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6 years

Nepali Times completes six years this week. We reprint a selection of editorials since 2002 on p2-3.

From this issue we have also tinkered with the typeface of our headlines and changed some graphic elements, without tampering with the basic layout which has remained the same for six years. The sans serif font is Verdana, which is curvy and more pleasing to the eye than the previous Garamond. The Franklin Gothic has been replaced with the more elegant and precise Palatino. Other than that, we haven't changed anything. *Nepali Times* is still the lively, timely and reliable paper our readers have come to expect every Friday.

ILLUSION: Singha Darbar reflected in a monsoon puddle while the budget was being presented to the nearby parliament on Wednesday.

KIRAN PANDAY

Mirage

An interim budget by an interim government during an interim peace

Times

Weekly Internet Poll # 306

Q. Should Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala now resign and make way for a successor?


Total votes: 6,839



Yes 78.7%
No 21.3%
Don't know 1.0%

Weekly Internet Poll # 307. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com


Q. