

Nearer and nearer

You don't have to go far to see the face of war these days. Just drive to Thankot, down to Malekhu and along the picturesque highway that in peacetime used to take Kathmandu's weekenders to resorts in Kurintar and Manakamana.

At Fisling, where white water rafters still launch their boats (right), there are charred hulks of tankers destroyed by Maoists to enforce their blockade. Further up the road on Wednesday, army commandos in full battle gear were massed around armoured personnel carriers.



Full story p13

KIRAN PANDAY

Timesnepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 291

Q. If an election for a constituent assembly were to be held now what system would you vote for?

Total votes:6,971

Active monarchy 16.1%

Multiparty democracy/ ceremonial monarchy 34.4%

Multiparty democracy/republic 42.3

One party communist state 5.4%

Don't know 1.2%

Weekly Internet Poll # 292. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Which of the following alliances do you find most probable in the current scenario?

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VIOLENCE IS A DEADEND

By renewing their pact with the Maoists last week, the parties have once more shown that they can bring the rebels out of the jungles if they had more support. By standing their ground on the dispute over a joint statement that threatened to scuttle the talks, they sent a clear message that there is a price for the legitimacy the rebels gain from the alliance.

The next logical step is to convince the Maoists to declare another ceasefire which would not just reinforce the parties' peace brokering role but also prevent the royal regime from using the conflict as an excuse for further militarisation and absolutism. More importantly, a ceasefire call is critical for the success of the planned pro-democracy rally on 7 April.

Then the parties and the Maoists have to get down to real brass tacks and tackle the issue of violence. There is no more rationale for the kind of bloodshed we have seen this week. The Maoists must think twice about their planned big strike in the capital because it will play right into the regime's hands and wreck the pact with the parties. Learning from the permanent ceasefire declared by ETA this week, the comrades must realise that armed struggle is a dead end. By pledging to the parties that they are committed to renouncing violence they get their safe landing and take the wind out of the king's sails.

Critics of the pact are partly right: violence and non-violence don't mix. The Maoist blockade that crippled the country has been swapped for a crippling four-day national shutdown 5-9 April called by the seven party alliance. And we are supposed to be thankful.

A national shutdown is not a non-violent protest. It depends on the threat of violence to keep cars off the roads and shops shut. Abductions, extortion, blockades and closure of community-managed schools are also forms of violence.

If the political parties are still wondering why the people aren't coming out openly in the streets in support of their pro-democracy agitation they just need to re-evaluate the decisions that prove the people's worst fears that they haven't changed their spots.

Why is it that the king's enemies insist on punishing the people to get back at him? How is it going to help build public support when you deprive the poorest segments of society from their livelihoods for prolonged periods?

It is this country's tragedy that people fighting to liberate the people have always punished the very people they're supposed to liberate.



RAMESWOR BOHARA

Could get worse

But it's not too late to prevent new bloodshed

Manakala couldn't finish her story. Her voice cracked, her body began shaking and she fainted right before our eyes. The memories of three nights earlier, when security forces clashed with the Maoists in her small village, were too much for her.

GUEST COLUMN
Anna Neistat and
Sam Zarifi

Mankala will never forget a helicopter landing in the field next to her house, Maoists seeking shelter in the village, the whine of bullets and her family's desperate efforts to hide under a bed, screaming soldiers accusing her of hiding the Maoists and

her attempts to convince them that a boy they were beating was not a rebel, but just a 14-year-old neighbour from the village.

The war that came to this elderly Palpa farmer's door is now engulfing Nepal. After a short period of relief during the Maoists' unilateral ceasefire, nearly every district in the country is currently affected by attacks and clashes between the Maoists and the army. Nepali civilians, particularly the vast majority living in rural areas, are now closer to the conflict than ever before, caught between two forces with histories of grave and systematic human rights abuses.

The Maoists put civilians at great risk by using houses, schools and public spaces to launch attacks or to seek shelter while fleeing counterattacks by the security forces. Many civilians die or sustain serious injuries when the army uses aerial bombardment to pursue retreating Maoists because the army's practice of dropping mortars by hand from the side of helicopters does not allow proper targeting and yields a high rate of unexploded ordnance.

Meanwhile, in many rural areas where the security forces are unable to counter the Maoists' intrusion into villages, the government has turned to creating and arming vigilante groups to serve as their proxies, drawing on local thugs as well as the pool of aggrieved villagers eager to avenge themselves against Maoists.

We found that over the last year the government has created and sponsored vigilante groups

throughout the tarai from Bardiya to Ilam. Vigilante leaders in Rupandehi and Nawalparasi admitted that they received official government support, including a one-month-long training program at RNA barracks, government identification cards and rifles.

The poorly trained and ill-disciplined vigilante groups act abusively toward the local population they are ostensibly protecting, beating and at times killing those suspected—however flimsily—of Maoist sympathies, extorting 'donations' and violently intimidating villagers. In turn, the Maoists aggressively punish members of vigilante groups, abducting and killing them and their alleged supporters. The cycle of attacks and reprisals by Maoists and vigilantes risks spiraling further out of control.

One of the most alarming aspects of Nepal's civil war is the heavy toll the conflict takes on children. According to UNICEF Nepal has the world's second highest rate of children killed or injured due to explosive devices. In addition, the Maoists continue their large-scale and often forcible recruitment of children for military purposes in violation of international standards.

Boys and girls we interviewed said they had been abducted from schools for indoctrination programs and then forced to stay, taken from homes under the Maoists' 'one family, one member' recruitment campaign, or simply kidnapped. The children told us they were taught to use hand grenades and socket

LETTERS

CHU NYIMA

I am deeply saddened to read the news of the demise of Chu Nyima Rimpoché in Charles Gay's tribute ('Chu Nyima is gone and we're still here', #290). I visited the Rimpoché's monastery in 1997 during the establishment phase of Manasalu Conservation Area Project. Being the team leader and a Buddhist by birth and practice, I visited the monastery and received blessings from the Rimpoché. Along with few local women, four of us from the project reached the monastery after walking for 10 hours. I come from Upper Mustang but I never imagined that a place of such astounding beauty existed in Nepal. The monastery blended with the beauty of the surrounding landscape and the scene is imprinted in my mind. The Rimpoché granted us audience with butter tea and chumpa and I was immediately impressed by the compassion and genuine concern of the Rimpoché towards all sentient beings and also by the practical approaches to education and transfer of knowledge to over 50 young nuns and monks from many parts of Nepal. I hope the legacy of Chu Nyima Rimpoché continues.

Ghana Gurung, Switzerland

NO TOMORROW

If Nepal continues, as it is now doing, to rupture economically, it won't matter

who's in power at all. (Editorial, 'As if there is no tomorrow', #288) While finding a political solution to the present Maoist crisis is important, the much more important task of assuring that the country doesn't become an economic basket case seems to worry not very many particularly. The present royalist government harps consistently on corruption in previous governments. That's well and good but what exactly is its solution? The king must understand that spending ever more of a wounded country's resources on setting up special courts is not worth its while unless as a result of the prosecution the average Nepali feels an upliftment in their lives.

N Manan, email

● Now that the political parties have entered into new agreement with the Maoists, the king has made it impossible to talk only with the parties with the Maoists excluded (that is, if at all he intends to talk) thanks to his intransigence so long. However it may be better to make the Maoists too, a party to talks (forget and forgive) as that will make the general election feasible. The polls can't be taken by anyone not be taken by anybody as anything but sham). The general election after agreement will be for constituent assembly retaining the role for the king a purely ceremonial one with no military or civil governing power. So far the people will be willing to give him a role, otherwise

Nepal may slip into a republic state, now that the Nepali regard for monarchy is at its lowest ebb excepting for a handful of cronies.

I Pradhan, email

MINI-EV

In contrast to the gloom and doom environment that we have been given by the media and the greedy, self-centered, power brokers Kunda Dixit's story about the MiniEV ('Clean & Green & Electric,



#290) has given me great hope. If we are allowed to live our lives—our way, this is surely the future for us in transport. With the utter failure in the management and development of hydroelectricity and the total chaos in the political scene, I was afraid that Nepal would be left high and dry with the polluting hulks of vehicles as fuel becomes unaffordable in the next few years. Thanks to Hulas Motors, KEVA, SDC and USAID Nepal will still be moving

on wheels for some time. These innovations will not only reduce pollution and save the environment but will keep our money in the country and provide jobs. What has to be done now is to set a time table to push out the polluting vehicles owned and run by mafia for the general public and for INGOs to give up their gas guzzling SUVs and switch to Mini-Evs in the cities. Maybe Hulas and KEVA could also turn the 7,500 Maruti taxis in Kathmandu to hybrid vehicles by fitting a similar system as the Mini-EV in the rear axle.

Rajendra Khadga, Lajimpat

JACK WELCH

Having worked for Jack Welch at GE, I concur with most of what Ashutosh Tiwari writes in his column Strictly Business ('Growing a human face', #288). During our Session C's, all GE employees were categorised into A, B and C players. C (bottom 10 percent) players better not stay at C level next year, otherwise they would be out looking for a job. B (mid 70 percent) players would get lot of coaching and mentoring. A (top 20 percent) players were treated like gods in the company. They would be paid very high with lot of perks and bonuses, pretty much anything they needed and, more than anything else, even more challenges. Some burnt out, most got even better. That's how it was with Jack. He explained this asymmetric compensatory system, and his exact phrase was 'vitality

bombs and worked as porters of ammunition, cooks, stretcher-carriers, or sentry guards—thus refuting the Maoists’s claims that the movement does not use children for military activities.

The bad news is that this already dire situation can become much worse. If the Maoists carry out their threat of attacking urban areas and the army is not forced to exercise extreme caution in its response to the attacks, the number of civilian casualties will grow dramatically. The good news is that it’s not too late to prevent the new bloodshed.

Over the last year, both sides of the conflict have demonstrated that they can change their behaviour. Fearing the possibility of losing its participation in UN peacekeeping operations and trying to satisfy the US-imposed conditionality for further military assistance, the army has decreased some of its most abusive practices.

The Maoists’ 12-point agreement with the opposition political parties prompted a decrease in Maoist violence against the parties’ political cadres, especially during the ceasefire. Finally, the presence of international monitors from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights seemed to have a positive effect on both parties’ adherence to human rights standards.

Now is the time to keep up and step up targeted international pressure on both sides of the conflict, coupled with monitoring from the UN and Nepali human rights groups and journalists to prevent further injury to Nepal’s beleaguered civilian population. ●

Anna Neistat, Human Rights Watch’s Emergencies Researcher and Sam Zarifi, Asia Research Director for Human Rights Watch, just completed a three-week mission to Nepal after the end of the unilateral ceasefire.

Marketting Mao in Nepal

The alternative to a messy parliamentary democracy is complete anarchy

Within 24 hours of the withdrawal of nationwide blockades by the Maoists, at least 50 Nepalis were killed in battles throughout the kingdom. Peace remains as elusive as ever.

On a busy afternoon at Asan this week a second cousin is spotted haggling over the price of fresh strawberries from Nuwakot. There are several women selling plates made out of sal leaves but a buyer can’t find a regular supplier. In the commotion of the bazar fresh wares, novel display or attractive discounts compete to grab the attention of shoppers.

STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal



Traders recognise that consumers want to be surprised but not so much to lose their orientation. So they jolt them

with novelty but keep them reassured with the promise of reliability.

The challenge is to design an appropriate mix of freshness and familiarity. This is difficult enough in business but in politics the task is much more daunting. The incumbency factor can make a party remain in power or lose it depending on its campaign strategy.

An armed insurgency loses its relevance if there is no violence but can’t acquire legitimacy without renouncing violent behaviour. Baburam Bhattarai, skilled strategist that he is, must be in that dilemma: how to remodel his party to keep its young adherents on board without frightening away the democratic coalition of political parties, civil society and the international community.

The Maoist leadership needs time to clear the confusion. The second MoU with the seven party alliance last week gave them another opportunity to design a safe exit strategy from the vicious circle of armed insurgency, ruthless repression, alienation and rebellion. Sadly, some powerful and familiar interests are determined to be spoilsports.

US Principal Deputy Secretary of South Asian Affairs Donald Camp reiterated the need for reconciliation between constitutional forces. Chinese State Councillor Tan Jiaxuan hoped all constitutional forces would settle their differences. Other safe players also want these elusive constitutional forces to unite. But all this unity would do is push the Maoists into limbo and perpetuate the conflict.

The very term ‘constitutional forces’ is an oxymoron. Sovereignty of the people is the sole constitutional force in any democratic country. It is exercised by institutions and instruments created by the constitution in accordance with constitutional provisions and judicial traditions.

Since 1990 Nepalis are the only constitutional force of this country. All others, including the monarchy, parliament, and the courts are its creations charged with the responsibility of acting according to the letter and spirit of the supreme law of the land.

That stopped working the day parliament was dissolved under unusual circumstances four years ago. Whether the constitution is dead for good, comatose, in ICU or hostage to Article 127 is debatable. But everyone agrees it is ineffective. When the foundation has collapsed, there is no point building on it.

Amidst all this, the promise of a constituent assembly offers a ray of hope. It would be futile to expect that a fresh compact of the people will solve all outstanding issues in a single stroke but at the very least it proffers a possibility of peace.

Most Nepalis have no idea what a constituent assembly is supposed to deliver. Will it usher in a dictatorship of the proletariat or just legitimise monarchical democracy? Will it introduce inclusive democracy or perpetuate the status quo? These questions need to be debated in an atmosphere of give-and-take with an open mind. There can be no better forum to deliberate these issues than a parliament reinstated for the express purpose of preparing the ground for constituent assembly.

It will offer the right mix of innovation and ease to improve the visibility and value of reinvented Nepali Maoism in the marketplace of ideas. The alternative to messy parliamentary democracy is complete anarchy. ●



curve’ of GE, in one of our frequent management training seminars at Crotonville, NY. He was one paranoid, demanding, SOB of a boss who pushed, pushed and pushed, somehow elevating you to the level you did not even think possible. Ahhhh,those were the days. I am glad someone or some people are taking note of Jack Welch’s management methodologies. He is, after all, the manager of the century.

Binoy Yonzon, Chicago

SOUTHASIA BEAT

Re: Kanak Mani Dixit’s Southasia Beat (‘India gets US nod on nukes’, #289) What about your Chinese communist buddies up north? They have been proliferating nukes and missiles to Pakistanis North Koreans, Libyans, Iranians. For a while they were even providing weapons to the Taliban. It is wonderful to put on your socialist/commie sunglasses and the infamous Mao suit and watch as the Han Chinese are slowly and surely destroying every emblance of Tibetan Buddhist culture. If the Pakis didn’t receive nukes and missiles from the Chinese they would be sitting on their tails concentrating in uplifting their people instead of instead of sending jihadis by the boatloads into India.

Jim Palmer, email

● Kanak Mani Dixit asks ‘Who are you going to use those nuclear-tipped missiles

against? Do you really need them to become a world power and would you not become a better world power when your children are better fed?’ India wants to feed her children and that is all this nuclear deal is about. This deal will allow India to generate the much needed energy to grow at double digits and take its masses out of poverty by 2020.

Jayasaal Thuvassery, email

● Has anyone told Kanak Mani Dixit that he is a paranoid India-basher? All his articles smack of a pre-determined conclusion of finding fault with India, no matter what the issue and context is. He should know that you can talk about facts and anlyse them without bringing in rhetoric and emotion and, worse, bias. I don’t think he can strut about as a journalist if you carry such deep-seated prejudice. If India is such a bad country, why do Nepalis make a beeline for this place, seek employment and live here? Why don’t you issue an advisory to all Nepalis to stay away from India?

Anup Varma, Bangalore

● I have never been able to understand why we in India are so proud to lead the pack of poor (NAM) nations. I have never been able to understand why we take such pride in the concept of ahimsa and Gandhi and Tagore or appoint ourselves as the moral guardians of the whole world.

Because we seem to be very violent people. Our gods are depicted with weapons...our whole mythology and philosophy is violent. To say that elite in india wanted nuclear weapons to get rid of inferiority complex is trivialising it.

N Ramachandran, email

HEALTHY LIVING

Congratulations on a very good article (‘Staying Alive’ #290). It would be *sunā ma sugandha* if you also could throw some light on healthy lifestyle habits, like watching your food and raksi intake, to help prevent such problems. Of course, it would not solve the problem 100 percent but it would help.

Aruna Uprety, email

STIGMATISATION

I have strong reservation regarding the Guest Column by Shyam Chalise in which he describes different personality types of our current political players. I don’t get the point: why do you media people choose psychiatry/mental illness or related fields to describe various political scenarios of this country? Why again and again stigmatise mental illness? You did same in ‘Schizophrenic Nepal policy’ (#285). Personality is a whole system of relatively permanent tendencies of an individual which is distinctive and adjusts according to psychological and social environment, usually begins to take shape during

adolescence and becomes crystallised in adulthood. When there is behaviour deviants that does not adjust with existing social circumstances, it becomes a ‘personality disorder’. Of course, normal people will have various personality traits that describe them but this does not mean you have to compare various types of personality disorders with characteristics/traits of political heavyweights. It is really ridiculous to compare ‘borderline personality disorder’ with correction of regression and joining royal government.

Shailendra Raj Adhikary, Lecturer in Psychiatry, KMCTH, Sinamangal

● I just read your trenchant, bold and absolutely correct analysis by Dr Shyam Chalise in your Guest Column (‘Psychopaths and sycophants’, #290). His diagnosis of NPD fits exactly, I’d only add that there are some antisocial and paranoid features as well. Of course it’s all the same DSM cluster. This narcissism could allow a face-saving way out, to allow them to grandiosely claim that they are heroes. I personally think they are APDs who should be on trial but that approach isn’t going to cut any ice and will only strengthen their resolve. As you know, confronting people like that doesn’t help. Thanks to Dr Chalise for his courage and insight.

Dr Bob Curran, email

Schools on the frontline

Education in one of Nepal’s remotest districts is set back decades by the conflict

RAJAN PARAJULI
in JUMLA

The government requires schools to make children sing the national anthem every morning. But the Maoists have banned it, and ruled that only revolutionary songs be sung. To avoid getting into trouble, teachers in schools in remote Jumla just let the children recite ditties. The Maoists have forced all students to tear out portraits of members of the royal family from their text books. Every book in every classroom has pages missing.

Like elsewhere across Nepal, teachers and students here in one of Nepal’s most remote districts are on the frontline of the conflict, squeezed between the state and the rebels. The government has moved out post offices, agricultural extension and forestry offices from the hinterland. Only the teachers remain.

There might be ceasefires and 12-point agreements with the parties but nothing has changed here. Teachers are still forced to march to Maoist programs, sometimes a roundtrip for a week across rugged terrain. They are still paying the mandatory ‘donation’. Now there is talk that all teachers have to come to class dressed in combat fatigues, teach the revolutionary curriculum and follow the rebel calendar with holidays for Mao’s birthday. The teachers know this will make



MOHAN MAINALI

FALLING IN LINE: School children in Jumla at morning drill without national anthem or revolutionary songs.

their schools targets of security forces but there is nothing they can do about it. Two years ago, Maoists came to Jumla’s Tribhuban Secondary School and abducted the principal and two teachers. The principal was later killed in the forest and the two teachers let go with the warning not to speak against the movement. Once released the teachers were interrogated by the army, and then the police took the two into custody and beat them up. “We are struggling to stay alive between these two sides,” says a teacher, “our students are terrified.” After the Maoists killed the principal, Ghanashyam Bhatta was forced by the District

Education Office to replace him. “I resigned twice,” Bhatta says, “But they told me I couldn’t. I am still afraid.” Jumla CDO Krishna Shrestha takes a hard line on teachers who listen to the Maoists. “Their job is to teach, not do politics,” he told us, “besides the military patrols are under standing instructions to treat civilians well.” This lack of understanding of their plight angers teachers caught in the crossfire. “What do they think,” asks one teacher, “if we were real Maoist supporters why would they have to abduct us?” Schools in contested areas on the outskirts of Jumla bear the brunt. The Maoists treat teachers and students as spies, and the army regards them as Maoist

sympathisers. “We’re not always afraid,” says a 12-year-old school boy bravely, “but we know we have to be careful when there is an army patrol around because that means the Maoists may have planted a booby trap along the trail.” District Education Officer Mukti Singh Thakuri has a pile of applications on his desk from teachers waiting to be transferred out of Jumla. Thakuri himself, like the school inspectors and resource persons, can’t venture out of the town for security reasons, so the teachers come to him. “School inspections are down to zero, that is true,” says Thakuri, “I guess now we all have to take our security in our own hands

and just go.” But such talk is just theoretical for Mimraj Giri a teacher from Dillichaur who was badly beaten by Maoists who accused him of being a government spy. He hasn’t dared go back to his village for the past four years. “They detained me for 23 days, they beat me up and left me for dead,” says Giri, “you can still see the holes in my head.” Most teachers don’t want to be quoted by name and they whisper: “There are two governments here, one in the village one in the town. If you want to live in the village you have to give them what they ask.” Most teachers admit privately they are paying five percent of their salary to the Maoists. The CDO, DEO and the army in the town know that is going on, but turn the other way. Says one teacher: “They pretend not to know, and of course if you don’t pay the Maoists accuse us of being a spy,” says another teacher, “some have to pay even half their salary. They weep when they have to hand over the money because they need to feed their families with it.” For the Maoists, the country’s school system has become a target because it is the only government entity still left in the villages. And that puts teachers and students directly in the crossfire. ●

Adapted from a radio feature broadcast on Antenna Foundation.

