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KIRAN PANDAY

## Alms race

The army and the rebels are arming themselves to wage a war the country can ill afford

Despite the high-profile rehearsals this week for the Shivaratri military parade on Tundikhel (above), the Royal Nepali Army seems to be feeling the pinch of the foreign arms embargo at a time when the Maoists look to be on an arms procurement spree. The RNA's main suppliers, India, UK and the US, suspended transfers of lethal hardware after 1 February 2005 and the army has tried to make cash purchases from alternative sources. However, the disclosure by an Indian minister to parliament in New Delhi Wednesday that Nepal had asked for a resumption of military aid shows the army's anxiety about weapons shortfalls. Meanwhile, the Maoists are now depending not just on weapons captured from the army but buying AK47s abroad.

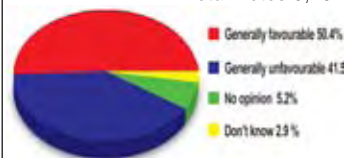
**Editorial p2**  
**Guns and roses**

**Continued p4**

**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 287

**Q. What is your impression of the interviews by Maoist leaders in the past week?**

Total votes: 5,281



Weekly Internet Poll # 288. To vote go to: [www.nepalintimes.com](http://www.nepalintimes.com)

**Q. Do you agree with US Ambassador James Moriarty's recent comments about the Maoists?**

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# Nepal's two wars

## War is not metaphor, war is death, destruction, ruined lives, children orphaned, women widowed

### GUNS AND ROSES

In times of crisis and calamity, it is human nature to look for a saviour. Nepalis, too, yearn for a knight in shining armour who will banish our troubles and extricate us from the mess we are in.

That is why despite all the disillusionment since the royal coup, there was a sense of expectation for King Gyanendra's Democracy Day message to the nation last Sunday. After all, the Maoist leaders instead of building on the public relations success of their interview offensive by declaring another ceasefire undid it all by announcing more blockades and a 'decisive final strike' in April.

As it turned out, the royal address was milder and more positive than anything we had heard recently. The word 'democracy' was used 19 times in the 340-word document and the king made what appeared to be a heartfelt appeal to the political parties to negotiate and strengthen 'multiparty democracy'. But, alas, it was too little too late.

If the same speech had been made on Democracy Day last year, there may have worked. The political parties would have been under public pressure to join hands with the king. If it had been made before 1 February, 2005 it would have rendered a royal coup unnecessary. King Gyanendra still has the chance to go into history books as someone who acted in the best interest of his kingdom to restore democracy and peace. One can't exist without the other.

All he has to say is: "Sovereignty rests with the Nepali people." Is it too much to ask? It would allow the king to sit undisturbed on his throne, hand governance back to an interim setup acceptable to all sides which can prepare for genuine elections and lay the groundwork for a peace process. But if he waits any longer, even this offer will be too late.

A dispassionate analysis of the past year will prove that the royal takeover hurt none more than the monarchy itself. It set off an extraordinary republican wave, pushed the parties over to the Maoist fold, brought Nepal unprecedented international isolation and it even cut the army's lifeline for military hardware.

On a royal retreat in Pokhara, King Gyanendra is said to be contemplating stepping down as chairman and appointing a prime minister. Even if it is who we think it is, this is unlikely to mollify the parties, nor defuse a looming military confrontation with the Maoists.

This Sunday the army will hold its Shivaratri military ritual on Tundikhel and publicly flex its muscles. Who is trying to scare whom with all these guns and cannons?



KIRAN PANDAY

In Nepal the combatants are fighting two very different wars in which even such basic concepts as military strength, weakness and success are at variance. On one side, the RNA is fighting a conventional, attritional war in which the stress

**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Sam Cowan**



is on the control of key territory and the engagement of the enemy to inflict casualties and thereby weaken his will to resist.

At the strategic level, Mao's concept of 'protracted war' is his most enduring legacy. He stressed that at all times the revolutionary army must stay unified with the people among whom it fights. The people can thus supply the recruits, supplies and information that the army needs

and can be politicised at the same time. In this way the cultural and political structure of society can be transformed step by step with military success. Revolution thus comes about not after and as a result of victory but through the process of war itself.

This is the strategy that has brought the Maoists, for such a poorly armed force, remarkable success. Protracting the war could be to their advantage but other pressures have persuaded them that military victory is not achievable.

The vast superiority the RNA enjoys in weapons and equipment have forced the Maoists to acknowledge publicly that they cannot seize and hold anything against RNA reaction: not even a district headquarters. This puts alarmist claims of them taking Kathmandu by force into perspective. At the most

basic level, however strong their will and motivation, the Maoists are very short of the physical means to fight and they know it.

Assessed in conventional military terms the Maoist are a pathetic armed force but non-conventionally, they are by no means weak. They have a proven strategy, favourable terrain, immense dedication and an absolute willingness to sacrifice their lives for the cause. All of this gives them the capacity to make large areas of Nepal ungovernable in any meaningful sense for many years. It also makes the task of disarming them by force, the current stated aim of the RNA, unachievable.

In the battle for heart and minds, the RNA's task is the greater. More than the insurgents, it is the state that needs the people's support and numerous intelligence failures indicate a deficiency in this key area.

Apart from the moral and legal imperatives, there is a human rights link to military effectiveness. Invariably the most committed Maoists can relate stories of family members killed in cold blood by the army and police. Intimidation from the Maoists is also a factor as is the RNA's inability to provide continuous security to villagers.

In this conflict of 'two wars' there is no possibility of a solution by arms. Each side can demonstrate that it is making progress according to its own criteria of success but, by the same logic, notwithstanding tactical gains, neither will be able to

## LETTERS

### BLIND ALLEY

Every time I log on to the *Nepali Times* (www.nepalitimes.com) there is more evidence pointing to the failure of current politicians of every hue to grasp the nettle. The reality is that to have peace today's terrorists have to become tomorrow's political party. It has taken the UK in Northern Ireland 30 years to get the sides in that conflict to accept this simple fact. Currently I see the political situation in Nepal not much different than Nigeria—endemic political corruption, vested interests lining their own pockets, inward looking and repressive law making. Respect is earned. Position is an empty chalice without respect. Stop blaming everyone else. The situation in Nepal is the Nepali people's problem and only you can resolve it—not the king or the politicians. They are too far up a blind alley that any pain they feel is them banging their heads against a brick wall. Is it not time that the Nepali people rediscover their spirit?

**Peter Thomson, email**

● I do not agree with the original writer of your

translation ('Amusing election', #286). The writer is trying to discourage true Nepalis from participation in the election. Rather I would like to congratulate both those who participated on the election as candidates and voters. We want see a true and genuine Nepali democracy in Nepal, not one copied from other countries. It must be firsthand democracy. We want to see a united, peaceful, disciplined and developed country (free from corruption) Nepal.

**R P Gurung, Italy**

● Thanks to Prithvi Narayan Shah the Great and the Royal Nepali Army, we are a sovereign and independent nation with an unbroken history since 1744. The RNA is a symbol of nationalism and unity. These soldiers with leadership, professionalism and valour have served in peace-keeping, relief, preservation and development of this nation. In the process of doing so, they have given countless lives. I just wanted to ask, if the so-called human rights organisations ever considered the rights of the soldiers who serve this nation.

The soldiers who clear booby-trapped road blocks, patrol the highways, streets and villages, making it possible for food and other necessary items to be transported into the capital and other parts of the country so that the human rights organisation members can feast on, while these soldiers continuously work day in day out, to protect fellow citizens from the rebels who have tortured, killed, extorted from innocent, hardworking people. It is surprising that not a word comes out about these people who know nothing other than to throw stones, burn tyres and destroy property in the name of democracy. I think it would not be too much to ask the likes of Charan Parsai and Gopal Siwakoti to show a little more respect for the soldiers who serve and pay the ultimate sacrifice and yet ask for nothing in return.

**Yelamber, email**

● Since Sher Bahadur Deuba is out and about I want him to explain in detail why he asked the King to dissolve the parliament at a time when he knew that elections were not possible due to the security problems in the country.

**Shree Shrestha, email**

● You ask in your editorial ('My kingdom for a horse', #286): 'The bottom-line question for the Nepali people is this: is the need for one man to have more power worth the continued misery and torment of an entire nation?' The answer is a big NO. It's no more one man's power struggle or even a 'fight for people's rights'. When someone says he is fighting for you, he shouldn't be killing you, right? There is now no more rationale to prolong this war. The conflict is wrong and has gone monstrously astray.

