with his experience of TOEFL tests, Gurung is surely familiar with standard English dictionaries—including the many free online ones—that can explain difficult words, in the process enriching his command of English. After a full week of the 'English-language' dailies of Kathmandu, I for one look forward to Fridays, when I can sit back and enjoy the perceptive, provocative, penetrating and definitely polished writing of the *Nepali Times*.

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# THE WORD IS FORESIGHT



What explains Himal Khabarpatrika's 575,000 readers? Our analysis and foresight, for a start on 2059 Kartik 16, we talked about King's wish to ride alone. On Magh 19, 2062, he admitted it publicly and said, "I am Eklavya".

The word is "Shelf-life". No matter what, Himal Khabarpatrika has been able to meet the epitome of journalism and of importance of the sense that shelf-life value adds to the trust of our valued readers.

First we spoke of Foresight. Then of trust and this week we speak of shelf-life. Still to come are production values, prestife, steadfastness, investigative skill, etc...






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# Sweeping polls

Pokhara's street cleaner wants to do a Lula

PETER DALGLISH in POKHARA

Among the most courageous of the kingdom's residents must be Yam Bahadur Pariyar (right), the humble Pokhara street sweeper who is standing for mayor in Nepal's municipal elections.

On Tuesday he was on the grounds of the city's municipal guesthouse, under the watchful gaze of armed police who have the responsibility of keeping Pariyar and his fellow candidates out of harm's way.

Unlike the more than 500 men and women across the country who over the past week withdrew their names from the ballot, Pariyar refuses to be intimidated by threats from any quarter. "My dream for Nepal is peace," he states with the confidence of a seasoned politician. "I am the man who picks up other people's garbage. Pokhara's citizens over the years have come to know and trust me. And I will do my best to deal with all the problems that Pokhara is facing."

Pariyar may lack the impressive professional credentials of many of the nation's municipal candidates but his sincerity sets him apart from the pack. And he has a plan for Pokhara, taking a page out of the policy manual of Europe's Green Party, emphasising conservation and resource management. "We need to improve the quality of Phewa Lake and to protect our places of natural beauty. Only then will tourists return," he says.

When asked whether he can win the support of the local business community, the street sweeper replied without hesitation that he would work hand-in-hand with the city's hotel personnel to "create the best possible environment for tourism".

If Pariyar is successful at the ballot box (his main rival is a former DDC chairman) he will follow in the footsteps of others who have overcome poverty and discrimination and defied expectations. President Luis Ignacio Lula of Brazil worked as a shoeshine boy and shared a single bedroom behind a Sao Paulo bar with his parents and seven siblings.

Like Lula, candidate Pariyar was forced to quit school as a child to help support his family. And like Brazil's charismatic leader, Pariyar has had to endure taunts and discrimination from more privileged members of society.

Does he fear for his safety, knowing that Maoists have already killed one candidate? "I hope that the Maoists would see me as a street sweeper who is attempting to become mayor of the city," he replied, "they won't support me but I don't think they will kill me either."

Whatever the outcome of Pokhara's municipal election, lasting peace in Nepal will require a new generation of politicians with personal integrity who are committed to improving the well-being of the nation's citizens. Electing Yam Bahadur Pariyar to public office would be one small step in the right direction. ●



PETER DALGLISH

Peter Dalglish is a lawyer and the founder of Street Kids International.

# Partnerships to fight Asian poverty

The Department for International Development (DfID), with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, will host 'Asia 2015: Promoting Growth, Ending Poverty', 6-7 March in London. The meeting is to focus attention on building new forms of partnerships to eradicate poverty in Asia and aims to forge agreement on how Asian countries, development agencies and the international community can meet the remaining Millennium Development Goals.

DfID says its new partnership agreements run for up to 10 years. "One of the most recent examples of this new approach is the multi-year allocation of budget support to the Government of Tanzania, announced by DFID just a few days ago, on 30 January 2006. This decision was based on strong and credible commitments by the Government of Tanzania to maintain and build the conditions in which poverty reduction can be achieved effectively," it says.

"In the past, Nepal made excellent progress in developing policy on foreign aid that encouraged just this type of approach. With peace and stability, it should be possible to restart a dialogue on how to move to these 'state of the art' partnerships," added DfID.

The conference website is at [www.asia2015conference.org](http://www.asia2015conference.org).

### Media mission to Nepal

On the first anniversary of the king's seizure of power, international media freedom groups have condemned what they say is "a year of repression of Nepal's media". The International Mission for Press Freedom and Free Expression in Nepal which visited Nepal last year to monitor the state of the media.

"Nepal's journalists have been confronted with an autocratic regime for the past 365 days. During this period, the independent press has lost most of the legal and constitutional protection it had acquired since 1990, more than a thousand journalists have lost their jobs and the government-induced economic pressure has increased on many media companies," the mission said in a statement.

### Cosmic check-ups

AVCO Service Centre (ASC) held a free check-up camp for Cosmic Yingang Motorcycles in association with HP Racer - Lubricant Products, at Kathmandu and throughout Nepal 4 -27 January. Services included free check-ups and washing, free oil top-ups and discount coupons for servicing and spare parts. More than 1,500 customers participated.

### Deurali Janata

Nepal's leading pharmaceutical company Deurali Janata Pvt Ltd celebrated is 15<sup>th</sup> year in business on Jan. 28. Vice-Chairman of the Nepal Planning Commission, Shanker Sharma, and Minister of Health Dr Banshi Dhar Mishra attended the function.

### NEW PRODUCTS

**ENERGY DRINK:** Gorkha Brewery's Nutri Malt energy drink is now being test-marketed in Kathmandu. A non-alcoholic carbonated malt drink with vitamins C and B Complex, it replenishes lost energy quickly. Nutri Malt is available in a can and priced at Rs 45 in select outlets during the launch phase. Joshi Suppliers is its official distributor in Kathmandu.



**WATER PURIFIER:** PureGen water purifiers are now available in Nepal. Based on US reverse osmosis technology, the purifier has five different filtration stages that remove all bacteria and viruses and soluble impurities like salt and heavy metals, according to PureGen. They also sweeten water's taste, the company says.

**SME MANAGEMENT:** BizMantra has upgraded its SME toolkit at [www.bizmantra.org](http://www.bizmantra.org) with information on the Nepal government's Finance Ordinance 2062. It has also released the second version of the toolkit CD, which includes hundreds of articles, tools, forms and training materials designed to help Nepali managers and entrepreneurs do business better.



**HELLO HONEY:** Salt Trading Corporation Nepal has introduced STC Honey to the Nepali market. STC Honey is enriched with natural nutrients and can be used on bread, with milk and other food items.

# Battered ‘Brand Nepal’

The state must realise its whimsical acts hurt our global image

Ten years ago, when outsiders looked at Nepal they saw the Himalayas, Gurkha soldiers, Buddhism and the Sherpas, without whom no mountaineering expedition was possible. As trite and inadequate those images were, they helped frame Nepal's complexity in easily comprehensible images. From backpackers on budget trips to elite mountaineers aiming to break records, Nepal was the place to be. Tourism was a valuable component of Brand Nepal.

STRICTLY BUSINESS  
Ashutosh Tiwari



In the ensuing years, while Nepal dug itself further and further into an ostrich-like position, other countries moved on to doing more business with one another. India, for instance, shrugged off its image as a country of snake charmers to one filled with cheap, hungry and smart software coders. China has formidably recast itself as the world's cheapest high-volume factory for just about anything. Ireland, long famous for sending away millions to work in London and Boston, has become a quiet economic powerhouse. And when people talk of Bangladesh these days, they increasingly speak not of floods and poverty but of a six-billion-dollar garment industry that has resulted in Dhaka's expanding skylines.