Let communities run schools

This is the smart approach to sustain quality education

The transfer of government schools to communities started modestly in 2002, and in the first year 95 schools were handed over to community management. In the second year, the program gained momentum and the total reached 1,000 and now well over 2,000 schools are under community management. That is more than 10 percent of about 21,000 government funded schools in the country. But this year, the process has slowed rather sharply. Is this another case of Nepal failing to bring a good reform to its logical conclusion? Since last year, in many areas local Maoists seem to have warned communities not to accept the management responsibility over their own schools and where the transfer had already happened, return the responsibility to the government. Their basic argument seems to be that this transfer of schools to community management is a sly trick and that the government will abrogate its responsibility to fund these schools. Some teachers’ groups seem to have also spread the same story and many communities are confused and worried.

What is really happening? The evidence does not support the notion that the government is trying to shirk its responsibility for funding primary schools. The allocation for primary education has, in fact, increased from 8.7 percent of the total budget in 2001-2 to 9.3 percent in 2005-06. Most of the schools transferred to community management have, if anything, seen an increase in funding. Furthermore, about 2,000 additional schools that had been started by communities and had not received any government support (they used to be called ‘community schools’ but are now known as ‘unaided schools’) began to

get grants to pay for one teacher in 2003 and for two teachers in 2004, and the government plans to increase this gradually so that these ‘unaided schools’ will eventually be brought in line with other government funded schools. This certainly does not seem like a government that is trying to withdraw from the funding obligation for primary education. In the meantime, the government has made good on the promise to hand over the power to hire and fire teachers to the school management committee by amending the Education Act and Regulations. It is clear that the government is serious about the idea of a public-private partnership in which it provides the financing and the community provides the management oversight of the school. A recent survey of over 10,000 households served by 33 schools that have gone over to community management shows that the impact of this change has been phenomenal (see table). What results show is that modest performance incentives and community efforts make a powerful combination to improve provision of education dramatically and very fast. Although this survey covers a

small sample, the leaders of the national network of community managed schools tell us that these results do not surprise them at all. They are consistent with what they have been seeing themselves, though their observations are not quantified. This is great news for the education system in Nepal. I suspect the achievements are far better than anyone had expected. But, it is also encouraging for the development effort in Nepal more broadly. When the political crisis and the insurgency have made development work more challenging, there is increasing evidence and realisation that letting the communities lead the way is the smart approach to sustain development. This survey’s results strongly support this idea. Of course, community management of schools is but one example of such an approach. There is a scope for the government to expand its support for a number of other community-based programs like the Poverty Alleviation Fund, rural drinking water (through the ‘Fund Board’ and other programs) alternative energy development (through the Alternative Energy Promotion Center), rural electrification (through the community electrification program), and microcredit schemes (through the Rural Microfinance Development Center). A rather unproductive game of disinformation about the true intention of the government continues and the Ministry of Education and Sports has failed thus far to counteract such a smear campaign with resoluteness. Many communities have become uncertain about the community management concept, and some observers seem to feel that this reform process is no longer working.

But many of the communities that have taken over school management are seeing impressive results. They march on and other communities that have been confused by conflicting information would do well to follow their lead. ●

Ken Ohashi is the World Bank Country Director for Nepal.

COMMENT
Ken Ohashi



Indicators	Academic year 03/04	Academic year 04/05
Out-of-school primary age children	20.4%	8.0%
Out-of-school primary age girl children	22.4%	8.7%
Out-of-school primary age Dalit children	28.9%	1.1%
Primary dropout and repetition rate	13.7%	9.5%
Secondary dropout and repetition rate	8.9%	4.6%

Respect the law

Tourism bodies have demanded that any member of the security services who manhandled Qatar Airways employees in an incident on 9 March be brought to book immediately. The employees were arrested at a hotel in Lajimpat while they interviewed candidates for jobs in Doha and then interrogated by the Department of Labour officials who said they suspected the company of illegally hiring Nepali employees. "The onus rests on government agencies and the state security apparatus to uphold and apply the rule of law following due process therein in a civilised manner so that business entities can work in a better environment," said a statement issued last Friday by organisations including the Hotel Association of Nepal, Trekking Agents Association of Nepal, Nepal Association of Tour Operators, Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents, PATA Nepal Chapter and Board of Airlines Representatives in Nepal

Revenue rises slowly

Total government revenue in the first eight months of the current fiscal year grew by only four percent missing the Finance Ministry target of 15 percent. Expenditure increased 12.2 percent, to Rs 50.4 billion, according to statistics from the Finance Ministry. Revenue amounted to Rs 41.3 billion while debt servicing cost Rs 4.9 billion.

New Era customer focus

The New Era Career Development Institute launched its Customer Focus Year 2006 on the occasion of its 16th anniversary. Pioneers in professional training and personality development, New Era is conducting a 100-day survey of its 107 partner organisations that have made commitments to improve customer service. Three of them will receive 'Excellence in Customer Service' awards on 16 April.

NEW PRODUCTS

MORTGAGE LOANS: Rastriya Baniya Bank is now offering mortgage loans for personal and business needs. One of the country's biggest banks till now has focussed on lending in the industrial, commercial and micro-credit sectors but today also offers loans for housing, education and vehicles. Clients can take mortgage loans of up to Rs 30 million for business purposes and Rs 5 million for personal reasons. The loans are repayable in five years at a net interest rate of 9-10 percent.

CRACKERS COUPON: Mama Chicken Crackers has launched its "run for runs" coupon scratch game. Based on cricket, customers can win prizes by tallying runs. Rewards range from a packet of Mama chicken crackers (six runs) to an MP3 Player (36 runs).

DENTAL CARE: Advanced Dental Care has opened opposite the north gate of the Narayanhit Royal Palace. It features larger treatment rooms, new dental chairs, an intra oral camera, newly designed X-ray machine and whitening equipment. The clinic's services include examinations, fillings, extractions, treatment of infections and periodontal disease and cosmetic and prosthetic dentistry.

Buried

Story ideas for biz reporters

Over recent months, this columnist has noticed the business pages of most of our newspapers and magazines are carrying more adverts than business news. Further, some of them are relying on the international wires rather than providing news of Nepal. To help whet the media's interest for home-grown headlines, your weekly Beed suggests a few story ideas our biz reporters could explore:

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



- The essential task of branding Nepal (see #171) is finally complete. While talking to Arun Anand and Rahul Sen, who worked relentlessly to create the 'Naturally Nepal-Once is Not Enough' campaign, it became clear that during the exercise the two explored emotions far more than most consultants would be comfortable with. However, the media handled the creation as a press release and no more. Perhaps the news got pushed aside by the usual violence, political rhetoric and 'un-rhetoric' but why did no journalist interview these people? And why didn't the plethora of marketing, advertising and trade organisations see the branding as

just the first step in creating a buzz about Nepal? This exercise must not be allowed to go the same way as the Kathmandu-Lhasa bus service.

- Last week's visit of a senior Chinese leader, apart from creating a perceived sense of legitimacy for the government, did result in some interesting economic developments. Duty free entry for more than 1,500 Nepali goods! This should all make us jump for joy. But like many such announcements, this one was short on details. What is on that list? Where in China can they be sent to? And how? The questions are many but the answers few. As someone at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences told the Beed, China is far more willing to invest in trying to reach Nathu La in Sikkim with roads, railways, transmission lines and gas pipelines than waste energy to stimulate Nepal to consider how it might take advantage of its transit position.

- The review of the Bikram Era calendar will surely get Nepal more space in National Geographic and more airtime on the History channel. (see # 268) What else can we expect from a leadership that is stuck at the start of the 21st century? I Can



KIRAN PANDAY

never understand our love for this calendar. Mobile phones of the future are not going to cater to a Bikram calendar nor will you be able to download Bikram schedules of your favourite tv shows on your PDAs or iPods. No global stock markets would be happy to see settlement dates of transactions in Chaitra 1 or Chaitra 2, the outsourcing industry will only take off if we shed this myopia. In today's world, 24x7x365 refers to the Gregorian calendar-we need to embrace world culture or we are fated to remain a living museum of medieval practices.

Nepali society needs more pluralistic thinking, more liberal debates on issues. Since politics is a debate we are sick of, why not start one on economic and business issues. Then we could depend less on international wire services to fill our newspaper pages. ●

www.arthabeed.com

Not doing too badly in IT outsourcing

Despite political instability, a power crisis and slow internet Nepal's dot coms come of age

GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA

The government's Information Technology Policy released in 2000 committed that Nepal would be put on the global IT map in the next five years.

It is 2006, and it is debatable whether we have reached that target. But we're not doing too badly. Deregulation has brought competition in telephony and among internet service providers. There are now competing operation systems in Nepal with the release of Nepalinux and software vendors are still hoping the IPR regulations are implemented.

In 2000, the Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) also announced a target of software export earnings to reach Rs5 billion in five years. We are nowhere close to that figure but even here we are making progress.

GeoSpatial Systems was one of the first information outsourcing companies established in 1998 with direct foreign investment from Japan. Nepali employees sitting in Kathmandu combine aerial pictures with topographical data to make 3-D topo maps. The work requires high concentration and precision outputs.

Suresh Shrestha joined the company in 2001, returning to Nepal after spending good part of his student and working life in Japan. GeoSpatial now has 80 fulltime staff (pictured) but it can employ up to 250 people in shifts. Because of the specialised nature of work, all employees are continuously trained, with senior



MIN BAJRACHARYA

engineers spending from six months to two years in Japan to learn Japanese mapping techniques.

Rajesh Shakya, another entrepreneur runs a HiTech Valley iNet which employs 200 staff. It specialises in internet based applications from clients in North America and Europe. After starting out small with only five people the company is now one of few large scale software operations in Nepal. "Our customers are amazed at the speed at which the programmers in Nepal can meet deadlines and revert back within 24 hours," Shakya told us, "initially we had communication problems but now with simple instant messenger softwares we have solved those problems.

Serving Minds is now the largest

outsourcing company in the country and has just moved into a larger and state-of-the-art 35,000 sq ft office in Tahachal that can house 1,500 people. D2Hawkye is a cost-centre local operation of an established firm abroad that employs 50 people. Yomari Inc is a web design company with offices in the US but all its operations in Nepal.

There have also been unsuccessful dot com startups as well. The first high profile company to open a development center in Nepal was Pilgrims Asia, which moved operations to Bangalore after realising that it was hiring more people from India. The number of companies involved in medical transcription have also gone down.

IT companies have evolved their own

CAN Info Tech 2006

The annual mela of computer goods and gadgets has started in Kathmandu. This year, CAN has designated the first two days as business days. The exhibition space has been greatly expanded with the use of the outdoor exhibition tent. There are more than 100 companies, and more than 100,000 visitors are expected. Parallel to the exhibition, a conference with the theme 'Leveraging ICT to Create an Engine of Growth for Nepal' is scheduled for 24-25 March.

ways of operating given Nepali conditions. GeoSpatial mostly hires people who are walking distance from work. HiTech Valley has representative offices abroad and recently moved to its own building. D2Hawkye has high turnover rates and has invested heavily in power backup systems. None is happy with the speed of internet access in Nepal due to satellite induced latency on links here.