**Name withheld, email**

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

'Journalistic ethics are to society what morals are to a person' so intones C K Lal in his State of the State column ('Coping with court jesters', #286). He is right. Let Lal show how he maintains a no-conflict-of-interest policy by informing all his readers that his full-time day-job consists of serving his beloved His Majesty's Government as a civil servant. Such disclosure is necessary if Lal himself is to maintain journalistic ethics. Where else would you get a salary-drawing

civil servant in active duty enjoying a simultaneous second full-time career as an independent journalist who blasts his own day-time employer for lack of freedom and has the hypocrisy to preach the virtues of journalistic ethics to his readers? The credibility of Lal's messages are damaged by the same sort of hypocrisy that he imagines his opponents are espousing.

**Pooja Belbase, email**

### TRAVEL WARNING

Your news item ('End travel warnings', #286) blaming foreign travel advisories just go to show that the private sector is as much to blame as the parties, king and Maoists. It is a classic hat trick: brandishing blatantly wrong figures and accusing foreigners for domestic-made problems. Nepal's tourism decline has a lot to do with environment degradation (of which Nepali are the first to suffer) irresponsibility of so many tour operators, trekking agents and rafting specialists who wrap bad service in great promises. Lack of professionalism is rife at all levels and NATO (what a

deliver a decisive strategic result that will end in the capitulation of the other. Thus, there is strategic stalemate in both the general and literal meanings of the term.

Claims about the Maoists that 'their back is broken' are both misleading and meaningless. War is not metaphor. War is death, destruction, ruined lives, communities torn apart, children orphaned, women widowed and much, much more. All decisions and discussions about its utility should be guided solely by awareness of these harsh consequences, not by mind-sets insulated from reality by soft words and platitudes.

Unless there is a ceasefire and the start of a peace process to find a political solution through negotiations and compromise, Nepal faces the prospect of war without end. The key lesson from other conflicts is that the precondition for any hope of success is when both sides come to the conclusion and publicly acknowledge that they cannot achieve their aims by military means. The Maoists have done so but recent statements by ministers indicate that the government is still firmly committed to seeking a solution by force.

Both of Nepal's wars are having a devastating impact on the lives of rural people. Caught in the no-man's land of a nasty and brutish conflict, they yearn desperately for peace. This can only be achieved by following the well established pattern of people sitting round a table and negotiating a political way out.

In Nepal, as elsewhere, all will have to compromise. The only questions are: when, and how many more young Nepalis will die in the interim? ●

Sam Cowan is a retired British general who knows Nepal well. A fuller analysis appears in the March-April issue of *Himal Southasian*.

# Professor Moriarty strikes again

## The aftershocks of the ambassador's speech still reverberate in the Nepali media

**S**o you thought you had heard everything there was to hear about the municipal polls? Hear this.

In the run up to the elections, an Indian tv reporter from Gorakhpur decided that he had to have an exclusive coverage of a Maoist attack on an army camp to depict the insurgents' intensity of opposition to elections. An advance party of the channel chose volatile Nawalparasi as the

STATE OF THE STATE  
C K Lal



setting of the event. The crew mobilised some villagers to act as Maoists (presumably with the promise of pocket money) and convinced an army unit to play along for the camera.

Had everything worked as planned, viewers in India would have seen a sensational report from Nepal's war-zone. But a slightly tipsy soldier thought that the camp was under real attack and opened up with his SLR at the 'Maoists' hitting and wounding a pretend-Maoist. Fortunately, the journalist was also a cover-up artist and rushed the fallen actor-warrior to a border town for treatment. But the Indian nursing home refused to touch the patient for fear of police reprisals, so he was taken to Gorakhpur where the journalist could wave his press-card and get out-of-normal things done. Happily for everyone concerned, the 'Maoist' recovered and the incident has since been buried into the inner pages of local papers in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Media manipulators know the power of images, and they know what makes media hounds go wild. They seize the moment, stage the show, and let it play in the media: just like the comments made by US Ambassador James Moriarty last week.

The venue was the Ganesh Man Singh Adhyan Pratisthan, a pseudo-academic body known



MIN BAJRACHARYA

for its right-wing sympathies. The list of invitees was made as representative of the Kathmandu upper crust as possible. And lo and behold, the ambassador soon had the glitterati eating out of his hands.

The aftershocks of the Moriarty speech still reverberate in the Nepali media. And every time it threatens to die down, His Excellency shoots off another letter which the editors dutifully print. Unlike the utter failure of the chairman-king's election fiasco, the ambassador's address has proven to be a public relation coup staged on a shoe-string budget. It has succeeded brilliantly in drawing away the attention of the country from Washington's failure to convince the king to hand power back to the people.

Walter Bagehot who knew something about the duties and responsibilities of imperial envoys observed that an

ambassador wasn't simply an agent, he was also a spectacle. American envoys take their imperial responsibilities with the seriousness of the arriviste. Michael E Malinowsky, Moriarty's predecessor on the stinky banks of the Tukucha reveled in the role of street-smart conservative firefighter from Chicago and loved to demolish the reputations of popular party leaders. Moriarty has taken up where Malinowsky left off and likes to ridicule Nepal's monarchy and democracy with wit and humour. His conclusion: military supremacy must be maintained to keep the Maoists out of Kathmandu.

But howsoever striking may

be the visage of a lean and mean envoy predicting a Maoist takeover, the competing visual of an Ian Martin holding the flag of democracy and human rights is no less arresting. Even though the message sent by an American ambassador playing golf with Crown Prince Paras is quite powerful, it's no match for a UN official in shirt-sleeves interacting intensely with a clutch of committed professionals, activists and journalists.

Moriarty has temporarily succeeded in stealing the limelight, but the future belongs to those who will side with the underdog in the ongoing struggle between the people and the palace. ●

ridiculous acronym) is its representative. The second untruth is that tourism 'benefits the poor in villages'. The problem is that only marginal benefits goes to the poor in porter's salaries. A great part of the money sticks in Kathmandu, here in the hands of operators. Tourism mostly benefits the rich in Kathmandu, and provides a mediocre seasonal living for a limited number of people. Using the 'poor Nepali' argument only shows the usual disrespect of the Nepali elite towards their own poor.

How can they talk about protecting the 'sole breadwinners' when tour operators never respect the minimum rules about protecting and paying porters? The little that has happened in Nepal for porters is because of western customers and some dedicated (isolated) Nepalis. Travel advisories are about insurance claims, if you decide to travel anyway the risks will not be covered. Western tour operators can be sued by clients if stuck by Nepal bandas, riots, coups, phone lines cutting and random bombings. The embassies don't issue these advisories on a

whim but as a last resort.

Should the number of tourist increase again and more importantly the number of days they spend in Nepal and the amount they spend per day, Nepal's really poor will only marginally benefit from it. So, do we have here a case of culprits posing as victims? The decline of tourism in Nepal would have happened even without the conflict. Mishandling tourism is one of the many lost opportunities for Nepal.

H Marceau, France

### LETTERS

*Nepali Times* welcomes all feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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# Kalashnikovs and gunships

There is a serious risk of escalation

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

from p1

The RNA brass is increasingly concerned about an escalation of Maoist attacks since the end of the ceasefire as well as their threat to hit urban centres in the coming months.

So far, the army has been able to pinpoint the exact strength of the rebel force by calculating the number of guns they have looted from the security forces. But on 30 January the army showed video footage of an AK47 it says was captured from Maoists. It also recovered 9,000 rounds of AK47 ammunition in a major haul a few weeks ago in Chitre Bhanjyang, between Syangja and Kaski.

"We don't use AK47s so where did the Maoists get them from?" army spokesman Nepal Bhushan Chand asked. The suspicion is that the rebels have now started procuring assault rifles from Kashmir and the Indian northeast. The rebels also appear to have far too much ammunition for their captured Indian INSAS rifles than they would have got from raids on army bases.

The AK47 bullets did not have any mark of origin but it is suspected they are from a former Soviet bloc country. Army sources say the guns are being smuggled through Rudrapur in the Indian state of Uttaranchal and through jungle corridors along the border between Banke and Bardia into the western hills.

"We know that the arms including AK47s are carried by bicycles from Rudrapur to Thaplyakhada in Kanchanpur, mostly at night," another top security official told us, "the guns are stored in a place called Chhap and then transported to other districts using Indian-plated trucks."

If it knows all this, why isn't the army stopping it? A senior police official in the midwestern region told us the police doesn't have the strength to counter the smugglers. "These are notorious gangsters we can't match them," he says. Local journalists who have reported on the arms smuggling in the past have been threatened. "We get anonymous calls warning us not to poke our noses into it," a Kanchanpur-based reporter told us.

Security agencies believe crossborder arms traders are now very active in Nepal and could possibly be working as double agents supplying arms to the rebels and selling information to the army as well. But the army says the information is usually too late.

The army did capture a huge haul of weapons, explosives and Indian-made detonators nearby the Kosi Barrage in January and two weeks ago it caught a group of Maoists with AK47 rifles in Nawalparasi. That was when the alarm bells started ringing.