Amidst all these changes, the

state of Nepal appears altogether intent on sending out wrong signals about its brand as a nation. On one hand it says that it wants to take advantage of globalisation. To that end, even without getting into the details of safety and logistical ease, it aspires to be a point of transit between China and India. But on the other hand, by repeatedly engaging in acts that earn negative publicity around the world, it tarnishes Nepal's image as a safe, secure and reliable place for tourism and business. True, the Maoist rebellion has not helped Nepal. But then hardly anyone mistakes the Maoists as advocates of free-market democracy. The trouble with the state is that it publicly claims to be a friend of globalisation and free-market democracy and then, step by step, goes on to do just the opposite. The result is that Nepal's credibility is compromised, long-term interests are hurt and the value of Brand Nepal is eroded.

As citizens we have to take the destruction of the nation's brand by the state seriously because, as Anholt-GMI Nations Brands Index puts it, "globalisation means that countries compete with one another for the attention, trust and respect of investors, tourists, consumers, donors, immigrants, media and the governments of other nations". If the attention we receive is only for curfews, censorship, violent demonstrations, whimsical

actions of the state against businesses and skirmishes that leave people dead everyday, it's hard to rally around Brand Nepal. And with our brand not doing well in the global market, our collective chances of attracting more investments, getting better jobs, earning higher incomes and enjoying a higher quality of life in Nepal are significantly diminished. Patriotism alone, alas, does not put food on the table.

But like a scoundrel, the state takes refuge in patriotism as a remedy for all ills. In doing so, it fails to understand that in these open times patriotism is malleably portable. A Nepali can live in Queensland or Qatar and still love Nepal in her own way without anyone telling her how to do so. Instead, she is likely to be aghast at how the state's actions have led to Nepal's portrayal in the international media as a country that's spinning out of control. Negative global press is hardly compatible with the state's professed aspirations to take advantage of globalisation, which demands consistency, reliability and a lower cost of doing business.

If Nepal had diamonds or oil, the state could potentially live off such riches and not worry about free-market democracy for a long time. But in a resource-poor nation, the state can only live off others' handouts for so long while the country's brand value plummets for tourism and investments. ●

# “Elections to bring democracy back on track”



KUNDA DIXIT

With a week to go till municipal polls, Minister of Communications and Information Shrish Shumshere Rana spoke to *Nepali Times* and blamed political parties for not responding to the king's offer to participate in the government.

**Nepali Times:** How is it going for you as a journalist-turned-minister?

**Shrish Shumshere Rana:** I'm learning. Much of my time is spent responding to the personal agendas of people because the government remains the largest employer. I am surprised at the extent of lobbying done for even small positions. This concentration of power in ministries or ministers perhaps even contributed to the demise of democracy here. This is a totally new realisation for me.

**As a journalist you were trained to look at both sides of a story but now as a minister you have to defend one side. Is that out of your own personal conviction?**

Let me put it this way: I have not had to lie as a minister. I have been

saying the same things that I used to say before I became a minister. There has been gradual erosion in Nepali politics...yet I am surprised that other journalists were not able to see it.

**See what?**

The tendency to drag the monarchy into politics every time it did not suit individuals and organisations. Every time there was a power tussle within one or other political party, they dragged in the king, demanding a partisan approach rather than a constitutional one.

**But in the past year we have seen the king himself descend to the level of everyday politics.**

On no account has the king come into politics—he has been dragged into it. On 1 February, the king invoked Article 27 and came in as chairman of the council of ministers so that no one would have to fight about who would lead the government. All his public statements since then have asked for participation from all political sectors.

**But the constitution does not have a provision for the chairman of the ministers' council.**

Yes there is no such provision. But there is a provision that says the king is the symbol of national unity and the same article says that the king is the guarantor of the constitution. Had the political parties agreed to address the country's crisis, the king would have very willingly reverted to his own position. It does seem that the major political parties would rather use their clout to join the agitation on the streets than solve national problems.

**So the real problem seems to be a lack of trust between the king and the party leadership?**

Well if the king did not trust the political parties, he would not have been appealing to them to participate in the government. He is a constitutional monarch. Those who say they support the constitutional monarchy, however, interpret it in their own partisan manner.

**In the past year, Nepal's international isolation has deepened and now even the Chinese have shifted their stand.**

I see no shift in the Chinese stand. What the Chinese have been saying is that this is an internal matter and they continue to say it. Nepal is a strategic country, they will watch it. If they say they will watch it, they will watch it.

**But the Chinese have for the first time expressed serious concern about what is happening in Nepal.**

The concern is genuine. The destabilisation of Nepal is a matter of serious concern for both China and India.

**Will there be any concrete change in the government's media policy?**

The journalism sector has lost its credibility in many ways. There is a need to correct the disorganised state of Nepali journalism and make it more professional. I am for filling the vacuum in media-related laws but those with vested interests will obviously not like it. If the press becomes a hurdle in the government's efforts to restore democracy, we will have to re-examine its role.

**Has there been a genuine effort for reconciliation with the parties?**

What is a genuine effort? After 4 October 2002 the king kept on meeting the parties' leaders for 27 months and asked them to form a national government. The leaders just sabotaged each other. Even after 1 February the parties did not respond to calls to join the government. The doors for talks are always open. But, there has to be a constitutional meeting point.

**So what is stopping you?**

It is high time we pinpoint (the blockage): the unconstitutional rigidity of those who demand that the king should be constitutional but themselves are not respecting the constitution. The state is very much within the constitution and that is why we have been saying that elections are the way to restore parliament so we can bring the constitutional process back on track.

**Why was the government so negative about the party-Maoist pact?**

We weren't negative. We were not even part of the talks. Madhab Kumar Nepal was saying that he did not have to go to India to meet the Maoists and he did go. It was India that first labelled the Maoists "terrorists". Suddenly the terrorists surface in New Delhi and everybody flocked there and came up with what they call a pact. There is only one point in which they seem to have an actual agreement and that is to scuttle elections. If they use that agreement to scuttle elections, then we will have to prepare ourselves for that.

# “Elections will bring reconciliation”

Interview with Manisha Koirala in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 January



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Bollywood star Manisha Koirala has kept her movie-making and acting career on hold to campaign in support of the municipal election in her homeland. She says: “I support polls because I have seen the king’s commitment to democracy and pluralism.”

### Why did you come to Nepal at this time?

To help elections. I will be here through this period.

### So you really came back to campaign in support of polls?

That is the main reason I am here now.

### Which party will you support?

Not parties. I will support Binod Aryal’s candidacy for the mayor of Biratnagar—he has been a staunch Nepali Congress supporter for 50 years.

### But what of public opinion that is against elections?

That is because of the fear of Maoist threats.

### What do you say about the parties boycotting?

Just the party boycott wouldn’t have had such a result—it is the Maoist threats.

### You seem to be against Girijababu and the NC.

I oppose anyone who goes against BP’s line.

### Would these elections strengthen the BP line, then?

BP was always on the side of national reconciliation. Only that line will solve the present crisis. And I am convinced that the elections will bring about reconciliation.

### Changing the subject, people say you came back because things aren’t going right for you in Bollywood.

I have always heard that every time I have returned in the past. But that’s not true.

### What are you doing in Bollywood?

I just finished work on a film in which I play a leading role, *Darbaja Banda Rakho* and *Tulasi*. After March, I am producing three films on my own.