Yomari is seriously considering setting up larger operation in the US, mainly because customers are demanding high risk insurance on work done in Nepal. If forced to pay higher premium it doesn't make sense to base here.

Companies which have survived and are growing despite high insurance costs, negative investment ranking in global markets and average infrastructure, deserve appreciation.

Nepal may be nowhere close to the Rs5 billion software export target, but companies are learning to adapt and that can only be good in the longterm. ●

Pact reaffirmed

Text of the second MOU between the Seven Party Alliance and CPN (Maoist) issued separately

Everyone is well aware of the 12-point understanding reached between the seven party alliance and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) on 22 November 2005 for *loktantra*, peace, prosperity, progressive thinking and national independence. The understanding created a nationwide wave that completely swamped the 8 February municipal polls orchestrated by the autocratic regime. That failure leaves no doubt that the understanding has been endorsed by the people. The widespread international support for the understanding also proves that it will be the true foundation for the resolution of the conflict.

Today, we express our strong commitment to implement the understanding. The seven parties are fully convinced that the force of the opposition movement will restore parliament, which in turn will create an interim government and conduct constituent assembly elections after dialogue and agreement with the Maoists. Such elections will end the conflict, establish *loktantra* and restore the people's sovereign and state power. The Maoists believe fully that an interim government formed by a national conference of democratic forces and constituent assembly elections can achieve this political goal. We have agreed that we will



KIRAN PANDAY

continue talks in order to reach a common agreement on the process. We also agreed that the people's movement is the only means feasible for achieving our goal. We appeal to all democratic forces, civil society, professional groups, marginalised and oppressed peoples, the press and public to actively take part in the ongoing peaceful movement to establish absolute democracy and restore people's sovereignty through constituent assembly elections.

We appeal also to the international community to provide all support in our attempt to end the 10-year armed conflict and establish peace and *loktantra* by ending Nepal's autocratic monarchy. Along with this understanding, the seven party alliance has called for a non-cooperation movement and massive mobilisations on 6-8 April in Kathmandu. The SPA has also requested the Maoists to withdraw their ongoing blockade and extend their full support to its programs. In response, the CPN (M) has agreed to end the blockade programs and extend its full support and cooperation to the SPA's Kathmandu agitation programs.

Signed: Girija Prasad Koirala (president, Nepali Congress), Amrit Kumar Bohara (acting general secretary, CPN-UML), Sher Bahadur Deuba (president, NC-D), Lila Mani Pokhrel (vice president, Janamorcha Nepal), Narayan Man Bijukche (president, NWPP), Rajendra Mahato (general secretary, NSP), Nanda Kumar Prasai (president, ULF), Prachanda (president of CPN-M issued a separate signed version of the same statement)

A human wave

UML's Jhalanath Khanal in Kantipur, 19 March

कान्तिपुर

There are more indications that the present regime will not last much longer and that the rulers themselves are aware that its time is running out. History has shown that whenever rulers lose control or run out of ideas, they begin consultations. This is exactly what King Gyanendra started doing recently in Pokhara. But the king's moves only added to the complexity of the crisis. Even if the king hands over the powers of prime minister to a former pancha and announces that he has given up sovereignty and state power, the problem will not be solved. Nor will the crisis end if he names one of his yes men who appears to favour multiparty democracy as prime minister. Even the appointment of a technocrat or justice as the new prime minister will fail. The core issue is: will sovereignty and state power be returned to the people via their representatives?

Other questions waiting to be answered are: should Nepal's democracy be inclusive? Will all communities, castes, ethnicities and cultures have an equal stake in the nation? Will a constituent assembly be formed to write a democratic constitution? Should the Maoists be brought into the political mainstream? These questions can be answered only by the democratic forces. Going by the king's deeds to date, he is not even interested in thinking about them. Even after the Supreme Court paved the way to the return of multiparty democracy with its verdict that the constitution vests power in the people, the king has shown no sign of taking concrete steps to end the present crisis. Even his political consultations are

taking place at a time when leaders remain jailed and the security forces have been deployed to arrest others. As long as state power is withheld from the people's representatives, the country will be unable to embark on the journey toward ending the crisis. To lead the country toward a resolution, there is no alternative to the people's movement. The days of street protests only at scheduled times are over. A human wave should engulf the capital and the people should block all highways. After the entire country is under the control of the people, the autocratic regime should be opposed and isolated through non-cooperation. It is this people's struggle that will dislodge the root causes of Nepal's historical crisis and break the autocratic hurdle now in our path.

Feudal Maoists

Expelled Maoist central committee member, Rabindra Shrestha, in Nepal Samacharpatra, 19 March

समाचारपत्र

Just when we were engaged in fighting the royal palace, we face yet another autocratic front within our party. Chairman Prachanda began to promote nepotism—his family members were his top priority. Comrade Baburam could not withstand even a single criticism against him. When the parties were agitating in the streets more than a year ago, Prachanda and Baburam suggested we ignore them and hold direct talks with the king. A few days before February First, Prachanda arranged a meeting with the king in Thawang. This was not something the central committee had approved of and a majority of its members were unaware of

the plan. They even agreed that if Thawang was inappropriate, talks would be held in the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve. These plans were known to us only after they were leaked at party meetings much later. Should the party's leaders have chosen to hold talks with the representative of the old regime at a time when we should have been engaged in a movement? This is something I believe the people will have to evaluate. But it proves that Prachanda and Baburam had illicit relations with the palace, which inspired the king to stage his coup. We believe that the movement's goal should be a republican setup but Prachanda and Baburam have compromised for lesser goals. They were unwilling to form a republican front. We also said that the 12-point agreement with the parties should carry the word 'republic'. But the two leaders simply abandoned the word when they signed the pact whereas the NC and UML expressed their concerns in the document. Our expulsion from the party is a result of the growing feudalism and capitalism within the leadership. They have also forgotten the need for criticism. We told the people this and they sacked us. We have not left the party, we have established a New Cultural Revolution Group within it and we believe that the majority is with us.

Indian goons

Desantar, March 19

देशन्तर

Dhangadi—Impoverished Nepalis crossing the border to India in search of livelihood get looted by the Indian police at the border. This is nothing new, but such incidents have been increasing lately. A large number of Nepalis from farwest



PLACARDS: Let's go to Kathmandu
“OK, I'm off to Delhi, you go to the villages after all we'll need some leaders for the movement.”

समय Abin in Samaya, 23 March

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ Adverse socio-economic ramifications ... have resulted in Nepal being plagued by insurgency. ”

Crown Prince Paras at a rhino presentation ceremony in Vienna on 22 March

Constitutionally sound

Interview with Advocate Sarwaratna Tuladhar, first president of the Nepal Bar Association, in Nispakshya, 21 March

निष्पक्ष

Was the Bar Association's national conference a failure?

I do not agree with the stand that the Bar has taken regarding current political issues. It decided to opt for a constituent assembly as the means to change the present system, meaning the constitution. But the 1990 constitution was brought about through a lot of sacrifice. It is as good as those of other countries. The constitution has not failed us, instead nothing has been done in the spirit of the constitution and that is the cause of instability. It is the governments that have been unable to solve the country's problems, fulfil the wishes of the people and bring about development. The constitution has been blamed for these failures.

What should the Bar have done?

The Bar should have attempted to correct the flaws of the political parties and governments so they could implement the constitution in an effective manner. If they had worked in a fully democratic manner for the people and country we could have achieved much more.

Why did the Bar decide to opt for a constituent assembly?

The majority decided to go for a constituent assembly. Perhaps it's because the parties also decided to go for one. Even though the majority has decided, I say that it is not necessary to discard this constitution and write a new one. If the leaders had wanted to they could have done so much with this constitution. Those who were in power worked against the spirit of the constitution and only fulfilled their selfish personal and party motives. That brought the country to where it is today.

Can today's problems be solved within the framework of the constitution?

Yes. The constitution is only a medium. The country will go forward if the people in power are honest and committed to the country. The present constitution has not blocked us in any manner.



DAMBER K SHRESTHA

travel from the hills to India and their numbers have been growing due to the conflict. Unfortunately, on their return home many are robbed by the Indian cops who extort huge sums of money after accusing them of being Maoists. “All I had saved was Rs 5,000 after working for six months in Mumbai and I have nothing left,” says Dirga Saud from Accham. Nepalis get extorted at stations and looted in trains, according to returnees. But they have no one to complain to. An Uttar Pradesh police official admitted that such incidents were true but he added that action against the culprits are difficult since it takes a lot of paperwork.

Parties’ ploy

Jana Bhawana, 20 March

कांग्रेस

The leaders of the seven parties are still conspiring to grab power with the support of the Maoists and the consent of Delhi. That’s why they reaffirmed the 12-point agreement. But the party chiefs were unwilling to sign the same statement as the Maoist leaders because they are scared of being labelled terrorists by the international community. They have only moved closer to the Maoists to threaten the palace and still consider the rebels terrorists but were willing to deal with them to gain power. By putting the NC and NC-D back together and bringing the UML and

Maoists into the fold, the west’s strategy to end all communist activities on Nepali soil has emerged. Neither NC leader now seems to be in the mood to fight for a constituent assembly after the foreigners advised them to stop talking about a republic and constituent assembly and to hold talks with the king directly. The seven party leaders are determined to sabotage the constituent assembly plan and implement their agenda to recreate parliament. They have even convinced the international community that as soon as the house is in place, they will break off all contact with the Maoists. The parties are equally interested in talks with the palace but they insist that the king first roll back his February First move. But if the king did that, there would be no need for the monarch to call in both the Maoists and the parties for talks. As for the UML, though some of their leaders may support the Maoists’ republican views, most of them are still suspicious.