"We have an AK47 even in our flag, we have been buying the rifles as and when necessary," admitted Maoist former Central Committee member, Comrade Athak in a phone interview. But he refused to say where the guns were bought.

The Maoists have said they are now more than a match for the army but admit they are still vulnerable to aerial bombardment. The RNA has turned some of its helicopters into gunships and used them with devastating effect, strafing from machine guns on sidemounted pods. Its nightvision-equipped Mi-17s are also used during Maoist attacks to drop mortar rounds on suspected rebel positions. But such attacks have often hit village houses and killed civilians as it did during a major battle near Phaparbari in Makwanpur in January. (See: 'Targeted', #284)

There are fears of further escalation following Prachanda's order to his warriors earlier this month to shoot down army helicopters. Military sources said they are aware the rebels are trying to buy anti-aircraft guns and used improvised GPMGs during recent attacks in Tansen and Panauti to try to bring down helicopters.

Asked how they would counter this, a security source told us: "We will go Tora Bora style, but we will do it carefully considering the safety of civilians and risk to helicopters from ground fire."

'Tora Bora' is the RNA slang for drums laden with explosives dropped from helicopters. Human rights organisations say they are worried about a serious rise in civilian casualties if the war enters a more intense and indiscriminate aerial phase.

When asked, army brass wouldn't comment directly on whether the arms embargo was hurting combat readiness. But aside from the \$ 890,000 worth of ammunition and grenades from China in December, there hasn't been any major replenishment in the past year. The army's field sources told us they have been economising on ammunition use and ammunition factories in Makwanpur and Sundarjil have increased production.

The army got some supplies from Pakistan and was all set to buy arms from Israel that had previously sold Galil rifles to the RNA's paratroopers, but Indian pressure prompted Israel to scrap the deal. A source close to the issue said India and Israel had "great relations, especially in defence-related matters". ●



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## Revenue drops

Government revenue grew just 2.9 percent in the first seven months of the current fiscal year, compared to a projection of 15 percent, according to data released by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) on Tuesday. The average growth rate in the first seven months of the last five years was over 15 percent, the report quoted an official as saying. Revenue to date totals Rs 35.8 billion while total expenditure reached Rs 43.7 billion, a 14.7 percent hike over the last year. In the recent finance ordinance, Minister of State for Finance Dr Roop Jyoti cut in customs tariffs on many items, claiming the adjustment would discourage under-invoicing and informal channels, which in turn would contribute to realising higher revenue.

## Flying again

Private carrier Air Nepal says it will resume its regular flights from 27 February after being grounded for nearly two months and finding a new Japanese partner. The airline halted flights on 24 December



after becoming Nepal's third private carrier to go international in July 2005. The recent announcement is good news for low budget travellers, including those flying to Malaysia and Bangkok for overseas work. Air Nepal says it will operate three flights weekly to Kuala Lumpur and two flights to Bangkok.

## NEW PRODUCTS

**LONGER LIFE YOGHURT:** Kathmandu Dairy, maker of *Snow fun* dairy products, has launched a new type of yoghurt in a disposable container. The new yoghurt is more hygienic, tasty and has a longer shelf-life. Kathmandu Dairy has for the past 20 years continuously produced quality milk, butter, paneer, ice-cream, cheese and ghru.

**ITALIAN BRAND:** Bajra and Bajracharya Enterprises have introduced Italian Leno glass cabinets and basins to Nepal. Made in China the products are available in the company's Lagankhel, Bijuli Bajar and Balaju showrooms. Their prices start at Rs 20,000.



**COFFEE CANDY:** Jaya Confectionery has launched its premium candy Crave in a new coffee flavour. Priced at Rs 1, the Crave Coffee

Candy is available in all major retail stores throughout the country. Jaya Confectionery is a subsidiary of Laxmi Group Pvt Ltd, whose other popular brands include Chocofun, Milk Falls, Waffly, Twinkle and Love birds.



# Inflation blues

## Economists please explain why we can't change the exchange rate with the Indian rupee

Every major hike in fuel price brings about spiraling inflation. This is plain student-speak. However, can we look beyond this? Your favourite Beed has always maintained that till prices of petroleum products are 'politically' fixed, we will continue to get these jolts. The market should adjust to prices and there should be no interference. (See this column # 262) While popular notion is that

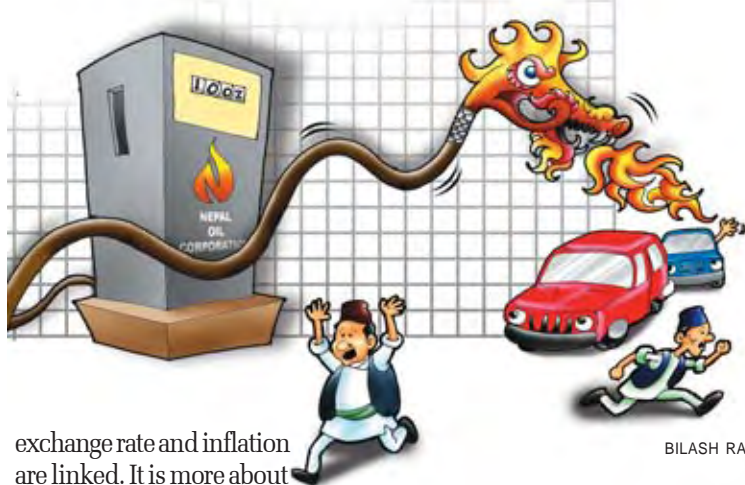
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subsidised kerosene is for the poor, it is used by industries, fuel adulterers, transport entrepreneurs and rich farmers as a substitute for higher priced fuels. The surge in kerosene consumption can't be explained in any other way.

Over the last 15 years since reforms began we have seen the 'consumer' benefiting through the opening of aviation, banking, insurance and other sectors. We have learnt to pay extra for better services and choice. We pay the highest tariffs for electricity and surely making services efficient will actually avoid future hikes. Similarly, a hit taken on petroleum products prices and introduction of well regulated market forces will actually make Nepali consumers not subsidising the inefficiencies of Nepal Oil Corporation. Like we have stopped to a large extent shouldering the costs of inefficiencies of RNAC we will slowly have to extend it to other sectors also.

Economists tell us the



BILASH RAI

exchange rate and inflation are linked. It is more about inflation determining the currency exchange rate and not vice-versa. However, Nepal's situation is peculiar. Our currency is directly pegged to the Indian Rupee through a mechanism of a fixed exchange rate which is politics rather than determined by economics. Therefore, as long as the Indian Rupee does not depreciate, the impact of inflation will not be felt. With the Indian economy growing at 8%, the chances of Indian rupee depreciating is very slim and therefore we are to a certain extent insulated.

It is becoming increasingly important for Nepal to understand the impact of the fixed exchange rate on the economy. While most people talk about the Nepali rupee depreciating against the Indian rupee, I have not seen any analysis that convinces me about it. In contrary, no one has explored the appreciation of the Nepali rupee against the Indian rupee.

The fixed exchange rate has been established taking into consideration that the Nepali trade basket is dominated by bilateral trade. However, over the years, Nepal is earning foreign

exchange that is nearly a quarter of its GDP. The correction of the same in the exchange rate is long overdue.

Just going by pure mathematics, a drop of exchange rate with India to 1.30 instead of 1.60 would wipe out all inflationary impact. In nominal terms, fuel prices would be cheaper than what we are paying in Nepali Rupee terms. This would make our imports cheaper, so what dollars we have as reserves would be able to sustain more months of exports.

In the interest of the economy this mathematics should be made to work. I am sure there will be many who would disagree with this, but the Nepali public has a right to demand explanation on the exchange rate logic.

Economists inside government outside government, banking community and others please come out and explain. For the political parties who still feel they have a chance of governing sometime in the future, instead of burning tyres let us begin this debate. ●

www.arthabeed.com

# "It is the quality of banks that matters"



**Prithvi B Pande is Chairman and Chief Executive Director of Nepal Investment Bank, which next week marks its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary after its first started as Nepal IndoSuez Bank in 1986.**

KIRAN PANDAY

**Has the transition of the past four years as Nepal Investment Bank been smooth?**

Nepal Investment Bank Ltd. (NIBL), previously Nepal Indosuez Bank Ltd, was established in 1986 as a joint venture between Nepali and French partners. The French partner (holding 50 percent of the capital of NIBL) was Credit Agricole Indosuez. With the decision of Credit Agricole Indosuez to divest, a group of companies comprising of bankers, professionals, industrialists and businessmen, acquired the 50 percent shareholding of Credit Agricole Indosuez in Nepal Indosuez Bank Ltd and on June 2002 the name of the bank was changed to Nepal Investment Bank Ltd. Ever since, the transaction has been very smooth and the bank has moved aggressively on all fronts and our valued customers have continued to bank with us.