## Jungle rule

Samaya, 2 February

समय

Just when the government’s ban on demos, protest rallies and mass meetings have become common in urban areas, dense jungles even in remote areas have also come under the spell of such prohibitions. The jungles in and around several villages of Palpa district are a case in point. The Palpa district administration has issued a notice prohibiting not only protest rallies and mass meetings but also normal movement of people in the jungles here until further notice. The ban has also come in effect in the jungles of Nawalparasi and Rupandehi districts because they share borders. The local administration says the ban is aimed at containing Maoist activities but it is ordinary people who collect fodder who are bearing the brunt.” Security officials say the forests are used by Maoists to hold meetings before launching attacks against government bases. But, villagers are not convinced. “Security is fine. But, how can we collect firewood,” asked housewife Radha Thapa, “we need alternatives to survive.” Security officials defend their moves saying that they are for the people’s good. So far civilians have not been caught in the crossfire. But, many including children have been injured in explosions.

## Manhandled

Disanirdesh, 29 January

Lying in serious condition with head wounds at Miteri Hospital, the president of the Padma Kanya Campus Free Students Union, Binita Adhikary, recalled how policemen beat up young female students at her campus. “We were

in the streets in front of our campus demonstrating peacefully. Then the police came and started using force to stop our peaceful rally. We ran into the campus premises but they chased us and hit us with their batons, bricks and stones. I was severely beaten and then collapsed on the ground. The police used their heavy boots to thrash and break fingers on my left hand. Just before I passed out, I saw a group of male policemen kicking our vice-president, Deepa Siwakoti, and beating her senseless with their batons. They were acting on orders from Kedar Ojha from police headquarters. Using men to manhandle girls and women is against the international human rights law. This is not the first time that such an incident has taken place. But this has not demoralised us—we shall continue with our movement.”

## King’s gamble

Desantar, 29 January

देशमन्त्र तन्त्रालय

The king is isolated. Even the royalists are hardly seen around the palace anymore, notably vanishing at a time when he needs them more than ever. All the king has now is the strength of arms, which he has been using to force the elections on the citizens. The nation’s security force, which is supposed to be fighting on the battlefield, is now also engaged in searching out candidates and voters for the 8 February municipal polls. The central government has become more vulnerable, desperate and isolated than ever in Nepali history. The king’s election spectacle has amused the nation and the world. Not even staunch royalists had imagined that the king would take such a laughable step in the 21<sup>st</sup> century just to save the monarchy. We can expect much worse in coming days. The families of the royal slaves spend their hours dreading the deaths of their relatives. It seems that the government has already prepared for this given that it has announced it will provide life insurance for candidates. Members of one poor farming family were terrified when they discovered their breadwinner inside army barracks, where he had already been declared a candidate. This farmer has no idea what that means. There are many more examples in every town and ward, from far east to far west. Every candidate is kept either inside the barracks or under heavy police protection. The king is fully aware of all this but is gambling on the lives of the citizens for his future.

## Costly year

Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 January

हिमाल

- Royal visit to Bangladesh, Tunisia and Africa: Rs 177.8 million in direct costs, Rs 38 million in payments to Royal Nepal Airlines and Rs 320 million in losses to the national airline
- Royal visit to the Boao Summit and Jakarta: Rs 70 million
- Crown Prince Paras’ Japan

- trip: Rs 27,911,954
- Crown Prince Paras’ Saudi visit: Rs 2,243,718
  - Ramesh Nath Pandey’s China visit: Rs 1,036,251
  - Ramesh Nath Pandey’s UN visit: Rs 6,926,943
  - Ramesh Nath Pandey in Moscow and Islamabad: Rs 1,561,684
  - Ramesh Nath Pandey in SAARC: Rs 1,069,629

### Frozen foreign aid:

- Denmark: Rs 5.8 billion
  - World Bank: Rs 12.55 billion
  - Swiss: Rs 1.57 billion
  - UK: Rs 190 million
  - Canada: Rs 350 million
  - ADB: Rs 5 billion
  - Norway: Rs 2 billion
  - Sweden: Rs 2 billion
- (Source: Rastra Bank and donor statements)

## Army votes

Jana Aastha, 1 February

आस्था

At a time when RNA spokesman Brig Gen Nepal Bhushan Chand announced that the army had been mandated to provide security in the upcoming municipal elections, the Royal Nepali Army has begun to ask for votes. But the vote the army is asking for has nothing to do with the elections. It has sought the vote regarding Maoist infiltration of the capital. The army has introduced a ballot on its website asking visitors to vote by answering this question: Do you think the Maoists have infiltrated the capital? The question has three possible answers: Yes, No, and Don’t know. The website (www.rna.mil.np) shows that 83 visitors had cast their votes by Sunday. Of those, 61 percent had voted suggesting there was Maoist infiltration in the capital. Thirty visitors thought there was no infiltration and eight percent had said that they did not know. The army has suspected infiltration of Maoists in the capital, especially after the rebels attacked the police stations in Thankot, Dadhikot and other places in the Kathmandu Valley on 14 January. The suspicion has been further solidified after unidentified gunmen shot at and injured mayoral candidate Dal Bahadur Rai in Lalitpur district on 31 January. At a time when the army has become vigilant about this infiltration, the rebels are said to have prepared a central command to surround the capital, boosting their presence in 13 districts around the Valley. East of Kathmandu, the Maoists have established a special regional bureau covering Dolakha, Ramechhap, Sindhupalchok and Kabhre with Agni Sapkota (Kanchan) has been designated as its chief. In the west, Chitwan, Gorkha, Dhading, Nuwakot and Rasuwa districts have been included in a special regional bureau headed by Hitraj Pandey (Uttam). South of Kathmandu they have set up a bureau that will use Makwanpur, Bara, Parsa and Rautahat as bases to launch attacks on the capital. The rebels have established a special valley bureau covering Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur and some parts of Makwanpur district.



Licence plate: February First  
Milestone: 365 days  
Clothes: Good Governance, Rule of Law, Corruption Control

Robin Sayami in [www.himalkhabar.com](http://www.himalkhabar.com) 1 February

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ The only thing countries like the EU and the US do is bully small countries. We just have to ignore what they say and keep on with our work. ”

— Former Chief of Army staff Satchit Shumshere Rana in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 31 January

# Nepal's garment slump

Abhiyan, 30 January – 5 February 2006



Ratnakar Adhikari is a garment specialist with UNDP in Sri Lanka who opened the Kathmandu-based South Asia Watch on Trade and Environment with which UNDP and ActionAid has begun a study on Nepal's garment industry.

**Abhiyan: Nepal's garment industry is sliding down. What does this indicate?**  
Ratnakar Adhikari: The UNDP Research Centre recently conducted a study on the state of the garment industry of 12 Asian countries which found that garment industries in four countries (Nepal, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia) were worse off than before. America is the main market for Nepali garments and exports began declining since 2003. Compared to 2004 exports decreased by 40 percent in 2005.  
There are two main reasons for this. First, the garment quota provided by America for Nepal was

अधिका

abolished. At present the US is very biased in its attitude towards developing and underdeveloped countries. While the quota for Nepal, Laos and other underdeveloped countries has been removed Africa has received subsidies. This has taken the American garment market from Asia to Africa. The other reason is that we weren't able to compete internationally.

**Why weren't we able to adapt and compete in the international market?**  
We knew the Nepali garment industry was going down. The government is mainly to blame. The infrastructure that the government should have made was not there. In many countries like Cambodia the government has given subsidies on electricity and taxes. Many have given similar subsidies on import and manufacture of raw materials. Besides giving a little discount on import of raw material the Nepal government has not provided anything else.

**How about the industry itself?**  
The industrialists also only focused on what they were traditionally manufacturing. They failed to produce new designs according to market demand or look for new markets.