Guns and books

Nepal, March 16

नेपाल

Nepalganj—The Maoists, who always believed that guns were worth more than education, have perhaps changed their attitude in the way they are not causing obstruction to the upcoming SLC exams in the country’s midwestern region. In past years

they have always disturbed students whenever SLC exams were approaching. Six years ago, the Maoist student’s union started a violent anti-SLC campaign in Surkhet to eliminate what the rebels call a ‘feudal education’ system. They blew up the vehicle carrying entrance permits of the students and the charred hulk of that jeep is still lying on the roadside. Since then, they made every effort to hamper the SLC exams. But today, the Maoists are actually helping to spread messages through their writings on the walls that SLC centres will be free from violence. Whether it is due to their politically vested interests or to win over the hearts of the students, this only shows that the Maoists have eventually realised the value of education. All this is evident now in the midwest districts of Salyan, Rukum, Rolpa. Now they have not only asked the Rolpa DEO to make the SLC entry permits mandatory but even got soldiers out of the exam centres. There are around 65 secondary schools, 62 lower secondary schools, 19 primary and 119 pre primary schools in this region. The Maoists are doing all this due to pressure from their own students who have suffered from past boycotts of exams. The rebels have not been able to do much with their own so-called revolutionary education system because they neither have enough books nor an effective education policy. In stark contrast, the Maoist students union are still on their way to arm more school students. A recent meeting by Bheri-Karnali regional coordination committee have made plans to bring more students in their political campaigns for two months, even if it means neglecting the regular studies of the students.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Hira Biswakarma in Kantipur, 21 March

काठमाडौं

Chunikhel VDC in Bungmati on the outskirts of Kathmandu is dominated by so-called ‘upper caste’ families. Recently, three ‘lower caste’ families were barred from collecting water from the common tap. Each time they went for water, they had to wait for a member of the ‘upper caste’ to help them fill their vessels. Housewife Nanimaiya Nepali had taken this discrimination for years. But one morning she was late to go to the well because guests had dropped in and she had to send her children to school. Nanimaiya waited by the well for someone to get her water but after 10 minutes there was still no sign of anyone. It was getting late so she decided to get the water herself. She was spotted and soon other villagers gathered and verbally abused Nanimaiya. They even threatened to throw out her family from the village. Nanimaiya felt the insults were intolerable and knocked on the door of an NGO working for Dalit rights. After they probed the matter, she tried to lodge a complaint at a nearby police post against the 32 villagers who

Water for all

had abused her. The office refused to register the complaint so she went to the Lalitpur District Police Office. Police there also refused despite the fact that the practice of untouchability was declared to be illegal two years ago. The human rights cell of the police said it was willing to take up the case but that taking action against 32 people would be difficult. When her neighbours found out Nanimaiya had tried to lodge a complaint they started becoming even more abusive. As the situation worsened, a team of human rights activists and journalists reached Chunikhel on 4 March. More than 500 villagers had gathered when a camera crew began to film the well where Nanimaiya’s ordeal began. Some thugs attacked the journalists and manhandled Nanimaiya and her relative Shova Nepali. Journalists Narendra Biswakarma and Dinesh Pariyar were seriously injured and Nanimaiya lost her gold jewellery during the incident. But just when Nanimaiya’s and the two other families were losing hope, former VDC chairman Prem Maharjan offered to mediate. After four days of intensive discussions, the villagers agreed to pay half of the Rs 60,000 in damages caused during the scuffle. They also agreed that the so-called ‘lower caste’ families would be allowed to collect water from the well and that the practice of untouchability would henceforth be banned. (This week the world marked World Water Day on 22 March and the International Day Against Racial Discrimination on 21 March.)

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Melting like icecream cones

Yet, global warming and retreating glaciers don't make it to the World Water Forum

MALLIKA ARYAL
in MEXICO CITY

There are 10,000 policymakers, water experts, scientists, businessmen, researchers and writers from 130 countries here in the Mexican capital this week for the 4th World Water Forum.

On the agenda is everything from water privatisation, irrigation, integrated water resource management and even future wars over water. But even when the world's foremost water researchers and scientists meet, they are not discussing one of the biggest threats to the world's water resources: climate change.

Conspicuously absent from the official agenda in Mexico City are the problems of glacial retreat, melting icecaps, Himalayan flash-floods and the impact of melting permafrost on downstream irrigation and agriculture.

The fact that the polar and mountain regions of the world are melting like icecream cones is no more a matter of debate. It is happening right before people's eyes, and within less than a generation. With it there is climate variability all over the world, including this year's unprecedented winter drought in the Himalaya.

"One of the reasons experts don't want to talk about global warming and its impact is because the science is not consistent. But we don't need any more evidence, just study climate variability all over the world to understand that the climate is indeed changing," says Ainun Nishat from World Conservation Union (IUCN) Bangladesh. "The snowline is decreasing and the low flow of the Ganges and Brahmaputra is already a topic of debate and dispute between Nepal, India and Bangladesh."

Even though it is not on the agenda, the impact of global

warming is being discussed in small, informal groups at the World Water Forum. The Third Assessment Report of the UN's expert group, the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects that the Earth's average surface temperature will rise between

1.4C-5.8C by 2100 if no major effort is made to cut emissions of the greenhouse gases.

In the Nepal Himalaya average annual temperatures have been increasing 0.09C a year since the 1970s. At this rate, there could be a rise of as much as nine degrees by the end of the century,

spelling a catastrophe for the mountains and the people who live below them. There are 2,315 glacial lakes within the country and 20 are already so swelled with melting snow that they are in imminent danger of bursting.

A Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) report released last year

reported that 67 percent of Himalayan glaciers are retreating rapidly. The Fund was concerned about what this would mean to biodiversity and wildlife. But there is a much more serious issue: rapidly melting snows would increase the flow of Himalayan rivers in the dry season for the next 35 years, according to one simulation model, but after that the rivers would go dry. However, climate change is a global phenomenon caused by increased fossil fuel use in the industrialised countries. The Nepal Himalaya may suffer the consequences, but the solutions lie elsewhere.

"Every year, countries like the US and Australia delay in making significant contributions towards climate change, we move closer to calamity," says Jamie Pittock, director of the WWF's Global Freshwater Program.

Others believe that instead of playing the blame game it is better to get together and ready for the worst. "We need to understand that climate is not going to stabilise soon, thus we need to work towards being prepared so that if there is a catastrophic event, there is minimum destruction," says Nishat. He proposes pressuring governments to work to develop early warning systems.

Himalayan experts agree that glacial retreat must be tackled at a regional level and are calling on cooperation of the affected countries. Biksham Gujja, policy adviser at WWF's Global Freshwater Program says: "Governments should work on adaptation strategy, take a proactive approach and work with the people."

IUCN's Nishat agrees. "Countries where the impact will be felt most need to seriously revise their national laws and incorporate climate change laws into them to avert future disasters." ●



Young and water wise

The 4th World Water Forum in Mexico City last week was sponsored by Coca Cola. But the fizzy drink wasn't what enticed children here.

Shanta Chaudhary, 14, of Dang and Suresh Baral, 13, of Kaski (pictured, above) made the trip to the Children's World Water Forum to talk about the role of young people in improving sanitation in Nepal. The two were chosen from among 400 Nepali schools with water and sanitation clubs. "When we started our youth club in my village with the help of UNICEF people didn't trust us so they shooed us away," remembers Shanta.

In 2004 only 35 percent of houses in Shanta's village had proper bathrooms but now over 60 percent do. "We don't just talk about latrines and bathrooms," the young girl explained confidently, "we perform street dramas, distribute fliers and have concerts on sanitation." It's now become a status symbol for people in her Dang village to have a bathroom, to keep surroundings clean and to live in a hygienic environment.

Suresh was involved in setting up his own school club in 2004 that offered loans of Rs 5,000 to families

interested in building a bathroom. "Today, all the village's households are equipped," says Suresh proudly.

Participants in Mexico City were impressed with how much the children have achieved in so little time—something that adults would find impossible to do. Over 100 children aged 11-15, from 29 countries participated at the children's forum, presenting 55 local action plans five of which will be chosen to be presented at a dialogue session at the main water forum.

"The most important thing I learnt about water is that it is vital for sanitation and it is not wise to separate the two," Suresh told children from other parts of the world through an impressive powerpoint.

Living in dormitories, the children had a chance to meet other kids. Shanta and Suresh have made friends from Tajikistan, Laos, Mexico and Japan. They also learned from one another. Says Shanta: "There are many problems in our villages but that doesn't mean we wait for someone else to solve our problems. I am going back to Nepal with the message that children can make a difference."

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PICS: NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Locals near Everest fret about Mother Nature's next surprise

Crazy weather

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA in TENGBOCHE

If there is all this global warming how come it snowed so much this spring?

That is what trekkers and Sherpas in Khumbu were asking last week as an unprecedented and unseasonal blizzard dumped heavy snow at the tail end of a bone-dry winter. Meteorologists explain it is not so much climate change but climate variability associated with the greenhouse effect.

No one we spoke to in Khumbu last week could remember a winter like this without snow, or a spring with so much. "This is something we never saw and heard about," said 80-year-old Jangbu Sherpa, at Namche Bajar. "It's quite ominous."

The freak storm hit the region on 10 March, blowing and snowing for two full days. Nearly a meter of snow fell on Tengboche and up the Imja Valley. Many trekkers were unprepared and were stranded. "The guidebooks I referred to did not have any information about snowfall in this season," said Sarah Topping, from London.

Some farmers were happy because it meant an end to a long drought. "The fields were drying up," said Sarki Maya Tamang, a seasonal farmer in Lukla. "Now that it has snowed, we can sow barley once it melts."

But others were full of questions. "First, we did not get snow throughout the winter and now we are getting to see snow fall during the spring, this is quite puzzling for



SNOWED UNDER: Namche Bajar last week under a metre of snow (top) and Chomolungma and Lhotse soar above an unusually white spring at Tengboche Monastery.

all of us, god knows what disaster we will face next," said Jangbu.

Phurba Gyalgin, at Monjo, is also worried. "It did not snow when it should have and now when there should have been plenty of sunshine we get hit by the freak snowstorm, something is not right."

Many such observations have been forwarded to conservation organisations working in the region, such as the World Wildlife Fund. "We noticed that it had snowed unusually and unexpectedly for three days last spring as well," said WWF Climate Change Officer Chamling Rai.

The Italian research group that goes by the acronym EV-K2-CNR recently installed a weather station below Chomolungma at 5,079 m to monitor climate variability.

Officials at the Department of Hydrology and Metrology in Kathmandu caution against jumping to hasty conclusions. "Just because it did not snow for one season or it snowed in spring doesn't indicate climate change," said Senior Divisional Meteorologist Sarju Baidya.

The department's explanation is that this winter's westerly disturbances were deflected by atmospheric pressure. "The westerlies all veered off into Tibet, which is why there was no precipitation this winter," explains Baidya.

While that may explain the barren winter, it offers no insight into what the Sherpas of Khumbu can expect next. ●

Nick Simons had just finished college in New York and was travelling around the world when he came to Nepal in 2002. He liked it so much here, he stayed and worked in a community health project and was determined to dedicate his life to health care in the Third World. On his way back to America, he drowned while swimming in Bali.

Nick's parents Jim and Marilyn Simons were devastated and decided to help Nepalis live healthier lives in Nick's memory. They flew to Kathmandu in their private jet and looked around. They were immediately impressed with the work being done at Patan Hospital and saw the overcrowded maternity ward. They decided to fund a new \$1.5 million maternity hospital that is currently under construction in Lagankhel.

Jim Simons was a mathematics professor at MIT and Harvard where he worked on probabilities and found ways to predict trends in the stock market. He set up Renaissance Technologies which helped corporate clients with management of their investment portfolios and grew into a multi-billion dollar business.