**How does it compare: running a foreign joint venture bank and a wholly Nepali-owned and Nepali-managed bank?**

There is not much of a difference. All banks have to be run with a great deal of prudence and risk management. However managing a wholly-owned Nepali bank gives me a greater sense of responsibility and challenge. Over the years we have proved that a Nepali-managed bank can consistently provide top quality service and be the best in Nepal. We are the first all-Nepali managed bank to win the Bank of the Year 2003 and 2005 awarded by the The Banker of the Financial Times Group in London. Running a wholly-owned Nepali Bank has helped in speedier decision-making and it is also comforting to know that all our profit stays within Nepal.

**So do you think a Nepali-owned bank must display more corporate social responsibility?**

We are fully committed to extend funding under NRB directive in regards to deprived sector loan at concessional rates of 3-4 percent and being a 100 percent Nepali-owned bank certainly carries greater corporate social responsibility. Ever since the all-Nepali

management took over, the bank has recognised its social responsibility and has contributed towards heritage renovation, the Kal Bhairab temple restoration being the latest. The bank has also provided assistance to the Heart Foundation and the Nepal Apanga Sangh. We have also supported various sports activities.

**How does the banking sector as a whole cope in times like these when the economy is sluggish, investment is stagnant in a liquidity-rich environment?**

The banking sector as a whole has struggled through difficult times over the past few years. Despite the political instability most commercial banks have managed to maintain positive growth trends and overcome obstacles. However, we are truly worried about the future if this situation deteriorates and investment opportunities decline. As you say, we have a scenario of excess liquidity and low demand for bankable projects in spite of low interest rates in borrowings. What worries me is the disparity in Nepali deposit rates compared with other countries and continued upward trend in inflation, which means that eventually interest rates have to climb, resulting in higher lending rate leading to further stagnancy in borrowings. Continued increase in remittance is the only positive indicator in our economy, however this could lead to further increase in money supply and contribute to further inflation.

**What would you like the government as the regulator to do to facilitate further growth in the banking sector?**

It is not the number of banks but quality of banks that matter. I would like to see a smaller number of financial institutions with much broader capital base, providing excellent service at competitive rates. I would like to see the Central Bank encourage mergers so that there is more stability in the financial sector, this will also go towards creating strong capitalized banks.

# Bamdeb's reply to Jim

UML leader Bamdeb Gautam in Kantipur, 17 February

कान्तिपुर

His Excellency American Ambassador James F Moriarty has called the 12-point pact between opposition parties and Maoists 'unfortunate'. After reading his it is not difficult to imagine why the autocratic royalists are a happy lot. The agreement with the Maoists was something we could not do even when we were in power or in the opposition bench in the parliament. Now that we have been able to reach into the agreement, all quarters except the autocratic royalists have been supportive of the pact. What has been applauded by political parties, civil society, the entire country, Nepali people and all the communities in Asia and Europe has been denounced by Moriarty.

To prove his point, he does not have anything more than a deep mistrust. This lack of trust can be cured if one stands on facts. Mistrust cannot be countered by mistrust. He has been repeatedly saying that Maoists will betray, misuse and eliminate the parties.

Urging people to be imaginative, he has said: "Supposing that this regime falls, what could happen to the armed Maoists and the unarmed parties? Then you would see the Maoists' autocracy."

But, Moriarty fails to notice that the 12-point pact also includes an agreement by Maoists to lay down arms under the mediation of any credible international organisation. He also does not look at the possible consequences of the army's supreme commander, the king, to misuse the army to continue the autocratic monarchy for the next 50 years while the people are left to tolerate the medieval jungle rule even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

An election for a constituent assembly is a democratic process to reach a logical political outlet not only for the Maoists but also for the seven parties and the entire people's opinion that has

been opposing the autocratic monarchy. I don't want this to be a challenge for the American ambassador, but if he is able to make the king agree to constituent assembly elections then the parties will take the responsibility to disarm the Maoists. If they fail to do so they will immediately abandon the 12-point pact.

It appears his excellency is quite appreciative of the king. Nepali kings have never been tolerant toward democracy. The history is the witness, kings have always betrayed the people and the parties. From BP Koirala till Sher Bahadur Deuba we have seen a history of betrayals. The incumbent monarch has violated successive agreements with the parties. With such a visible backdrop, one should be able to tell this to the king, and not the parties: The king should remain within the constitutional framework and should be content with what the parliament gives him. The king should not rule, he should just get the respect. If he wants more than that, he should become a common citizen.



KIRAN PANDAY

The ambassador has once again suggested to the king that terrorism can be tackled if he joins hands with political parties. That means this country's first priority is to eliminate terrorism. It also means that restoration of democracy is not a priority. It follows, then, that if there was no so-called terrorism in Nepal, the United States of America would not have opposed the autocratic move of the king.

Our experience over the past ten years proves the ambassador wrong in his belief that the alliance between the king and the parties will end so-called terrorism. The violent movement was born and even grew when the monarch, parties and even the international community were standing together. It was during this period that 'terrorism' grew and spread. Going back to the same situation is the wrong prescription to resolve this crisis.

## King's way

Speaker Taranath Ranabhat in Gorkhapatra, 21 February

गोर्खापत्र

If the parties are really worried about the country, democracy and peace, they must come for talks. Without talks, democracy will not survive nor will peace return. If there is no country, where will the parties practice politics? To save the country we also need to activate the constitution. The problems identified in the parliamentary system can be corrected in the constitution, which can also accommodate several demands made by the Maoists. The king's Democracy Day message demonstrated that he supports cooperation between constitutional forces and is committed to saving the constitution. At a time when the parties are protesting on the streets, His Majesty's message has opened the doors to understanding and peace. However, moving toward a constituent assembly would invite further divisions and crisis. The recent interviews of Maoist chairman Prachanda made it clear that the seven opposition parties are in an odd position now. The points for peace in the 12-point pact that they signed with the Maoists are welcome but other provisions are quite troublesome. US Ambassador James Moriarty's recent criticisms of the pact reflect our constitution and are just the arguments we need at this point of time.

## Chopper war

Drishti, 14 February

दृष्टि

The Maoists are commemorating the tenth anniversary of their war by a re-evaluation of their military strategy. They have concluded that they can defeat the army's crack units if they travel along the highways but they are worried about the army's air capability. Prachanda these days is said to stay in Nepal but he doesn't travel in big formations in the day time precisely because of the danger of an aerial attack. That is why he has given instructions to his forces to commemorate the tenth anniversary by shooting down an army helicopter and that his why the rebels have positioned GPMGs on strategic hilltops. In the past, the Maoists have suffered great losses in helicopter bombardments and some of their attacks have turned into defeats because of aerial retaliation by the army. Reports say that in their latest attacks the Maoists have placed big guns on hilltops to foil heli-borne retaliation by the army. In the Beni attack in 2004, the Maoists lost more forces during the post-battle phase than during the battle itself. Sources say the Maoists suffered a defeat in Khara with 83 dead and 317 injured because of aerial counterattack by night-vision

equipped helicopters. Recently, Comrade Sunil was killed in Rolpa during a helicopter attack and his forces suffered casualties despite camouflage fatigues and.

## IMF

Samaya, 23 February

समया

One of the key partners in Nepal's development process, the International Monetary Fund has pressured the government to take appropriate measures for the establishment of peace. It has suggested that the government's attention should be shifted to the fact that poverty alleviation efforts would be unsuccessful until and unless there is progress in the political and security situation. The IMF's latest suggestion has come under its regular assessment of its member countries.

The fund's message is politically soft but has an economic message and between the lines the statement is uncharacteristically strong. The IMF's conclusion is that the king's speech talked about financial irregularity while in practice the economic structure of the country has turned into shambles in the last one year. It has also concluded that the donors and the international community have been kept in the dark and the government's non-transparent activities are on the rise.

After the king took over one year ago, the directors of the IMF had called a meeting on 9 March and had warned in black and white that the donors would not continue their assistance if the government did not commit itself to three main programs: financial sector reform, implementation, and creation of an environment so that the donors funding the poverty alleviation could continue their assistance.

Under the financial sector reforms, immediate actions against wilful defaulters in the financial sector, privatisation of the public enterprises that have become burdensome for the state's coffer and pricing of petroleum products at par with the international market were the issues prioritised by the IMF.

The commitment toward the financial sector reform and fiscal discipline in the 21-point royal promulgation was basically aimed at making the donors positive toward the royal regime. But the donors don't seem satisfied with its written commitment to the World Bank and the IMF. The IMF's role is important in any country because other donors make their decision whether or not to continue their assistance after making sure if there is the fund's presence. Moreover, the donor community heavily relies on the IMF for the economic indicator of the country.