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## Ken's concerns

World Bank representative Ken Ohashi in Nepal, 5 February

नेपाल

The events of 2005 have once again proved the correctness of the World Bank's country assistance strategy. Strategically, it focuses on three important issues. First, if there are efforts for financial reforms we will support them. Examples include the **Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC)**. Secondly we support reforms that contribute to the creation of people-centred government. Since any system can be dismantled, it is only planned progress that can help reduce losses and misuse. Enabling the process of public policy making, increasing transparency and responsibility and capacity building fall into this group. Handing over schools to community management, the Midterm Expenditure Framework and the Purchase Act are some examples. The third change that we support is the decentralisation of resource management to the local government and communities. This helps transfer social and political momentum to the more disadvantaged groups within communities and we believe that it will, in the long run, provide the drive for the transformation of Nepal into a more open and fundamentally democratic society. The year 2005 was a difficult one. It steered its course from the king's 1 February move and the Maoist conflict escalated. On the other side, the coalition between seven parliamentary parties developed gradually. At the end of the year, these three forces put forth their respective, somewhat unclear, stands for possible peace and the restoration of democracy. Where these latest developments will lead Nepal remains unclear. But even with the setbacks of 2005, we should not give up hope. We need to have a long-term vision for Nepal. If we fail to develop one, we will be overlooking the real challenges of the country's development. The year 2005 has reminded us that we need to work on the fundamentals. Who knows? In 2006, Nepal could see its luck return again, just like during the reform process of 2003.



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- Disseminating a better understanding of governance issues through research, publications and interactive forums
- Overseeing ESP public relations in respect of prime stakeholders, HMGN agencies, donors and the media
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Closing date for application is 23 February 2006.

# Restoring Nepal's soc

Nepal's pashmina industry is bouncing back with innovat



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ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Until about five years ago, Nepali pashmina was *haute couture* among the world's rich and famous. Cashmere was out and people flaunted their pashminas, from Buckingham Palace to Beverly Hills.

In 1997 alone Nepal exported Rs 3 million worth of the fabric, and by 2000 the figure had risen to more than Rs 5.6 billion. The industry employed over 50,000 people and made up at least 82 percent of all handicraft exports from Nepal in 2000-2001 with manufacturers producing everything from scarves, shawls, blankets and mufflers to dressing gowns. It looked like Nepal finally had a global brand name to call its own.

Pashmina making began as a cottage industry, catering mainly to the local market. The few investors who saw its potential had to be patient before profits began to flow. And just as they started earning dividends, the industry realised it had one more lesson to learn—it's not easy doing business in an era of globalisation.

When Nepal's neighbours saw pashmina's potential, they brought economies of scale and just copied the product. There was a glut in the market, prices went into freefall. The Chinese had cheaper labour, lower production costs, skilled manpower and most importantly, their own raw material, something that Nepal was actually importing from the northern neighbour.

The Indians for their part used the age-old vanishing trick—importing Nepali pashmina, tinkering with it and then exporting cheaper products with the Nepal label. Low-price Indian and Chinese pashmina items, even fakes, began circulating in international markets, striking

at the heart of Nepal's industry. Unfortunately this was exactly what makers here tried to copy. "Indians totally spoil the market for us. They had variety, and embroidery skills, which we did not. Maintaining quality in the face of competition was tough," explained Roshan Timilsina of Innoxia Pashmina, whose main markets were Italy, Japan and Korea.

By this time everyone in Nepal wanted a piece of the pashmina pie. A Rastra Bank study shows that the number of registered factories jumped from 25 in 1993 to 959 by 1999. The 70-30 formula (70 percent pashmina and 30 percent silk), which had worked fine till then succumbed to competition and woollen shawls and other items began to be passed off as pashmina.

With the markets tightening, the unregistered factories were the first to go but the long-term businessmen were wounded. Not only did exports nosedive, retail businesses that relied on tourist buyers also suffered. Shopkeepers like Bishnu Dhungel of Lovely Handicrafts in Basantapur today spend the day waiting for the odd tourist to appear. Days of no business are not uncommon. Timilsina closed his factory more than a year ago and now only calls his workers when there are large orders.

But after years of downturn, it looks like the industry is coming out of the slump. The government has promised reforms to help them, like a refund on VAT, duty drawback and bonded warehouses.

People like Pushpa Man Shrestha of Nepal Pashmina Industry, one of the main players in the business for more than two decades, are still hopeful. "The US and Europe still have a soft corner for Nepali pashmina," he says. "It's a question of survival. The Chinese and the Indians are too large for us to



"This is not a blanket, this is a pashmina."

# Nepal fabric

## tion and new markets

compete with so we have found ways to overcome the challenge.” Nepali pashmina-makers are now restricting themselves to shawls but have focused on niche markets of apparel and household items made from the fabric. The other pashmina items are: pillow cases, bedsheets and dressing



gowns. Even men are wearing pashmina now in the form of mufflers, vests and sweaters.

The pashmina market is still a money-maker but the private sector alone cannot take on the giant neighbours. Securing a registered trademark for Nepali pashmina and encouraging the production of our own raw material, which is possible considering Nepalis in the north do raise sheep, could be steps to putting pashmina back on the shelves of the world's boutiques.

Pashmina is made from the soft wool found under the coarse hair of the *chyangra* or mountain goat. In its raw form pashmina is softer than cotton and as a fabric it is warmer than wool and smoother than silk, thus making it one of the most desirable of fabrics. Pashmina has been used by highland communities like the Thakalis and Gurungs for daily wear since time immemorial. Only in the last two decades did the international fashion discover pashmina. ●

## NEPAL PASHMINA INDUSTRY

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# Erna's joint venture

A Dutch artist collaborates with Kathmandu artisans for an exhibition of silver ornaments in London next week



MARK TURIN  
in AMSTERDAM

Erna Anema was a 25-year-old art school graduate when she first travelled to Nepal in 1979. She and her travelling companion had hoped to journey overland, like so many Europeans before them but the deteriorating situation in Iran meant that they had to fly directly to Kathmandu to travel and trek in the Himalayas.

Coming to Nepal had long

been high on Erna's list of desires, after reading a book as a child about the 1953 conquest of Chomolungma. While she had expected to be bowled over by the natural beauty of the country, the fine craftsmanship of the metal workers and jewellers fascinated her the most, sowing the seeds of future collaboration.

When she was studying at the prestigious Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam, where she now teaches, Erna had become interested in working with gold and silver and wanted one day to collaborate with the skilled Newar craftsmen in Kathmandu valley.

It wasn't until 1995, however, that this germ of an idea would blossom into a joint venture. In the intervening years, while working as a professional artist, Erna often holidayed in Nepal with her three children and her husband, Cas de Stoppelaar, the part owner of the Summit Hotel and eventual Consul General of Nepal to the Netherlands. In 1995, Erna began visiting a number of Patan craftsmen to watch them at work and seek potential partners who could translate her artistic vision into precise copper, silver

and gold objects.

I had the pleasure of meeting Erna at her house in the Netherlands earlier this month, where she regaled me with tales of her collaboration with and fondness for, Nepal's artisans. Her enthusiasm for her work and her ongoing relationship with this Himalayan kingdom are infectious, topped only by a charming unpretentiousness. She is disarmingly frank in the way that she describes both the challenges and successes of her artistic work.

One of the unexpected challenges in working with craftspeople in Nepal is the difficulty of accurately conveying an artistic idea in a manner that has local resonance. Trained to produce careful technical drawings in two- or three-point perspective, Erna soon realised that her Newar co-workers were unable to 'read' such visualisations, even if they marvelled at her precision.