Jim and Marilyn wanted to do something more for Nepal that would make a real long-term difference in rural health. With a



KUNDA DIXIT



HOW ABOUT HERE? Marilyn and Jim Simons plan their rural health care strategy in Kathmandu on Monday (left) and their son Jim with a friend in Nepal in 2003.

The gift of life

An American billionaire invests in rural health care in Nepal in memory of his son

task force of Nepali health experts led by former ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa they set up the Nick Simons Institute (NSI) which was launched this week in Kathmandu.

“Rural health care is not a new problem and there are lots of people addressing the issue,” Jim says, “what makes NSI unique is that it will do this job better than

it has ever been done with an emphasis on quality training.”

This is a relatively less glamorous way to do charity. Most philanthropists like to help with high-profile diseases that bring big headlines, address rural health in developing countries is an anonymous and low-profile. But the Nepali advisers at NSI were convinced that to make a real

difference in Nepal, health care workers in remote and the poorest areas parts of Nepal needed to be trained in basic skills like childbirth, anaesthesia, bio-medicine, nursing, x-ray and even dentistry.

NSI has drawn up a strategy to select and train health personnel who are most likely to remain in the villages, and not migrate to

the cities once they learn skills. It is looking at innovative ways of keeping doctors in rural hospitals by paying for their children to go to school in the cities and giving them telephone and internet access. Trainees will develop skills in existing government and mission hospitals like Tansen, Rukum, Dadeladhura and Okhaldhunga.

“Nepal has doctors, but they are in the wrong places, and it isn't enough to train health workers we have to make sure they stay where they are needed,” says Mark Zimmerman Executive Director of NSI. There is great disparity in health care in Nepal: Kathmandu has 117 doctors for every 100,000 population but the figure is 3.3 for other towns and 0.7 for remote areas.

Jim and Marilyn Simons say they have a great sense of fulfilment that after three years an institute named after their son is finally getting off the ground.

“You know, we'd probably never have come to Nepal if Nick hasn't been here,” says Marilyn, “he was so happy in Nepal, he said he wanted to live and work here. Nick left us a gift by opening a whole new world to us.” ●

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RUBEN MEIJERINK

A ray of sunshine

Solar cookers help feed Bhutani refugees, protect forests

AARTI BASNYAT
in JHAPA

There is something blindingly new when one enters the Bhutani refugee camp at Belgandi-I these days. It is the blazing light of the sun reflected off dozens of parabolic solar cookers outside the bamboo and thatch huts of Bhutani refugees, many of whom are spending their 16th year away from their home country. The families come in shifts to change the pots on the cookers and it takes up to 30 minutes to boil rice for a family of four. There are some 110,000 Bhutani refugees in seven camps in Jhapa and their demand for firewood for cooking was seriously

dwindling the surrounding forests. So in 1998, the Dutch-supported group, Vajra Foundation, decided to introduce solar cookers to reduce the pressure on the forests. Ram Kaji Poudel of Vajra explains: “We thought we’d start from the refugee camps as people there have the time and patience to wait for food to be cooked and we wanted to prevent deforestation. When we complete the camps, we want to encourage Nepali communities outside as well.” The Foundation has already distributed 550 cookers in Beldangi-I and plans to have 7,300 more set up in the other six camps by December 2007. Four families now share one cooker,

which also includes a Hay-box—wooden or bamboo containers insulated with cotton or rice husk for insulation—for storing food to eat after the sun goes down. Vajra plans to cut that number to only two families per set. As donor fatigue sets in, refugees have had to do with less and less. They say the UNHCR’s cut in kerosene quotas is causing problems and they are thankful that at least they have the cookers. From 1 January 2006 the refugee agency replaced kerosene with bio-briquettes for cooking but it still provides one litre of kerosene to each family every month for lighting. CI Thapa has been living in Beldangi-I for 15 years and says: “People are getting panicky and it is getting tough to survive. The kerosene is being cut and briquettes don’t work as well.”

Even so, refugees are reluctant to sing the praises of solar cookers because they don’t want relief agencies to use this as an excuse to make further cuts. “They don’t want to openly admit how effective these cookers are,” says Vajra’s Poudel, “but they should rest assured because our project is different from UNHCR’s.” Vajra, which funds its programs through donations in the Netherlands, aims to have solar cookers for 90 percent of the families here by 2007. Shade from trees and other geographical difficulties will make it impossible for the remaining 10 percent to use the devices. As the memory of their homesteads and farms in Bhutan slips away, the Bhutani refugees here say at least the cookers have kept a ray of hope alive. ●

Vajra Foundation: PO Box: 10392
Kathmandu Nepal, 5572410,
vajranepal@wiink.com.np



The time required to prepare various foods with solar cookers on a sunny day in October:

Food Item	Quantity (kg)	Total Time (min)
Rice	1	28
Curry (chicken)	1	32
Pulse	0.5	25
Curry (beans and potatoes)	0.5	22

Kukur-sukur ra car-sar

The outbreak of double-barrelled words in Nepali is getting out of hand

The first time I became aware of the jingle word, an ever increasing phenomenon in the Nepali language, I was in a taxi. The driver was from Dhapakhel and he told me what his village was like. It is a most beautiful place, he said, because at night from his house he can see all the lights of “airport-sairport”. I naively asked the driver for the meaning of “sairport”. He merely shrugged his shoulders. The Nepali language has a lilt and a musical tone because of the number of enjoyable jingle words matching the mood of the expression. Family members are known by their jingles, such as dai-bhai, mama-kaka, chhora-chhori, and little girls are known as cheli-beti. Early summer morning, when the air is crisp and clear and birds announce the new day, we say it is rim-jhim. Over holi your clothes become rangi-changi, which can be seen wari-pari, all around. In the market, where wedding processions with baja-gaja can be seen dayan-bayan, we buy mal-saman. After that we have dal-bhat together with our friends, sang-sangain. But of late, Nepali colloquialism seems to have got out of hand. New jingles pop up like rebels in the hills and the speed at which new rhymes are invented requires a daily update of my Nepali dictionary. A friend says he loves to listen to geet-sangeet during his khaza-saza. A well-educated neighbour expresses his concerned about the bhid-sid and increasing number of pasal-sasal in Kathmandu’s gulli-sulli. When I buy a new carpet for the house the shopkeeper says I shouldn’t worry. His carpet-sarpet are the cheapest and best and his tasne-sasne manche are without a doubt the most experienced in the district. A neighbour down the road is looking for a job and claims she makes excellent coffee-soffee for office staff during their meetings-seetings. A friend praises her, saying how she has even been to Italy-sitaly to work for bideshi-sideshis like myself.



And so it goes on. Friends are complaining about the fact that these days palung-salung is not available in the market because of the nakabandi-sakabandi and if it is there it costs a lots of paisa-saisa. People who build a new house, get their painter-sainter to put matching rang-sang on each and every wall. Naturally, the design-design of the mansion in question has to be a good one and should include a comfortable parking for the car-sar and a suitable house for the expensive kukur-sukur. It is not surprising that those who mix their mother tongue with English would pioneer updated variations of the words. Anyone with a computer-somputer hides the cable-sable or tar-sar behind a fancy office table after which they google-soogle till the cows come home. Or they buy the latest gadget-sadget and skype-sype or email-semail with nata-gota and sathi-bhai around the globe. I am sure the assault of jingle words does not stop at the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and that villagers including Maobadis and Khaobadis add their own new juicy expressions to the Nepali language. I imagine them talking about their dukha-sukha, marked by julus-sulus and baltin-saltin and socket-wocket bombs. No doubt many rural Nepalis are at this very moment busy getting their passport-sassport and dollar-sollar needed to escape the country’s grim reality.

Last week I was on my way from Dhapakhel to Lagankhel once more, and decided to do a little experiment. Could I invent a new jingle word and introduce it into the Nepali language, to be enjoyed for many generations to come? “O dai, Lagankhel ma taxi-sexy haru painchha?” I asked casually. The driver did not miss a beat. “Hirnus”, he said, “Lagankhelma thupro taxi-sexy painchha!” If tomorrow you hear someone calling out for a ‘Taxi-sexy!’ you know who to blame. ●

Treading carefully in Sri Lanka


Suspicious linger despite the resumption of talks

COLOMBO—Sri Lanka is one country where you take no time to pick up the thread from where you have left it off three months or three decades ago. It is the same old ethnic divide in different forms at different times.

Currently, they are sitting across the table for sorting out a way to live together in the united

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar



country. But this is not the first time they are doing so. They have gone over the exercise again and again.

India was in the picture more than once and even got embroiled and mauled in a war.

After burning its fingers, New Delhi is reluctant to get involved again. Norway is now batting for it and consults India at every step. Oslo has even strengthened its negotiating team and this has evoked some hope. But there are lots of ifs and buts. The Sinhalese believe that the talks will produce little since the LTTE is not willing to be pinned down to anything concrete.

Sri Lanka's chief negotiator says "it is too soon to say anything". In one way, he is right



because there were more accusations and counter-accusations at the last meeting. In other way, the Geneva dialogue was a positive development and has come to be an on-going process. The next round has been fixed for late April.

President Mahinda Rajapakse is treading carefully and says the talks are only preliminary. He is being hassled by Chandrika Kumaratunga. She began well as

president but then in her eight-year-rule she got lost in political intrigues which were of her own making. Sadly, the talks have not got beyond the preliminary stage. They seldom have in the past because both the Sinhalese and the Tamils have never put all their cards on the table. They always have a few up their sleeves. Both sides know it.

Sinhalese editors, politicians and human rights activists say

how can you trust the Tamils who, while being at the negotiating table, are extorting money, buying weapons from abroad and recruiting Tamil children for their Eelam fight? The Tamils are mostly opposed to the LTTE but they have a long tale of grievances. Not many Tamils are either in government service either or the Sinhalese-run industry or business. Schools for the Sinhalese and the

Tamils are mostly separate nowadays and there is very little social contact between the two communities.

Two things struck me: the Sinhalese anxiety to maintain peace with the LTTE and the belief that there was the third man, India, which would step in if there were anything worse happening. A few years ago, the word, 'federation', was a taboo. Now the Sinhalese, except the hardliners, talk about it and try to find out how things were working in India. The status of Indian state may be acceptable to the Sinhalese provided they are sure that it would constitute a full and final settlement. The fear of Sinhalese, who constitute nearly 70 per cent of the population, is that the LTTE would use the status of state as a stepping stone to get to the Eelam.