Boom, boom  
Prachanda: Giddiup, run my horses  
Chariot: Seven-horse chariot  
Road sign: Singa Durbar

समाचारपत्र Nepal Samacharpatra, in 20 February

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ The king has to leave his role as chairman of the council formed by him. ”

Former chairman of Rajparisad Standing Committee Keshar Jung Rayamajhi in Annapurna Post, 21 February





KIRAN PANDAY

# Caught between two armies

Samaya, 23 February

The country is caught between two armies. But the king's worries must be growing with the national and international media constantly highlighting Prachanda's statement while being severely critical of the monarchy. It's not really a surprise that the Maoists are gaining political opportunity with the king being isolated from the international community. But the real danger is the demoralisation of the RNA especially after the rebel attacks after the end of the four-month unilateral ceasefire in January. They seem to lack the ability to counterattack. Lack of political vision, the king's continued attacks on the political alliance and Maoist offensives have been directly affecting the army's junior cadres, who seem to wonder why they should die and for whom?

The king's leadership has failed to rally the RNA. Still, Information Minister Sri Shamsheer Rana is under the illusion that he can preserve his power by threatening journalists by using anti-terrorist laws. The Maoists have been cleverly talking about peace and democracy. They have even shown willingness to give up arms with mediation by India and the international community. But it remains to be seen how far they are committed or willing to prove themselves. The irony was that the Maoist militants were escalating military activities

at a time when Prachanda was talking about peace, thus taking advantage of low morale in the RNA.

It will benefit the Maoists if the king fails in his moral responsibility to honour the decision given by the Supreme Court about the RCCC. The problem is that a certain gang inside the palace is propagating the view that king was behind the SC's decision. This rumour has been spread to dishonour the independence of judiciary and the courage of the SC to stand up for justice

But for the parties, their suspicion about the rebels is still the same. Neither the rebels nor the king have recognised their existence. Although Prachanda in his interview admitted crimes committed by the Maoists that is really not enough. He has still failed to explain the mass killings in Madi, which he has interpreted as an internal matter by claiming that he has suspended the culprits from the party.

He has tried to keep mum about his row with Baburam Bhattarai by brushing the issue under the carpet. If he really believes that the Maoist party will be joining the mainstream politics, then he has to give the public reason to trust him.

Let's hope the Maoists will now be more open to criticism about their wrongdoings and policies. But the bottomline is that the Maoists will never be able to take political advantage if they do not proceed in a democratic manner.

# TEN YEARS IN STATISTICS

Various tables from *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 13-27 February



- Nepal's economic growth rate had remained at 5 percent as it was in 1996:
- Per capita income would have reached Rs 24,000 instead of Rs 21,000
- Revenue would have climbed to Rs 80 billion instead of Rs 71 billion today
- There would be 50,000 jobs in Nepal for migrant workers
- Security expenditure would have remained at Rs 10 billion instead of the current Rs 19 billion

### Ten year toll

	Killed by	
	State	Maoists
1996	59	22
1997	16	32
1998	334	75
1999	328	141
2000	180	219
2001	243	390
2002	3296	1351
2003	1217	646
2004	1606	1113
2005	1031	600
Totals	8310	4589
Grand total:	12,899	

Source: INSEC

### Target: Education

Fatalities and damage to the education sector in the past ten years of conflict.

Teachers killed by Maoists	:	84
Teachers killed by state	:	57
Students killed by the Maoists	:	136
Students killed by the state	:	195
District Education Offices destroyed	:	17
Schools destroyed	:	66
University destroyed	:	1

Source: INSEC

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# In the



**ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY**

**W**hen Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher abolished slavery he used money from Pashupatinath to compensate slave owners. Indeed, the temple, perhaps one of Nepal's largest landowners, could still be a last resort today in times of national need. King Girbanaya Yuddha Bikram Shah gave 2,000 ropanis of land to the temple

trust for its use which today includes sacred spots such as Gorakhnath, Biswaroop, Guheswori, and Kirateswore. Green parks like the Bhandarkhal Ban, and the forest surrounding Guheswori function as Kathmandu's lungs as the city groans and grows. The Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) was created in 1988 to manage the real estate belonging to Nepal's patron deity. The same year it was also included

as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It's tasks included not only safeguarding the area's historic flavour but also preserving its cultural and religious significance. In 2000, a 10-year master plan began work shifting squatters, tearing down at least 100 illegal buildings. That angered some people. "The problem with the removal of illegal squatters was not just due to the way PADT handled it but also because of the lack of foresight with the

local administration, which approved some as local residents and denied others," says freelance journalist KB Prem Vikari. However even critics now agree that the Trust has done commendable work. PADT Chairman, industrialist Basanta Chaudhary, has been a key force in pushing the project. "We have our challenges. With temples like Pashupati, which has the sentiments of one billion Hindus worldwide attached to it, we have to

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is Shivaratri, a cleaner greener Pashupati

# e name of the Lord

balance social and religious obligations," he told us. Half the masterplan work has now been completed and the effect can already be seen in the clean wide streets and the management of the shops.

Plastic has been banned, the Bagmati flows cleaner because of sewage control upstream. A one-stop shop for cremation rites has opened in Arya Ghat and an electric cremation is on the way. The ground outside the temple is being paved with granite and marble and a proper park is being constructed. Stone waterspouts where the faithful can wash before and after praying actually have water flowing through them.

Money was never a question. The faithful have their own ways of thanking the Lord and they go beyond making offerings to the main temple. The issue was always lack of resolve to improve the situation. There were small hiccups along the way like when devotees were prevented from performing prayers in Kirateswor Mahadeb. They built a shrine on a mound next to the temple and then constructed a shed to protect the shrine from the elements. But the PADT demolished the shed because it did not conform to architectural guidelines.

"Except for the handling of the illegal squatters and construction case the trust has done great work," says Prabin Thapa, a 23-year-old tourist guide from the area. But the PADT has one more major case to solve before it can declare the master plan



PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA

a complete success—the temple's legendary treasury, the keys to which traditionally lie with Bhatta priests from South India.

There is a good reason why the main priests of the official protector deity of Nepal hail from South India. In times of national mourning, such as the recent deaths of the royal family, the rules of mourning apply to every Nepali Hindu but not to the Bhattas. According to the *shastras*, a priest in mourning is not pure enough to perform purification and religious rites but foreign priests can.

The Bhattas get the money donated to the main temple, which according to some is less than that collected from outside the main temple, which goes to the Raj Bhandari priests. This state of affairs has erupted into controversy every now and then, in part due to nationalistic sentiments but also because the handling of the temple's money is not transparent enough. A thorough and transparent auditing of the temple's treasury is one issue that the Trust is now looking forward to solve. ●

## Last days at the lord's doorstep

Established in 1882 as Pashupati Pakshala by King Surendra Bikram Shah, the present day Pashupati Bridashram is the country's oldest and only government-run old age home. This is where 230 elders, 140 women and 90 men, spend their final days happy that they can breathe their last in peace at the lord's doorstep. Residents need to be above 65 and have a recommendation from local officials certifying that they do not have a caretaker, are poor and in weak health. Twenty staff are employed here to look after residents' food, health and cremation, also paid by the government. This year's budget is Rs 6.8 million.

"I have an extended family. These old people are living history, the gods who speak. The one who doesn't is inside," says administrative head Arjun Prasad Gautam, whose major preoccupation today is finding the space to accommodate 230 elderly people comfortably. The PADT renovated three wings of the Bridhashram but it is not sufficient and Gautam is now pushing for a plan to construct a modern building with full facilities.

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# Empty heartland

The Maoists have headed for the towns, leaving their base areas deserted



PICS: SUBEL BHANDARI

**HIRSUTE MEN:** A mural depicting Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao on a wall in Thawang, and a gate the army tried to destroy.

**SUBEL BHANDARI**  
in THAWANG

**H**ere in Rolpa's capital spring is setting in, on the high ridges the rhododendron buds are out early this year.

But there isn't much activity in the villages: many families locked up their houses and left for the safety of the tarai in the last 10 years of conflict, and even

the senior comrades aren't around in the cradle of the Maoist revolution. The shops are shut, only four young boys were playing in the volleyball court which on a previous visit was packed.

The Royal Nepali Army carried out a search operation here in December, an offensive that prompted the Maoists to withdraw their unilateral

ceasefire. Many villagers who fled that offensive still haven't returned. The Maoist warriors have also been deployed to the cities for an impending 'big strike'.

The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Maoist movement therefore passed quietly and without much fanfare in the district where it all started. Last year Comrade Bikash had told us he

would see us back in Kathmandu in three years time. Bikash is nowhere to be seen but Comrade Inkaar, head of the 'village people's government' rides over in a white horse to tell a group of journalists that the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration has been postponed by a week to 18 February for unspecified reasons.