The rough but elegant simplicity which Erna achieves in her art is unsightly to most Nepali craftsmen with whom she has worked, given the differing



MARK TURIN

aesthetic sensibilities. Once she finally succeeded with a copper worker in forming a bowl in the way she wanted it. She left for a couple of hours and returned to discover that he had carefully beaten an undesired wave into the rim.

Erna is modest about her contribution to the livelihoods of these craftsmen, suggesting that her artistic commissions make up only a small part of their annual income. While respecting traditional craft techniques, Erna delights in bringing small gifts for her friends and colleagues Rajesh, Saroj, Mohan, Nabin and Gautam, such as strong work gloves, books on gilding and gas masks to combat the noxious mercury fumes which are released when Patan's craftsmen decorate temple domes.

Erna's oeuvre is made up of three components: objects, jewellery and paintings. The first two are made in collaboration with craftsmen from Patan, while her painting is solo work from her studio in the Netherlands. Soon after an exhibition at Siddhartha Art Gallery in Kathmandu in the late 1990s, while Erna was teaching a workshop at Nepal's Art Academy, she organised a successful exhibition in Haarlem at which all exhibited items were sold.







Her most recent artistic adventure is the *Lal Project*, which she will take on tour to London next week. A *lal* is a Nepali unit of measurement for silver, from which Erna makes beaten silver brooches of different sizes and constellations. ●

9-13 February  
Victoria and Albert Museum  
London  
COLLECT 2006  
<http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk/collect/>

For more on lals and Erna's other:  
[www.ernaanema.nl/](http://www.ernaanema.nl/)



LAL SALAM: (clockwise from left) The artist Erna Anema, in her studio. A model wearing different combinations of silver Lals for an exhibition in London next week. Copper pots and other objects beaten in Nepal.



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# Targeted

## As always, villagers suffered most in the past year

NARESH NEWAR

It's 6PM in the village of Phaparbari in Makwanpur. Jamu Maya Bajju is holding her son, born only two hours ago. Her father-in-law, 83-year-old Pratap Singh, is busy preparing a chicken to celebrate the birth of his first grandchild. They hear the sound of a helicopter. Soon after, a bomb lands on the roof.

The walls of the wooden house collapse, all six family members run out and jump into trenches dug by the Maoists. Jamu barely has the strength to reach for cover,

just statistics that will be added on to the list of 13,000 Nepalis who have lost their lives in the past 10 years.

On Wednesday, King Gyanendra said that except for a few isolated incidents of criminality, the security situation in the country had improved. But after the Maoist ceasefire ran out last month the war has intensified. Neither the Maoists nor state authorities have publicly apologised for the civilians killed in the crossfire in Phaparbari or anywhere else in the past year.

Since 1 February 2005, the

ceasefire period to pay brief visits. More children were forced to leave school and migrate to cities both in Nepal and India to work in mostly exploitative jobs.

The economy was hit hard. Tourism reeled, particularly because many western countries issued negative travel advisories. Nearly \$ 250 million in development aid was frozen or slashed. And despite the king's assertion in his recap of the past year that foreign relations was 'stable and had clarity' Nepal's isolation has never been deeper. The UN Committee on the Rights



where she collapses. In the ensuing panic, she forgot her baby inside the burning house. A female Maoist rushes in and rescues the newborn.

RNA soldiers appear from behind the stone walls, bullets are flying everywhere. Pratap is hit in the head.

Mandhoj Bajju also runs out of his house as it catches fire, his 32-year-old wife Maili hears him pleading with the soldiers, "We're just villagers, not Maoists." A soldier asks him to raise his arms and another one shouts, "Kill that son of a whore." Mandhoj is shot dead.

Four-year-old Resam Bahadur Bholan was on the roof while the rest of his family were on the ground floor. He took a direct hit from a bomb dropped from a helicopter.

These stories of desperate Makwanpur villagers caught in a fierce firefight in Lamkana of Phaparbari VDC near Hetauda on 22 January are only just emerging. A Nepali team from the Human Rights Treaty Monitoring Coordination Committee visited the site and issued its report in Kathmandu on Tuesday.

"This is a tragic example of how civilians are paying the price of the conflict," says Krishna Subedi of the seven-member team.

The tragedies that hit the four families of Lamkana are already

country's human rights crisis and its humanitarian consequences have deepened further, especially in rural areas. Insec's newly published *300 Days of Royal Takeover* outlines the severe impact on citizens. (See box) Besides the security force and rebels, anti-Maoist vigilante groups backed by the state emerged as a third force. The media was subject to severe restrictions and the government sent soldiers with machine guns to camp in several leading publishing houses. Thousands of journalists were arrested.

"Even the most powerful institution, the judiciary, has lost its independence," says advocate Tikaram Bhattarai. Development activities of both NGOs and the government declined, with the impact felt most in health, education, rural infrastructure and poverty alleviation projects. More families were displaced from their homes, even though they used the

of Children in Geneva branded Nepal as a country not fit for children. "It's ironic that international concern for human rights of our own people have been interpreted by this government as foreign interference," says rights activist Gopal Siwakoti. International support has boosted the morale of activists, democrats and journalists to fight back fearlessly for democracy, adds Siwakoti.

As human rights violations mounted in the aftermath of the royal takeover, the UN established an Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which monitors abuses by both the state and the rebels. International pressure hasn't forced the king to roll back on his takeover, but according to Kundan Aryal of Insec it has stopped him from going all the way. Aryal says, "there would have been much more atrocities in the absence of international support." ●

### 300 days after February First

- 1,478 Nepalis killed in 65 districts in 2005. The state was responsible for 951
- 100 disappeared following state detention, thousands more were abducted by the Maoists
- More than 6,000 political activists and human rights defenders were arrested, many are still in detention
- During the first six months, nearly 1,000 journalists were out of jobs
- Tourism revenue dropped by Rs 1.2 billion.
- Nearly \$ 250 million in development aid was suspended



## Twinkle twinkle winter star

Winter nights are glorious! Of the 25 brightest stars, 12 twinkle in the winter skies. Six of these stars form the Winter Hexagon, which dominates the winter sky. (See star chart).

Our tour of the Winter Hexagon begins with the brilliant blue-white star Rigel, which forms the left leg of Orion 'the Hunter'. At the top of the hexagon is Capella, located in the house-shaped constellation Auriga 'the Charioteer'. Following Orion's belt up and to the right leads us to the next star of the Winter Hexagon, the red-orange Aldebaran, located in Taurus 'the Bull'. Moving straight down and to the left of Capella are two stars of nearly equal brightness that form the heads of the Gemini twins, Castor and Pollux. Pollux is the brighter of the two but Castor is a wonderful triple star system visible through a modest size telescope. Low in the east is Procyon, forming one end of the two-star constellation, Canis Minor. The sixth corner of the Hexagon is the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius. Notice that the three stars in Orion's belt point southeast to Sirius, the Dog Star.

Don't forget to observe Venus on Valentine's Day, when it will be at its brightest, giving pre-dawn viewers a sight that's difficult to miss. Venus won't be so striking again until June 2007.

February highlights:

**The Sun**  
The Sun is in the constellation of Capricornus at the start of February, moving into Aquarius on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

**The Moon**  
The Moon's orbit, experiencing an extreme tilt during 2006, will take it to unusual places: on the 8<sup>th</sup>, it leaves the zodiac and ventures into the northern constellation Auriga. On the 27<sup>th</sup> the Moon is closer to the Earth than at any other time of the year, a distance of 347,000km, an extreme *perigee*.

**Mercury**  
Mercury reaches its greatest elongation east of the Sun on 24 February, so this elusive little planet could be visible in the evening sky. Look for it with binoculars from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 22<sup>nd</sup>, low in the west about an hour after sunset.