The general impression is that the LTTE head, V Prabhakaran, is interested only in an independent country at the expense of Sri Lanka's integrity. This is where India comes in. An average Sinhalese has convinced himself that New Delhi will thwart the LTTE's ambitions to have an independent Tamil state because it can pose a danger to India itself. ●



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Rich Indians' power play

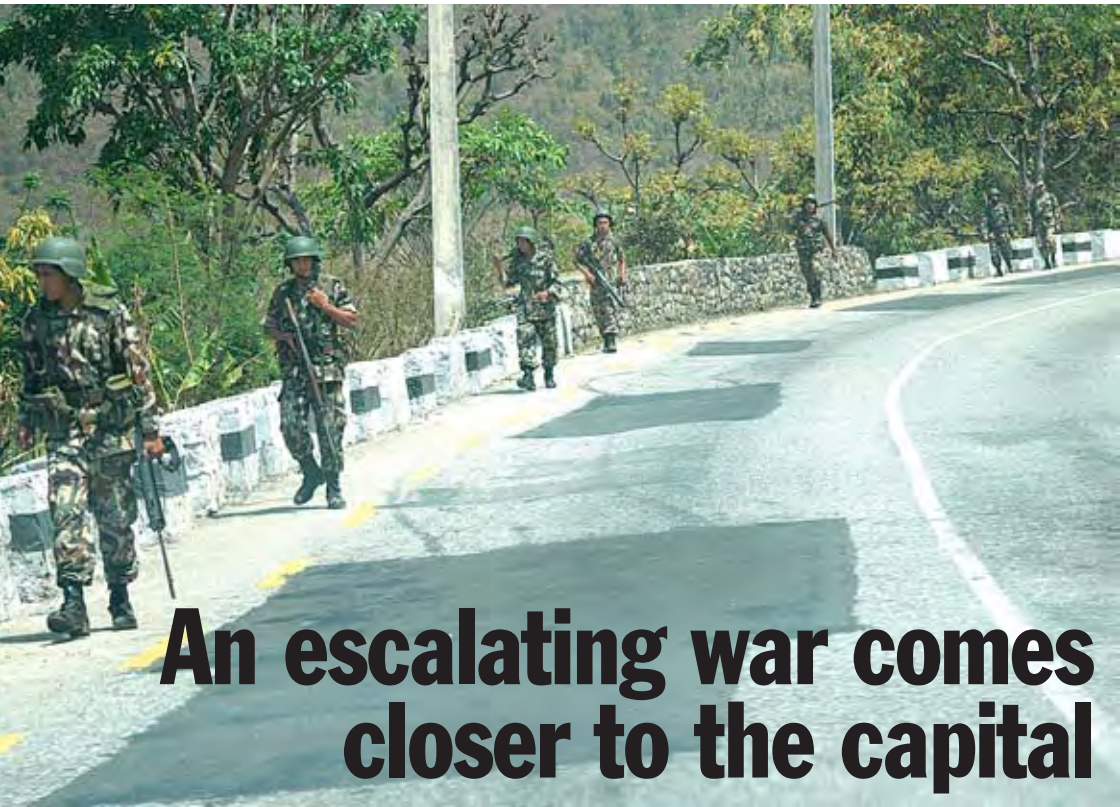
NEW DELHI - India's plan to reform its ailing power sector has been stalled by influential sections of society that benefit from subsidies provided by state-run utilities and steal electricity in collusion with officials, say experts. "Substantial improvement in power supply may not take place in the near future unless the core issue creating opposition to reform, that is, the issue of subsidy, is suitably addressed," says V Santhakumar, a researcher at the state-run Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in the southern state of Kerala. The popular perception that electricity tariff reforms would adversely affect the poor was incorrect, he added. Says Shubhasis Gangopadhyay, director of the independent India Development Foundation, "Those who never receive electricity do not figure in discussions on power sector reforms—they don't care one way or the other."

Truly Malaysia?

KUALA LUMPUR - Malaysia's first serious survey of race relations in 50 years shows that behind the façade of unity and peace, racism runs deep in this multi-ethnic 'melting pot'. The telephone survey of about 1,200 Malaysians also found that the majority find comfort and security in their respective ethnicity and not in a common 'Malaysian' identity, as the travel and tourism brochures suggest. "The findings are not at all surprising," said social scientist Chandra Muzaffar. "This is partly because ethnic boundaries are real in our society and almost every sphere of public life is linked to ethnicity in one way or another." The survey also found that negative racial stereotyping was deeply entrenched. For example, minority Chinese and Indians see the majority Malays, who make up 60 percent of the population of 25 million people, as lazy.

Not mai pen rai

BANGKOK - A popular local expression for Thais laid-back and non-confrontational character—*mai pen rai* (it's OK)—has been turned on its head these past weeks as an opposition campaign to get Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra to resign picks up. With hardly a hint of compromise surfacing from the main contenders locked in this tussle, it is becoming increasingly clear that this Southeast Asian nation could be heading towards political paralysis. "It is difficult to reach a compromise at this stage," said Gotham Arya, director at the Research Centre on Peace Building at Bangkok's Mahidol University. "There is not enough trust, each party is holding firm to their positions—all of them think the time is working in their favour." The prospect of a snap election on 2 April, or even at a later date as some are suggesting, will do little to reduce the political heat against Thaksin, he added. "If he continues as the prime minister, you can expect more agitation and the act of governing will become more difficult." (IPS)



An escalating war comes closer to the capital

KIRAN PANDAY

from p1

NARESH NEWAR
in DHADING

The Royal Nepali Army's elite Ranger Battalion had just come down off the mountain after a major battle on Tuesday in which 21 Maoists were killed. The Maoists in a statement said only 12 of their men were killed.

Further down the road, soldiers of the Sixth Battalion based in Baireni were all smiles when we caught up with them on Wednesday (*pictured above*). They were headed up the trail on a four hour climb to the battle site where they will be mopping up. The army didn't suffer any casualties in this battle and morale among the soldiers was high.

This was a well-planned attack. Learning from past mistakes, the army bided its time after getting intelligence on Monday that the Maoists were massed up on Chautara hill above the highway. They surprised the camp the next morning with air support. For the Maoists, everything went wrong from the start.

A combined rebel force of 250 guerrillas from Rasuwa, Chitwan and Dhading had mobilised nearly 5,000 villagers to attend a meeting at Lapu village of Gorkha on 19 March to plan an attack on the district capital.

But that plan changed when

the rebel leadership called off the blockade the next day after reaffirming an agreement with the seven party alliance. The villagers went home, half the rebels marched towards Kathmandu via Nuwakot while others headed south towards the Chitwan border. The army got wind of one group that had camped at Darechok village and attacked them early Tuesday morning.

Locals now fear the Maoists are regrouping once more for the previously-planned attack on Gorkha. "It could happen any day," says a local journalist, who says there is big Maoist buildup in the surrounding mountains. Locals say up to 5,000 guerrillas have massed up along the forested passes west of Sim Bhanjyang and east of Mugling.

The army seems to be aware of this and is conducting reconnaissance flights and has dispatched more soldiers to the area this week. "This was a big blow to the rebels, losing so many of their fighters," says a local reporter, adding that the Maoists are growing desperate to prove that they are advancing on the capital.

Indeed, the Darechok battle and other ambushes and encounters between the army and rebels around Kathmandu in the past two weeks prove there is heightened Maoist activity near the capital. This means the rebels are following the plan to 'climb

on the shoulders and hit the head' under which they may execute high profile attacks on Kathmandu and army bases and police posts along the highway. In a bloody week of carnage, 65 people were killed all over Nepal including 10 policemen in an attack on a police post in Birtamod on Monday and 13 soldiers in Dapcha of Kabhre on Sunday.

But so far the rebels have only succeeded in carrying out ambushes when soldiers move out of barracks to clear obstructions, sabotaged government buildings, and attacked security personnel in the middle of crowded towns increasing civilian casualties. While the rebels had pinned down troops on the Prithvi Highway in the past, this is happening less and less. Army sources told us they are now familiar with the topography along the highway and have stationed posts at strategic locations and improved intelligence.

But however much the army thinks it has superiority, analysts say, in guerrilla warfare in this kind of terrain all it takes is one tree across the road and one ambush to strike a blow. And an attack even bigger and bloodier than the one on Thankot in February that left 12 policemen dead is a near certainty. ●

Meet my tennis team

Our diversity is our strength

Spring break for me means a trip with my tennis team to a warm part of the US. This year, we chose to come to Los Angeles for an opportunity to train outdoors for the first time in months and to have some fun. One week away from the rigors of schoolwork gives our student athletes an opportunity to re-charge their batteries for the remainder of the season. It is great to feel the sunshine and exciting to know that winter is behind us.

I was settling in my seat for our flight west when eight of my players, my assistant and my trainer walked into the plane. They were dressed in orange and blue sweat suits and in great spirits. I was very proud of how professional they looked and how vibrant they were. I decided then to write about my team and what they mean to me.

One of the great things about being a coach for a college team like the University of Illinois is to have a chance to incorporate the individual aspects of tennis into a team concept. This is definitely a challenge and lot more difficult than it looks. My philosophy is very simple: "the chain is only as strong as the weakest link". Everybody on the team has to be on the same page and marching to the beat of the same drummer for us to be successful.

My role as the head coach is not just teaching the finer points of tennis. At times I am a motivator, a psychologist, a taskmaster, a team builder and a mentor. I enjoy these roles immensely and I am very fortunate to have a wonderful group of young women who are motivated both on and off the court. One great thing about the US is the opportunity it provides athletes to pursue their sports careers as well as to continue their education. And can you believe that they receive a full scholarship to do just that? It is worth more than \$ 250,000 over five years.

GAME POINT
Sujay Lama



LOOK AT US: The University of Illinois team with coaches Sujay Lama and JoAnne Russell (front)

Diversity is the strength of our team. We have power hitters, counter punchers, retrievers and serve and volley specialists as well as all-court players. They have diverse academic majors such as electrical engineering, pre-med, business, accounting and social work. We have Chinese American, Indian American, Russian, Cypriot and Peruvian players, among others, on our team. It sure is a colourful group and there is never a dull moment with them.

My assistant is JoAnne Russell, a former Wimbledon doubles champion. From Naples, Florida she is a tremendous inspiration for all of us. Not only is JoAnne a former #1 doubles player in the world, she also made the top 10 playing singles. She is our energizer and brings passion and energy to practice day in and day out.

Meet my top six players:

Macall Harkins – This native of Los Angeles is a six-foot serve and volleyer who will certainly play at Wimbledon one day.

Momei Qu – A brilliant student who hits with two hands off both sides, this Chinese immigrant is also a tenacious competitor.

Brianna Knue – She's the heart of our team, the ultimate 'team player' from the windy city (Chicago).

Emily Wang – A power hitter and an extremely compassionate person, from Lawrence, Kansas.

Shivani Dave – She has Agassi-like ground strokes. A social butterfly, her parents are from India.

Alejandra Cuadra – This clay court expert from Lima, Peru aspires to work for the United Nations.