In Thawang itself the Maoists had called a strike to mark the

municipal elections on 7 February and a dozen people, half of them under 14, chanted slogans against the monarchy and for a 'democratic republic'

Bonfires were visible in the surrounding hillsides like a scene from the *Lord of the Rings*. An old musket finally fired after many tries and that marked the conclusion of the celebrations. For the Maoists, Thawang has the

**Panauti residents will never forget a night of terror that brought the war to their doorstep**

# The longest night

**MALLIKA ARYAL**  
in PANAUTI

**T**here was no warning. The people of Panauti were getting ready to go to bed when the explosions and gunfire started at 8.30 PM on the night of 5 February.

Labourer Dharma Das Shrestha was returning home after a hard day's work when he was hit by a bullet. When he was found later that night he had bled to death barely 100 m from his house.

At Shrestha's house, family members had just finished dinner when they heard the first explosions. "At first we were not worried because dai usually came home late," recalls his sister-in-law Muna Shrestha. "But the fighting got worse, there was more gunfire and when he still didn't show up we started getting really worried. But we didn't dare go look for him."

Panauti residents are finally able to talk about that fearful night. Some say there must have been over 1,500 Maoists, most of them women, who swooped down on the town from the nearby hills. One unit cut off the road to Banepa, another



NARESH NEWAR

## Martyrs' road

The showcase Maoist project in the construction of the 93-km Martyr's Road from Holeri in Dang to Thawang. Hundreds of villagers are digging into the slopes with their bare hands.

Using crude implements, the road is taking shape. But one wonders what will happen to the fragile slopes once the monsoon comes. The project started two years ago and is now half-complete. The first phase, from Nuagaon to Tila (12 km) was inaugurated last year amidst much fanfare.

Each house in the area has to contribute the labour of one person for two weeks, at its own expense. The punishment for defiance is up to Rs 5,000.

At one time 500 to 900 might labour on the road, ranging from a 10-year-old girl to women of 70. They work eight hours a day from 7AM till 6PM. Some carry stones, some level the ground, some blast rocks. Workers use dynamites to break bigger rocks and heat smaller ones before breaking them, which can take hours.

Most workers are unhappy about the forced labour and the dangerous work, but have decided to make the best of a bad situation. The villagers are the real workers—the clothes of party workers are usually cleaner and smarter.



importance of a pilgrimage site. This is where their revolution started and the village buildings are bedecked with a mural of Stalin, Lenin, Mao, Marx and Engels. European visitors said they felt like they were in a timewarp.

Across the valley in Rukum the heavily fortified town of Khalanga is in government control but barely. Barbed wire fences, landmines and sandbags guard the sentry points at the entry of the town. Here, among a population of 9,000, every new face is greeted with suspicion by security forces.

positioned itself on the Kushadebi road to prevent the army base at Lakuri Bhanjyang from sending reinforcements and still another engaged the army base outside town.

In front of the Panauti municipality building the fighting lasted nearly all night, leaving five dead and 16 injured. At the time of the attack 25 police and army personnel were guarding the office building and they were pinned down, reinforcements from the army base ten minutes away arrived only at 2 AM. An army Mi-17 hovered overhead just before midnight, but eyewitnesses said Maoist rebels simply hid inside houses when the choppers appeared.

"When the guns started going off, we immediately shut our lights off, the children started crying, men and women started screaming, we were all looking for cover, some of us hid under the bed, some under the stairs, some behind the doors while others just put both their hands on their head and crouched in the corner," remembers Uddab Shrestha who is wearing a white mourning cap to mark his brother's death.

It is hard for Shrestha's grieving family to talk about their loss. Adults find it easier to describe the night-long clash but younger ones can't even talk about that. Uddab sits in front of the two-storey house he shares

CDO Bal Bahadur Malla plays badminton behind walls under protection of armed police and soldiers. He tells us he loves his job of "serving the people". But walk three hours out of town and there is the first Maoist flag fluttering from a rooftop. Locals need written permission from the Maoists if they want to go to Khalanga.

Comrade Inkaar used to be a businessman before turning into a Maoist and remembers the army's December offensive. "They came at 10AM and left the village at 3.30 PM. They destroyed two houses, including the regional

with 11 other family members and describes the horrific night. The family is poor, windows in his house have no glass, the backyard unkempt. "When the helicopters came the guns would stop for a while and as the sound of helicopters died down the guns would start again, we thought it would never end," Uddab recalls.

Two weeks after the clash, most of the two-storey municipal building is in ruins. Mounds of broken bricks lie in front and the metal shutters of the shop fronts are full of bullet holes.

Bhoj Raj Timilsina of the Kabhre office of human rights group INSEC says the Maoists had forced civilians to join them in their human wave attack on the village. "It was wrong to have used civilians like the way the Maoist did," he says. A recent report by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) condemned such attacks in areas heavily populated by civilians.

The Maoists also looted a number of shops. A pharmacy was forced to hand over antibiotics and painkillers and a grocery store owner says he lost his supply of instant noodles and food. Timilsina also found a case of extreme brutality. A sack of red chillies in the municipality building had been stolen from a store and poured over an injured unconscious soldier who was then set on fire

agricultural building, set fire to clothes, destroyed kitchen utensils, food and medicine and vandalised shops," he recalls, "they tried to torch the welcome gate and bombed a public toilet. The army even destroyed a communal farm and vegetables."

But today Thawang's signature mural has been repainted, more slogans scrawled on building, flags fly from trees and on the welcome arch. Inkaar says development work has started, fruit trees are being planted and peanuts grown. Public toilets have been built and the Maoists are trying to convince the villagers, especially the older generation, to use them.

But he admits schools are suspended because of the war. "We are fighting, there are so many things that have to wait. All our energy is wasted in fighting the royal army, but we are doing what we can," he adds.

The latest Maoist slogan is to 'climb on the shoulder and hit the head'. But here in the Maoist heartland there is a state of confusion.

The 'old' has not yet been replaced by the 'new', and not everyone is convinced this revolution will end up making their lives better.

The former chairman of Thawang's erstwhile VDC is Regan Roka, and he thinks the old government was able to bring some development to the village. "Now they are trying something new," he adds, "they think they can make it work. But if it doesn't the Maoist movement here will have failed." ●

and left to die.

"There were four of us playing under the bridge when there was a huge explosion," says Phulkaji Pradhan, 14. "The next thing I knew I was on the ground, my stomach was open and I could see my intestines coming out."

Pradhan was injured by a socket bomb the Maoists had planted under the bridge to Panauti to launch their attack. The blast also seriously injured Pradhan's friend Karsang Lama.

"I managed to put both my hands on my stomach and walked up to the road," added Pradhan from his bed in Scheer Memorial Hospital in Banepa. Lama was discharged on Saturday.

Pradhan lies with his hands on his stomach while his anxious mother sits next to him. It is hard to miss the helplessness and worry in her eyes. "I don't know who to ask for help. I have no money to pay for my son's treatment. Apart from Children Welfare Committee, Kabhre, which gave me Rs 500, no one else has offered to help," she says.

After the clash, Maoist district chief Lal Dhoj Lama issued a statement saying that the party regrets what happened to the boys and that the bombs were not targeted at children. That's no relief to Phulkaji and his mother.

"My stomach still hurts a lot," he says haltingly, "I am scared and weak and I don't know if I will ever be able to play like I used to," he says. ●

# A unique uncle

## A dear uncle recently returned from Japan and told me his bittersweet tale

"My hands were black and aching when the police raided the factory. When they asked for my identity card, I confessed I didn't have the papers. Mohan, who also worked there, was a good distance away from us. So I signaled him to quietly slip out of the hall. But instead, the fool strode straight towards us and said, 'Ke bhayo?' The officers at once demanded his ID card. When he said it was at home, we were handcuffed and driven to his apartment.