**Venus**  
Venus is a brilliant 'morning star', at the first light of dawn low in the eastern sky. On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, it appears to be motionless in the sky as it moves toward its greatest elongation west of the Sun. On Valentine's Day, look for crescent Venus in the predawn sky through a pair of binoculars.

**Mars**  
This month Mars is at its highest in the early evening and sets after midnight. The 'red planet' is fading as the Earth draws further away from it but can still be distinguished by its reddish-orange colour. Mars is leaving the constellation of Aries and crossing into Taurus on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Look for it around 17 February close to the Pleiades star-cluster ('Seven Sisters').

**Jupiter**  
Jupiter at mid-month rises by 1AM to appear as a brilliant 'star' with a silver-white lustre in the constellation of Libra, the Scales. It will be primarily a late-night-early morning object from February through April. The giant planet appears brighter than any other star-like object except for brilliant Venus, 60 degrees further left.

**Saturn**  
During February, Saturn rises in the north-east shortly before sunset and will continue to be an evening object through the middle of July. It is moving slowly north-west in Cancer and could be found well below the 'Twin' stars of Gemini.

**Meteors**  
At certain times of the year, the Earth travels through a cloud of interplanetary debris that burns up in its atmosphere and we get a meteor shower in the form of 'shooting-stars'. However, there are no significant showers in February, which is generally also a quiet time for sporadic meteors.

# An eye on the region

## Nepal's rebels, India's scandals, Balochistan's blight, the list goes on

**H**oled up in each of our countries, we Southasians are too roiled by our nearest national political events. We are not really interested in what happened next door, yesterday or during the past week. Mostly, we perk up only if western tv or wire services raise enough of a ruckus that it penetrates our parochial cocoons. So, what has happened in the last week?

Being Nepal-based, this writer is keenly interested in three developments: the suddenly escalated Maoist attacks on government and security apparatus around the country, the developing farce around what Chairman Gyanendra calls 'elections' and the fact that so many politicians, civil

**SOUTHASIA BEAT**  
**Kanak Mani Dixit**

society  
leaders  
and  
activists

are currently in jail. There are sporadic protests and they are now countrywide, not limited to just a few cities.

But life in the rest of Southasia also continues and it deserves regular monitoring. It may be impossible to keep track of everything that goes on in a region that houses a fifth of humanity but one should surely keep watch.

Two political explosions rocked two Indian state capitals last week, in the north and south. With the Supreme Court having found him guilty on 24 January of misleading the centre, Buta Singh dissolved the Bihar State Assembly and stepped down as governor on Republic Day, just hours after unfurling the Indian flag

on the maidan. Post-shake-up, in the words of one editorial, Nitish Kumar is now 'comfortably ensconced'. The following day, seeking a vote of confidence, the Karnataka Assembly also adjourned. Chief Minister Dharam Singh resigned shortly thereafter, opening the way for the formation of a new government between the Janata Dal (Secular) and the BJP. The back-to-back embarrassment for the Congress also included an exhumation of the Bofors payoff scandal: with Rajiv Gandhi long gone, it is his widow and successor Sonia who is now taking the rap.

The strife in Balochistan has been heating up in recent months and frantic calls to quell the developing situation have reached Islamabad. But the rest of the Subcontinent is pretty clueless about what is going on at its westernmost edges. Anyone flying over Balochistan on their way westward cannot help but note how tortured the landscape is. But so is the humanscape, it seems. The Quetta provincial government recently unveiled a security plan for the upcoming month of Muharram, including surveillance cameras and law-enforcement personnel lining the routes of Ashura processions. A US

congressman also recently registered his vehement displeasure with the situation, accusing Islamabad of making money on the backs of Balochistan's suffering citizenry.

And even while President Pervez Musharraf made his case with characteristic élan at snowbound Davos, reports from back home (through the medium of Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi) confirmed—and predicted—that Musharraf will remain both army chief and president after the general elections, currently scheduled for 2007.

Bangladesh's pre-election drama is already heating up ahead of the general polls, currently scheduled for sometime in early 2007. The Awami League-led, 14-party opposition alliance has organised a six-route 'long march to Dhaka', starting 2 February and ending in the capital on 5 February to join the 'grand rally' that day. The 20<sup>th</sup> session of parliament began on 23 January with the AL continuing to boycott the proceedings, an action that began after the August 2004 grenade attack on an AL rally. According to the constitution however, MPs will lose their membership after a 90-day absence.

Other non-participatory Southasian

oppositions include the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) in Male, which stated that it would not be taking part in Commonwealth-mediated all-party talks, currently scheduled for 5 February. The MDP is protesting the continued detention of political prisoners, including MDP Chair Mohamed Nasheed (Anni), whose confinement was extended on 30 January by the Supreme Court. The following day, an MDP public demonstration protesting the same issues was called off early, after alleged threats of violence from the government. Nonetheless, the act netted the MDP a stunning MVR 50,000 fine.

'It is better to go to Oslo than to go to war' was the title of an article by Colombo commentator Jehan Perera, a reference to the reluctance of the Tamil Tigers and the Colombo government to agree on the proper venue for talks to attempt to rescue the shaky, four-year-long ceasefire. Fortunately, with the facilitation of Norwegian minister Erik Solheim, they agreed on Geneva. Now, LTTE-initiated violence has fallen dramatically. Meanwhile, more relief came when the renegade LTTE commander named Karuna subsequently declared his own unilateral ceasefire. He explained that he was taking into account the 'good intentions' and pragmatic efforts of President Mahinda Rajapakse and that he welcomed the Geneva meet and was committed to sustainable peace for Tamil-speaking people who have been victims of the Tigers.

Rounding out this incomplete Southasia roundup, there was no news from Bhutan this week because the violence on that front is the official silence on the Lhotshampa refugees. That silence continues to resound. ●



Maldives political prisoner Mohamed Nasheed (Anni)

## US trashes Tigers

**COLOMBO**—A reluctance to eschew violence and a failure to grasp prevailing political currents have earned Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels a place in the world's doghouse, rather than international legitimacy. Nothing conveys this better than a harsh statement this week, by a senior US government official about the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as the rebels are formally known, stand in the eyes of the world's sole superpower.

"We hope that the LTTE will understand that they will have no relationship with my government and indeed no effective relationship with any country in this world as long as it seeks to redress its own grievances through the barrel of a gun," Nicholas Burns, US under-secretary of state for political affairs, told journalists in Colombo on Monday evening. Burns' rebuke strengthens the noose placed around the neck of the Tigers by other international actors such as the European Union and India for the LTTE to give up its passion for violence or face more global censure.

## Tsunami abuses

**UNITED NATIONS**—A survey of more than 50,000 tsunami survivors in five Asian countries has revealed that most of them have been doubly devastated: losing their loved ones in the December 2004 natural disaster and subsequently having their human rights abused by their own governments. The five countries—Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives—are accused of discrimination in aid distribution, forced relocation, arbitrary arrests and sexual and gender-based violence in the five-country study by three NGOs: ActionAid International, People's Movement for Human Rights Learning (PDHRE) and Habitat International Coalition.

## Prelude to water wars

**MEXICO CITY**—There are many who predict that future wars will be over water supplies but intense skirmishes are expected in March at the 4<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum between those who favour and those who oppose privatisation of this essential resource.

Every day around the world, 2,000 to 5,000 people die from causes related to water shortages or poor water quality, and one billion people do not have ready access to water. The World Water Forum in Mexico is the fourth since 1997. It is organised by the World Water Council, which includes the business, academic and scientific communities. The presence of free-market advocates is an irritant to NGOs, which are staunchly opposed to the idea of water being turned into a commodity of the private sector.