Before and after
EMERGENCIES

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All the **Adventures** can be seen here in the Times every Friday or read online at www.extreme-nepal.com

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THE ADVENTURES OF HEROJIG

PART VII. Return of the Stooze

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Quote of the Week....
"Daily life is like climbing Everest each morning, you don't realize how lucky you are until you fall off."
— Herojig, Nepali Cartoon Character, 2003 -

Next change: Herojig tries his new mobile, but the battery, service, and party on the line is dead.

Any similarities to the (c) STAR WARS cartoons is purely accidental and in no way intentional. Send all lawsuits care of "EDITOR", this newspaper. FLASH: Go to CAN Info-Tech this weekend and see Herojig Live!

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Group Exhibition** by Artists Society of Nepal 17-24 March. Park Gallery.
- ❖ **Shanti Yagya** by Uma Shankar Shah Siddhartha Art Gallery. 26 March – 18 April.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Francophonie Night Festival.** 24 March. 6PM. Alliance Francaise. 4241163/4242832.
- ❖ **Music and Dance from Dolpo** a documentary. 26 March. 2PM. Lajimpat Café
- ❖ **Israeli Film Festival** at the Russian Cultural Centre. 28-30 March. 4411811
- ❖ **Open House** at French School of Kathmandu. 31 March
- ❖ **Why People Fall: Spinal Injury in Nepal** a lecture by Kanak Mani Dixit. 31 March. 9.30 AM. Shankar Hotel.
- ❖ **International artists' residency** by Sutra art. 10 March - 10 April. Bhaktapur. 4242106
- ❖ **Wheel of Fortune** every Thursday at Radisson Hotel.
- ❖ **Women in Concert** a fund-raising event. 1 April. Baber Mahal Revisited. Tickets Rs. 2000. 4263070
- ❖ **Life Skills Training Camp.** programs@youthinitiative.org.np. 4107599
- ❖ **New Free Student Union(FSU) : The Way Ahead** youth discussion. 24 March. 3-5PM. Martin Chautari
- ❖ **Ghode Jatra** 29 March.
- ❖ **Ibsen vs Shakespeare** a football match organised by the Norwegian embassy. 26 March. Jawalakhel

MUSIC

- ❖ **Classical Music** at Lajimpat Café. Every Monday. 6PM-9PM. Rs150.
- ❖ **MOKSH LIVE** presents new jazz rock band followed by DJ Sani. 24 March. Rs.150
- ❖ **Shanti Thatal** Paleti 31 March. 6PM nepa-laya R sala . Rs. 500
- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** with Anil Shahi and Maya Mantra. Rs. 1000. 7PM-10PM. 5 and 26 April. Poolside Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday (Jazz) and Saturday (Afro-funk and Latin) 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **Live Music** at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- ❖ **Best of jazz** JCS trio and Friends. Niek's Place. Every Tuesday and Saturday. 4701324.
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- ❖ **Uncork the Good Times** Fusion bar at Dwarika's presents Ciney and Par-e-jat Fridays 7PM onwards. Rs. 750. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479448



DINING

- ❖ **Grilled lobsters** at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu at 4491234 Ext. 5241
- ❖ **Nepali Cuisine** at Krishnarpan Restaurant. Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Lunch** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage 25 March. 9841 371927
- ❖ **BBQ Ban Bhoj with swimming** at Godavari Village Resort. Saturday & Sunday. 5560675
- ❖ **Breakfast** at Singma Restaurant. 8.30 – 11.00AM daily. 5520004
- ❖ **Stupa View** vegetarian creations, clay oven pizza, tasty desserts, espresso & latte. Boudha Stupa. 4480262
- ❖ **Great Dining** options at Al Fresco, Bukhara, China Garden and Garden Terrace restaurants, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Breakfast With Birds** lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fire place. Farm House Café. 4375279

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Home away from home** Shivapuri Heights Cottage for bookings 9841371927. sohan@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **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.1700.00 per person with dinner, breakfast, accommodation and shuttle service. 668-0080, 668-0083
- ❖ **Go Double, Pay Single** special air package to Thailand & ASEAN destinations with Air Nepal & Air Asia, valid until 31 March. 4247215. malaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resort & Spa, Budhanilkantha 4375280
- ❖ **Star Cruises/Singapore** with Air Sahara bring you cruise packages from Rs.65,500. 2012345.
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

Quest Entertainment

Being Cyrus' is a story of six people and is set in a Parsi household of Sethnas. The Sethna family is headed by Fardoonjee Sethna [Honey Chhaya], an aging man, his two sons Dinshaw [Naseeruddin Shah] and Farokh [Boman Irani] and their wives Katy [Dimple Kapadia] and Tina [Simone Singh]. One day Dinshaw the sculptor meets a complete stranger Cyrus [Saif Ali Khan], who he allows to stay at his house as a paying guest and sculpting apprentice.

Cyrus soon becomes an integral part of Sethnas. Meanwhile an extra marital affair starts in the household. A deep rooted secret starts to unravel and the mystery around the character Cyrus starts engulfing everyone. Who is he? Where has he come from? What's his agenda?

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श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग

NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



Many parts of the country, including the Valley, have already received this month's rain quota but after five months of drought water remains in short supply. Thursday morning's satellite photo shows an active westerly front streaming toward the western Himalaya, carrying with it moisture and a good chance of more rain before the end of March. The earlier rains moderated temperature fluctuations and the mercury level has been rising consistently by one degree a week. Expect balmy afternoons and with localised convection storms into the weekend that we in the profession call "Charlie bravos".

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RAM HUMAGAIN/NEPALNEWS.COM

I SEE: Vice-chairman Tulsi Giri being shown around the CAN Infotech information technology fair that opened at the BICC on Thursday.



KIRAN PANDAY

VIRTUAL MUNCHA: Kathmandu's famous Muncha House is a pioneer in e-commerce through which it sells everything from i-pods to vegetables and gym exercise equipment at muncha.com



SAGAR SHRESTHA

MEDIAADVOCATES: Members of the International Media Advocacy Mission to Nepal after meetings at the Supreme Court on Wednesday being escorted by Suresh Acharya and Bishnu Nisturi of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ).



PRISONERS OF WAR: Maoist child soldiers captured after the Palpa attack last month being interviewed in police custody by researcher Anna Niestat of Human Rights Watch in Butwal last week.



BUHDI KATEL

BARELY AFLOAT: A female boat owner waits for customers amidst a colourful sea of boats at Phewa Lake in Pokhara on Sunday after the Maoist blockade kept tourists away in the peak trekking season.

In tune with Nepal



In 17 years, musician Yoshihiro Akita has not dreamt once of his homeland. He's only visited Japan once in the past decade and today, aged 54, all his wishes are rooted in Nepal.

"The first time I came here 25 years ago I felt like I had been here in a previous life. So I want to die here," he says with a smile.

After a couple of hours with this multi-talented man you start to understand why he is looking to hand over his unique yet very practical piano-tuning business to an apprentice and devote his working hours to "Buddhist art".

Born into a family of Buddhist monks, Akita was trained as a piano tuner. He married his Newari wife in Osaka 22 years ago and five years later the couple returned to her roots in Patan. "I was just tuning pianos for friends, and I started wondering how many pianos there were in Kathmandu. I put up a notice at a supermarket and people began calling," Akita recalls.

Today, he carries a binder full of letters recommending his skills as a tuner, a list of pianos in the Valley and their condition, along with advice on the instrument's care and value.

Besides pianos, Akita has also learned to care for the human body, having developed a physiotherapy technique that one satisfied patient, an ambassador here, calls "body tuning". Today Akita's son runs the Sotai Japanese Traditional Physiotherapy clinic in Jawalakhel.

That frees up Akita's time for his thanka business (Mababa Buddhist Thangka Gallery and nepalthanka.com) and to his goal of revitalising the art with what he calls the true spirit of Buddhism.

"Much of Buddhist art has been going in the wrong direction," he says, "my aim is to convey the exact feelings of the Buddha."

But when the stress of healing others "gives me a headache" Akita reaches for his piano, where his favourites range from Chopin to Andre Gagnon to easy listening.

But Akita is not completely happy because there is no peace in Nepal. He adds: "I have a dream. Peace will come to Nepal and then I'll go to the mountains and play piano." ●

Marty Logan

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Us yeomen must think positive

Thanks to the yeoman's service imparted by our country's current rulers in the past year, we can say with confidence that things can't get any worse. Therefore, if my memory serves me right, things can only get better.

That is why you may have gleaned from recent coverage in the *The Rising Damp* that we are all bubbling with optimism about the future. We have started seeing the glass as half-full and that is largely due to the fact that we have already quaffed the other half. Everything looks rosy on the sunny side of the street because we are wearing rose-tinted

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



shades. We clearly detect a silver lining that wasn't there before in cloud cuckooland. And as we confidently sail underneath a rainbow towards a glorious sunset we know all this has been made

possible because we have locked up all pessimists under the Terrorism and Disruptive Activities Act (TADA!).

And allow me to take this opportunity to also propose a vote of thanks to the large numbers of yeomen and women who have demonstrated courage, commitment and patriotism in the year 2062 and who I'm sure will be recognised and awarded medals in the New Year's Honour's List.

So, with permission from the Chair (May I?) allow me to propose the following richly-deserving candidates for decorations: soldiers who courageously marched into newsrooms last year to ensure that all the news was good news; daring dogs of Pokhara Municipality who fearlessly stood as candidates in the recently successfully-concluded elections; Herojig, the cartoonist extraordinaire and member of UNACOOTs; and since everyone from the good old days is coming out of the woodworks why not also give a medal to the shoplifting Royal Nepalese Ambassador and Kleptomaniac Plenipotentiary who exercised his diplomatic impunity and whose service to the nation has remained unrecognised for over two decades and a half?

It is when we start recognising every Nepali who has tirelessly worked for the betterment of this country that we will set an example for others to follow. And I'll start right here by developing a positive mental attitude myself and not poking fun anymore at those on top of the food chain. So, here is a rundown of all the upbeat things that have been happening lately which may help us count our blessings:

- Kulekhani reservoir has risen by 1.7 cm due to recent rains which means loadshedding will now be reduced from 5 hours a day to 4 hours and 57 minutes a day.
- Another contingent of RNA peacekeeping troops has left for the Congo where it will try to win the hearts and minds of the Congolese people who overwhelmingly yearn for a ceasefire, the restoration of peace, democracy and respect for human rights.
- Kathmandu has held its First Chicken or Egg Festival which proved once and for all eggs came first and there is no bird flew in the country.
- Two potholes were patched in Krishna Galli this week, which is a 200 percent improvement on the situation in the previous fiscal year when no potholes were patched.
- A new Bikram Calendar has been approved by the Department of Astrology and Voodoo that will eliminate the month of Baisakh in 2063 since that is the month when most political upheavals have historically taken place in this country.
- The Nepal Telepathy Corporation has introduced a new service called Sixth Sense (Registered Trade Mark) for voice mail in which subscribers will have to use their intuition and instinct to figure out what callers are trying to say since they keep getting cut off.

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सर्वेक्षण-२०६२

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