NEPALI PAN  
Shradha Ghale



Two officers went in with Mohan while one waited with me. But when they came out, I saw they had caught one more fish! Jagat, Mohan's roommate,

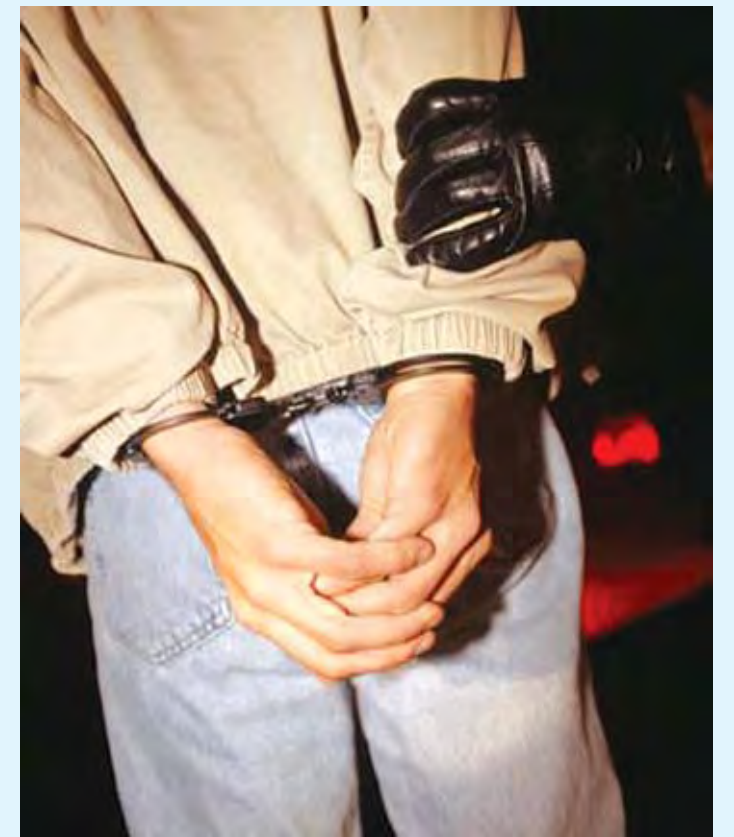
followed them looking all disheveled and disoriented with a giant suitcase in his hand. I burst out laughing but the officer hushed me up.

Later, Jagat told me he was literally shaken out of his dream into that nightmare. Poor fellow, he was jobless. His previous employers had refused to pay him his three months' wages and he had just filed a case against them with the help of a labour organisation staff.

At the police station, they asked me if I would immediately return to Nepal. I said, yes, I had the money and would fly back right away. Luckily I had some savings set aside for this emergency. Mohan said he'd go back, too. He had colossal loans in Nepal and had only been in Japan for three months, but what else could he do?

But Jagat started sobbing out his story to the officers. "I have a case pending, sir, how can I go?" he cried and started rummaging for the documents, letting all sorts of items fly out of his suitcase. How could he let go of his hard-earned money just like that?

We remained in custody while they arranged our deportation. The three of us were kept in separate cells with people charged with similar offenses—expired visas, fake marriages, forged work permits, you name it. I shared the cell with an Iranian, an Indonesian and a Bangladeshi.



The Bengali and I could communicate in Hindi, thank god, or else I would have been bored to death. After many frantic phone calls, Jagat finally persuaded a Nepali dai to fight his case on his behalf. This dai was a *visa wala*, he had married a Filipina who was previously married to a Japanese.

On the sixth day, Mohan and I were carted off to the airport. They didn't remove our handcuffs until we boarded. We had an eight-hour transit in Bangkok, where we were cooped up in a room with people from all over the world. They were all being sent away from different countries.

At last we flew home, exhausted but relieved, and hoping Jagat would win his case from behind bars.

It's nice to be home, but I also need to be making money. I want to send my kids to a good school. Besides, once you're used to slogging and earning real cash, you tend to feel restless here. And believe me, it's not just about the money. My job was hard and unpleasant. I had to work heavy machines all day long. My hands ached every waking moment. I still can't bend my fingers without hurting.

But there is also something sweet about working hard and getting paid for it. In fact, I didn't know I could work like that until I left home. Now, I want to try my luck in America. I hear life isn't rosy there. But it might be better than Malaysia, or Korea, or Kuwait, or Afghanistan. Don't you think?"

I was hesitant but I said that might be true. It was heartening to see despite everything, uncle had not lost hope and his sense of humor. After all, he was the less wretched than the tens of thousands of Nepalis who work hard to send money home to their families. ●

# Why not to kill the minister

Bollywood's *Rang de Basanti* is revolutionary chic and dangerous

The run of anti-Pakistan films out of Bollywood peaked a few years ago with productions like the infamous *Gadar*, which seem like a bad memory today—like Kargil.

As the Hindi film market expands and ropes in the upper as well as expatriate classes, more

**SOUTHASIA BEAT**  
Kanak Mani Dixit



complex themes are being addressed. The release last month of *Rang de Basanti* starring Aamir Khan confirms this trend and it challenges the introverted, nihilistic worldview of the English-speaking college youth of

India/Southasia.

The story is about a fun-loving band of Delhi University students whose members revel in drinking beer and exchanging smart one-liners. Their attitude towards politicians and public service drips with self-serving cynicism, until a rookie filmmaker from London comes by and ropes them into acting in an amateur production about martyred fighters of the Indian freedom struggle. So far so good and the larger portion of the film by Rakyesh Omprakash Mehra is devoted to the self-discovery of these spoil brats.

The film draws a parallel—in sepia and Technicolor—between the militancy of Bhagat Singh and

his hardy band against the British colonials back in the 1920s and the Delhi youngsters becoming conscious of their societal responsibilities. But then the comparison is taken literally too far and that is where *Rang de Basanti* turns dangerous because of its immaturity and illogic.

Bhagat Singh went about assassinating colonial administrators in a freedom struggle and Mehra astonishes by having his modern-day protagonists stalk and murder a minister guilty of corruption in a military deal. The kids then hole up in the studios of All India Radio and are picked off one by

one by commandos, which again projects an image of a police state at the Indian centre that seems ingenuous and out-of-whack.

This departure cannot be defended as being merely a presentation of Bollywood fantasy because while the standard masala film has no pretensions, this one arrogates for itself the high moral ground from which it looks down on the Indian landscape with distaste. It proposes to the gullible, privileged youth this route of murder and mayhem as a means of becoming more 'connected' to their political and social surroundings. This is a far cry

from the students of Delhi University three decades ago who became politicised and joined the Naxalite movement in the villages. What *Rang de Basanti* proposes is a Delhi-based act of terror by the elite against the elite, a Coca Cola revolution whose hero, incidentally, is Coke's commercial front man in real life.

But what a horrific example to provide to audiences all over—that it is okay to contemplate murder of politicians on the road to transparency and accountability. There is a childlike earnestness in the script that can only come from the filmmaker's own distance from the reality of ground-up politics.

This is the rarefied urban attitude that finds Bihar's Laloo Prasad Yadav a subject of continuous ridicule. After finding itself on the deep and sticky end, the script does try to wriggle out of the situation by suggesting that idealistic youth join the Indian Administrative Service or the police force but then it has the actors pull the trigger.

The core of the film's thesis lies in a false juxtaposition. It turns history and political science on its head as it forces a parallel between fighting the colonial state and fighting the democratic nation state—if it is patriotic to assassinate the colonial administrator so is it patriotic to murder a modern-day politician who is on the take. Had the protagonists sought to find non-violent ways to humble the politician, this film would probably have come out ethically sound but director Mehra had a need to see the historical analogy drawn to its dastardly end. If Bhagat Singh's cabal shot the gora sahib, Aamir Khan and his band performe has to finish off the crooked minister.

The plot has taken a naive yet dangerous shortcut and the fact that this is a Bombay blockbuster adds to the potential damage. Simply put, Mehra and his cohort were so intellectually lazy they did not see the difference between a fight for independence and the need to have accountability and probity in present-day governance.

*Rang de Basanti* is revolutionary chic from Bombay. It is anti-humanist, anti-Gandhian and in promoting violence it provides an answer that is more gruesome than the problem identified. The only thing left is to hope that the young adults who watch *Rang de Basanti* in cinema halls or on the small screen will take it as the standard Bollywood fantasy. ●



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"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.) - as translated by UNACOOTs, the United Nation's Association of Cartoonists



**COOKING With Khandro Didi**  
**#66 - Chicken Curry in the Age of Bird Flu**  
 This tip comes from a reader in Lela, where tasty & safe chicken dishes are renowned. To prepare a tasty chicken curry, without worry of added chicken, just visit your local cold store and add 1/2 cup boiled water to one pack "Quick" curry, or just eat right from the packet!