"At the first three Forums, an open policy in favour of privatising water was evident. Now they have moderated their discourse and they talk about promoting social participation and plurality, but they continue doing the same thing," said Claudia Campero, spokeswoman for the Coalition of Mexican Organisations for Water Rights. (IPS)



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# Arjun rising

Indian golfer paves the way for Asian pros

I am indeed a great admirer of Tiger Woods but when Indian golfer Arjun Atwal is in contention, my heart says ARJUN, ARJUN. That was the case last weekend at the Buick Invitational on the USPGA tour. Young and dynamic Sergio Garcia was leading the field at 11 under par going into the final round, Woods (who has won the tournament the previous three times) was just one stroke off the lead and there was Arjun at 8 under par with a slim chance of victory only if he produced a spectacular final round. Trust me, I was wholeheartedly supporting Atwal.

After the regulation 72 holes, three players were tied at 10 under and Atwal was at 9 under. He had a chance to tie for the top spot but missed the birdie putt on the last hole from eight feet. However he still managed to finish tied for fourth, which helped him to jump to 16<sup>th</sup> place on the PGA tour after three appearances, earning \$ 256,668.

Atwal is the first Indian to have secured, in 2004, a tour card for the USPGA, the world's most celebrated golf tour. Other Asians who have qualified can be counted on the fingers of two hands.

Atwal's compatriot Daniel Chopra also secured his card the same year but Chopra plays under the Swedish flag as his mother is Swedish. Atwal has not only secured the tour card but has also proved that he can rub shoulders with even the big guns on any given day.

Last year he lost a victory in a playoff (in sudden death) with top golfer Phil Mickelson at the Bellsouth Classic. Atwal earned \$ 963,168 last season in 24 appearances.




He is the only Indian professional golfer to win on the European PGA tour and has registered triumphs at the Caltex Singapore Masters, in 2002, and the Carlsberg Malaysian Open the following year. He is the first professional to have crossed the million-dollar mark on the Asian tour after winning the Hero Honda Masters 2003 at the Delhi Golf Club.


Atwal apparently had the best putting average on the PGA tour in 2005—an average of 1.710. With such statistics under his belt this 33-year-old has all the needed skill and tenacity to come out tops on the tour and in the world.

Atwal is undoubtedly a trendsetter for Indian and Asian golfers and gives a huge boost to the golfing community in this part of the world. Every week I check the PGA tour's web page to see how this Indian golfer fared.

Good Luck Arjun! Hope you will keep the Asian flag flying and bring us lots of golfing glory. ●

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





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# Pokhara as a sports hub

The town's potential for sports tourism is finally being realised

RAMESH POUDEL  
in POKHARA

Pokhara has taken advantage of its spectacular setting to develop a tourist industry and lately it has become an educational and medical centre as well. Now, the city is destined to become a sports hub too.

Pokhara is already on the world marathon map with the gruelling Round-Annapurna Race and the annual Pokhara City Marathon which is scheduled for 18 February with many foreign participants. The city is also the venue for the annual Himalayan Golf championship and last month an international paragliding tournament was held here. Pokhara's sports aficionados say there is a huge untapped potential and they are determined to hold more games here to attract more national and foreign sports people and fans.

"We can promote water sports on Phewa Lake and we are hoping to revive the triathlon and traditional archery competitions we used to have here," says Tej Gurung of Pokhara's Sports Forum.

The problem had always been the lack of facilities and a proper stadium. The existing stadium has been used as a test-driving site by motorcyclists and as

grazing grounds for cattle. Now, with local and international support, the stadium is getting a perimeter wall and an ambitious upgrading plan.

The stadium has an ideal location near the city centre and a scenic backdrop of the Annapurnas. The local organising committee was at first daunted by the budget of Rs 10 million, but the support from Pokhrelis living abroad and foreign donors has been so overwhelming that Rs 7.5 million has already been raised. Even the National Sports Council has chipped in with Rs 1 million.

With the perimeter wall in place, the stadium will be hosting next month's Sahara

Club South Asian Football tournament. Local hoteliers, whose spirits have been dampened by the drop in arrivals after the end of the ceasefire are pinning their hopes now on Pokhara emerging as destination for sports tourism.

Pokhara tourism entrepreneur Sundar Kumar Shrestha says: "Because Pokhara is a tourist destination we already have international standard hotels and that is why we can attract international class sports events too." Shrestha says Pokhara's climate and setting is also ideal for one-day international cricket tournaments. ●

www.pokharastadium.com.np

## Vortex for paragliding

The Seventh International Paragliding Championship in Pokhara 19-23 January brought more than 60 participants from 19 countries, including 11 from Nepal. Participants took off from Sarangkot and had to land accurately on the shore of Phewa Lake.

The five-day competition has been organised by the Pokhara chapter of the Trekking Agents Association of Nepal for the past seven years and has given Pokhara's tourism a big boost. This year's first prize went to Russian Dmitri Oli, Adam Hill of Britain who runs Pokhara's famous Sunrise Paragliding school came second and Nepal's Rajesh Bomjon was third.

An indication of the importance that the government attaches to developing Pokhara as a sports tourism destination was the presence of tourism and civil aviation minister, Yankila Sherpa, to give away prizes.

sunrise@nepal-paragliding.com

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## ABOUT TOWN

### EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Slide show** by Korean Artist, Mr. Lee K.H and Photographer Mr. Choi Y.H. 3 February 3PM Buddha Gallery Zen café

### EVENTS

- ❖ **Interaction Program** At College of Applied Sciences 'Let's celebrate world wetland day together' followed by a picnic at Nagdaha. 4 February, contact Yatra at 5523948
- ❖ **Youth Forum** at GAA hall discussing 'youths in decision making'. 3 February, 3PM onwards.
- ❖ **Yuva Chalfal** at the Martin Chautari organised by Youth initiative will focus on 'Good Governance- Youth Perspective' 3 February. 3-5PM, 4107599.
- ❖ **Stammtisch** workshop on the similarities between Nepali and German language. 3 February Goethe Zentrum, Thapathali. 4250871
- ❖ **Sri Panchami** 3 February

### MUSIC

- ❖ **The Cloud Walkers** at Rox Bar. Request the music of your choice. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant
- ❖ **Celebrating Bob Marley's Birthday** lets get together and feel all right at Moksh Live. 4 February 3PM 5526212
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **JCS Trio** at Niek's Place. Every Tuesday.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711
- ❖ **Live Jazz** by the pond at 1905, Kantipath. 4225272
- ❖ **Uncork the Good Times** Fusion- The bar at Dwarika's presents Ciney and Par-e-jat playing Popular Sounds of 70's with Fabulous Cocktails, Tantalising BBQs by the poolside every Friday from 7PM onwards. Rs. 750, includes a small bottle of Carlsberg beer or a soft drink. Dwarika's Hotel, 4479448

### DINING

- ❖ **Buffet Breakfast** at Hyatt Regency assorted salads and deserts. 4491234
- ❖ **Maki Newa Bhutu** for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Singi. 4439784
- ❖ **Mexican and Italian** food at Fuzone Café, Lagankhel. 5542935
- ❖ **Great Dining** options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Barbeque** at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- ❖ **Plat du Jour** at the Shambala Garden, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** at Fusion, Dwarika's, happy hour 5-9PM.
- ❖ **The Sidewalk BBQ** with Shades of Blue, Wednesdays, Shangri-La. 4412999
- ❖ **Breakfast** at 1905 New York style bagels whole wheat pancakes and real croissants baked in house daily. Omelettes made to your gourmet style. 1905, Kantipath
- ❖ **BBQ Dinner** at Summit Hotel every Friday. 6.30-9.30 PM. 5521810
- ❖ **Breakfast with birds** lunch with butterflys and dinner by the Fire Place. Farm House Café. 4375279



### GETAWAYS

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- ❖ **Star Cruises/Singapore** with Air Sahara bring you cruise packages from Rs.65,500 only. 2012345.
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245
- ❖ **Conferences** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

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Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy are deported from London to the house of an eccentric professor during World War II. They find life there extremely dull until Lucy discovers a wardrobe that leads to a magical world called Narnia, where animals can talk and all are ruled over by the wise and benevolent lion Aslan. The others don't believe her at first but soon all of them go through the wardrobe and discover all is not well in Narnia. The land is being kept in a perpetual winter by the evil White Witch Jadis, who turns anyone who doesn't obey her into stone. The children join Aslan and the animals loyal to him in an attempt to vanquish Jadis.

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श्री ५ को सरकार  
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय  
सूचना विभाग

## NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



January came and went and still no rain, making it the driest three winter months in a decade. Although this trend has been apparent in recent winters, this year's case is unusual for the intensity of dryness immediately after a weak summer monsoon. Satellite pictures show fresh westerly fronts carrying clouds over the western Himalaya, where they collide with southern jet streams and diffuse. That brings fragmented patches of dry clouds to our skies but no signs of impending rain. Expect cloudy days thanks to the intense haze, high clouds this weekend but sunny days ahead.

## KATHMANDU VALLEY

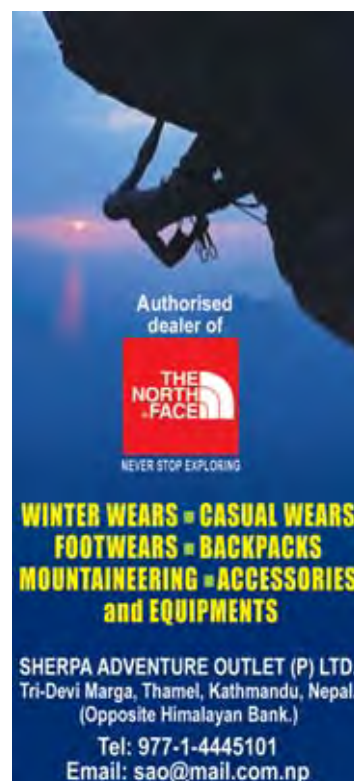
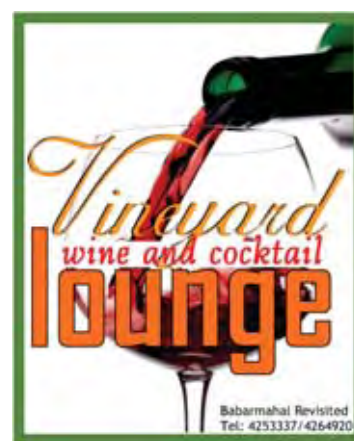


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PASSING THE BATON: Journalists defy prohibitory orders at Bhotahitya on Wednesday for pro-democracy rally. Thirty journalists, including Kanak Mani Dixit co-publisher of Himalmedia (pictured) were detained briefly.



ALL TOGETHER: French Ambassador Michel Jolivet with the families of the Nepali victims of the 20 October Mt Kang Guru avalanche in which eight Nepalis and seven French climbers died. Each family got Rs 22,000, the third such payment since the tragedy.



SMOKE SCREEN: The jet carrying Admiral William Fallon makes an approach into Kathmandu airport on Wednesday. The head of the US Pacific Command was supposed to arrive a day earlier but his plane couldn't land in Kathmandu because of poor visibility caused by smog.



VOW'S WOWS: Winners of VOW magazine's Top 10 College Women contest pose with their prizes at Hotel Radisson on Tuesday.



SAVE THE WETLANDS: Participants of the Taudaha Jamboree ride alongside Taudaha Lake to mark World Wetlands Day on Wednesday.

# Garlands for Maskey

When Tirtha Man Maskey arrived to take up his assignment of warden of Royal Chitwan National Park in 1973 there was a crowd waiting for him. He thought they were there to garland him. "Actually they were there to beat me up," Maskey recalls. The people of Chitwan saw the park as a threat to their livelihood.

More than 30 years later, Chitwan is cited worldwide as a model for people and park strategy where villagers actively work for conservation. Maskey's pioneering work at Royal Chitwan and later in the Department of National Parks and Wildlife recently won him the 2005 Duke of Edinburgh Conservation Media Award which he got from Britain's Prince Philip. Last year Maskey was also honoured with the 2004 Order of the Golden Ark by late Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands.

With other Nepali conservationists, Maskey was successful in educating communities surrounding Nepal's national parks that they could benefit from the tourism and biodiversity conservation. He designed the buffer zones around protected areas that cushioned human pressure.

Maskey has also championed the cause of the endangered

Gangetic gharial. Collecting eggs from the wild, the small fish-eating crocodiles are hatched and raised at rearing facilities for five years before being released to their natural habitat. Chitwan's


gharial farm set up with help from the Frankfurt Zoo has not just helped save the reptile from extinction but also turned into a tourist attraction in its own right.

Maskey was also recognised for strengthening anti-poaching operations in Nepal's national parks and it is due to these efforts that Nepal's rhinos and tigers are not being hunted down as they are elsewhere. Maskey has also been a key figure in international coordination to enhance transboundary conservation.

"If you are creative and willing to initiate your own projects, there are plenty of jobs in wildlife research and conservation in Nepal," says Maskey who retired as director general of Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation last month. But this doesn't mean retirement from conservation, Maskey wants to keep on with his research and writing. After all, he is the only Nepali to have a frog named after him: the *Sphaerothaeca maskeyi* a rare amphibian that he discovered.

Last month, Maskey went to Royal Bardia National Park for a farewell visit. There was a large crowd waiting for him at the warden's office. This time they were really there to garland him. ● (Mallika Aryal)






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# Election cymbals

It is only when a country has election symbols for each and every one of its political parties that we can safely surmise it has a policy that has finally come of age and that society is ripe for democracy. Campaign slogans at election time that go 'Vote for Spectacles' or 'Rooster for Mayor' or even 'Vote for Bow and Arrow, or Else!' prove that a country is indeed a mature multiparty democracy where voters exercise their adulterated franchise to elect a symbol that they least dislike. That is why certain western democracies are democracies in name only because they don't have symbols like us.

It is especially when elections are symbolic, like the upcoming municipal polls that elections symbols take on a heightened sense of urgency. An election symbol represents all that is good and wholesome

UNDER MY HAT  
Kunda Dixit



parties fight tooth and nail for their symbol because it symbolises attributes that they hold dear.

For example, some parties have spectacles as symbol because they have a lack of vision, others have a hand because it shows they will be on the take the minute they get to power so they can distribute the largesse, still others prefer the dirty finger because they are a bunch of sleazebags and they don't really mind if everyone knows it.

To make it easier for those of you who are of voting age and above to make up your minds about who to cast your valuable ballots for among parties contesting forthcoming elections, those boycotting them or even those engaged in trying to prevent them, we bring you in the interest of national unity and amity a rough guide to the choice available and their preferred election symbols. ●

	Symbol	Party
	Burning Tyre	NC
	Flying Brick	NC-D
	Slingshot	CPN (Unified Marxbad Not-so-Leninbad)
	Four Fingers	CPN (Gang of Four)
	Grenade	CPN (Murder and Mayhem)
	Pressure Cooker	CPN (Maobad)
	Hollow	RPP (KT)
	Hello	RPP (PSJBR)
	Halo	RPP (Holier Than Thou)
	Muscles	Rastriya Janashakti Party
	Champagne Glass	partynepal.com



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