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**ABOUT TOWN**

**EXHIBITIONS**

- ❖ **Climate Change** exhibition at British Council. 13-25 February. 8.30PM - 5.45PM. 4410798
- ❖ **Hiding The Balls** by Peter Schrader. Bhaktapur Da rbar Square. 28 February. 2PM
- ❖ **Performance Blowing up The Balls** By Peter Schrader. Siddhartha Art Gallery. 5 PM 5 March
- ❖ **Spectrum of Moments** photo exhibition by Sushma Amatya. 17 February to 1 March. Siddhartha Art Gallery. 11AM - 6PM



**EVENTS**

- ❖ **Nature and Wildlife Photography** competition for amateur photographers. Visit [www.wcn.org.np](http://www.wcn.org.np) for more details
- ❖ **Pilgrims Book House Sale** till 28 February. Pilgrims. Durbar Marg.
- ❖ **Kathmandu Chorale** is beginning rehearsals for its Spring Concert. Rehearsals will be held at the British School hall, Sanepa, from 20 February. 7.10PM.
- ❖ **Facilitation and Presentation Skills** a forum by AYON. 18 February. 1 pm - 5 pm. FNCCI, FNCCI complex, Teku. 2041674
- ❖ **An indigenous technology on the verge of extinction** youth forum. 3- 5PM. Martin Chautari

**MUSIC**

- ❖ **Live music** by STUPA featuring COZIMA and DJ SANI. 24 February 7.30 PM onwards. 5526212.
- ❖ **Celebrate Shivaratri** bonfire party. Free entrance. 6PM onwards. 552621.
- ❖ **Classical Music** at Jatra. 26 February. 6.30 PM. 4256622
- ❖ **Paleti** with Bhim Birag. 24 February.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs.
- ❖ **Live Music** at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- ❖ **Best of jazz** JCS trio and Friends. Niek's Place. Every Tuesday and Saturday. Free entry. 4701324.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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**

- ❖ **Madras Express** south Indian Food. 17 - 25 February. Garden Terrace Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Stupa View** vegetarian creations, clay oven pizza, tasty desserts, espresso & latte. directly at the Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- ❖ **Maki Nawa Bhutu** for traditional Newari cuisine at Hotel Royal Singi. 4439784
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **The Shangri-La Express** Soups, make your own sandwiches and salads and choice of dessert only for Rs 399. Everyday from 11AM - 3PM. The Shambala Garden
- ❖ **Wonderful Wednesdays** at Fusion, Dwarika's, happy hour 5-9PM.
- ❖ **Breakfast** 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. 5521810
- ❖ **Breakfast With Birds** lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fire place. Farm House Café. 4375279

**GETAWAYS**

- ❖ **Tea House-Inn.** Nepalese Salads with Nepali Thali every Saturday at the terrace garden. Nagarkot. 668-0048, 668-0080 (ext.2111)
- ❖ **Club Himalaya Chiso Chiso Hawama** package from Rs.1700 per person with dinner, breakfast, accommodation and shuttle service. 668-0080, 668-0083
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, award winning relaxation in Pokhara Reservations 01 436 1500
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- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

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**NEPALI WEATHER** by MAUSAM BEED

The rise in maximum temperature is not as sharp as expected and this is because of the thick Indo-Gangetic haze that filters the sunshine. The haze stretches right across northern India and into the foothills of the Himalaya and has been worse this year because of the prolonged drought. It is now four-and-half months since the last rain in Kathmandu Valley, and such an extended drought has never been seen since the British Embassy started keeping records 100 years ago. This satellite image taken on Wednesday evening shows a favourable pressure pattern in the north Indian plains for the weekend, but alas, no hint of moisture to take advantage of this. All we'll get is dry clouds and if we're really luckily a few very isolated convection-related drizzles along the higher valleys but don't bet on it.

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**WOMEN WITH SWORDS:** 67 female officers, the RNA's first, were among the graduates from the Kharipati Army Academy in Bhaktapur on Monday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST:** Nabil Three Star Football Club goalkeeper Upendra Man Singh waves from behind the wheel of his new car, the prize for being named top player in the Martyrs' Memorial San Miguel A Division League, on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**A LITTLE DIRTY FUN:** Riders roar through dirt in the Kathmandu-Bungamati-Lele-Godavari-Lubhu off-road ride organised by Bikers Nepal last Saturday.



PUNYASHEEL GAUTAM

**LENDING A HELPING HAND:** Volunteers from Kathmandu high schools with Habitat for Humanity help dig the foundation of a house for needy locals of Chapagaon on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**FIERY PROTEST:** Students of Amrit Science College burn bicycle tyres on Lainchour on Wednesday to protest the steep hike in the price of diesel and kerosene announced last week.

# Sarhana's Samudaya

**W**hen a group of likeminded Nepalis in the US got together to launch [www.samudaya.org](http://www.samudaya.org) in January 2005 they were looking to start a discussion forum where Nepalis could come together and talk about issues ranging from politics to music in cyberspace.

Then February First happened. And ever since, Samudaya's work has been more towards spreading awareness amongst the youth for democracy, pluralism and free press.

"We are critical towards the current regime and this government assumes that if we are against them, we must be with the other side. What they fail to understand is that we are critical of anyone who is against democracy," says Sarhana Shrestha, 23, a multimedia designer from New York who runs [samudaya.org](http://samudaya.org) in her freetime.

Sarhana is a new breed of committed Nepalis who are using the Internet to bring international Nepalis together with a common commitment to the future. But back in Nepal, the royal regime promptly blocked [samudaya.org](http://samudaya.org), it remains among a dozen websites that can't be access from Nepal. But that only made Samudaya more popular, although Sarhana admits it made it more difficult to get participation from Nepalis in Nepal.

But that problem can be overcome. Samudaya and other

blocked sites can be accessed through several proxy sites, as well as through a mirror site, [www.everybodybreed.com](http://www.everybodybreed.com).

Sarhana says one doesn't need to be in Nepal to do something for the country. "Just because you are away does that mean you stop caring," she said during a visit to Kathmandu this month. The Samudaya team wants to break the myth that young people can't, and shouldn't, work for social reform whether at the



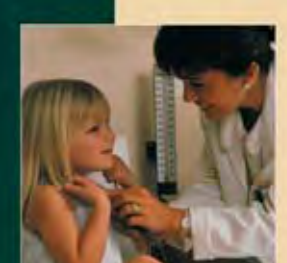
grassroots or policy levels. Samudaya has also started Creative Dissent Nepal, a movement of people working towards supporting and promoting democratic ideals through participatory, creative and non-violent activism.

In Kathmandu for a brief visit this month, Sarhana told us with conviction: "A new Nepal is possible but young people need to be involved."

Mallika Aryal



DAMBER K SHRESTHA


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# Streetwise in Kathmandu

Regular readers of this column will have discerned by now that every year or so they are required by law to mandatorily read through yet another article about Kathmandu's traffic situation.

At the rate this metropolis is expanding the rules of the road need to keep pace. What was perfectly acceptable road

**UNDER MY HAT**  
Kunda Dixit



behaviour last year (turning turtle at Koteswor intersection) could be illegal this year. So, here is our biannual traffic rules update:

- A valid or invalid national driving license is required. Driver needs to cut out this article and present it as proof he/she has read it before getting a compulsory endorsement stamp from the Department of Potholes and/or Cavities of His Majesty's Government.
- Expats can use a valid national driving license from the following countries where driving conditions are similar to Nepal: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea, Guatemala and Mali. Expats from all other countries need to sit for a written exam and a driving test which includes trick

situations such as being required to parallel park in uparallelled situations.

- Anyone who fails to honk incessantly while driving could have his/her license revoked. Honking is a necessary part of alerting road-users outside hospitals and schools about your presence and failure to toot your own trumpet could lead to untoward mishaps.
- Alert: The rule on the use of hand-held mobile phones while driving has been changed yet again. It is once more legal to speak on the phone while driving, but only if it is a Nepal Telecom set since everyone knows it doesn't work anyway.
- Taxis are henceforth allowed to park, but only at road junctions and only if they block all vehicles going in and out of a sidestreet. A taxi that parks on the kerbside leaving ample room for through traffic is liable to prosecution for Waste of Public Space. Buses, being public transport, can load and unload passengers anywhere including in the middle of the road provided they are blocking traffic for a distance of not less than two kilometers in both directions while doing so.
- In case an outrider appears with sirens blaring indicating the imminent arrival of a VVVVIP in a tearing hurry, drivers are allowed to climb into nearby

traffic islands to get out of the way. Failure to do so means you may be sideswiped by a speeding Harley Davidson.

- Since pedestrians continue to ignore bridges to cross the city's major thoroughfares, the bridges have now been opened to all-terrain motorbikes and 4-WDs wishing to extricate themselves from traffic jams by making legal overhead U-turns.
- The rule on driving on the left side of the road has been revoked by royal ordinance. All full-drawn and broken centerlines have been erased so drivers can now drive on whichever side of the road they fancy, exercising their constitutionally guaranteed right to the Freedom of Movement recently upheld on the road outside the Supreme Court Building.
- Some roads have concrete barriers along the centerlines. These are for motorcyclists to practice for the giant slalom.
- Armoured Personnel Carriers, Anti-aircraft Batteries and Main Battle Tanks on their way to the Shivaratri Parade at rush hour have right of way and anyone who has a problem with that is liable to be booked under the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities (Control and Punishment) Act and used for target practice. ●

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Digital match print & Progressive Proofing

**ONE STEP AHEAD...**

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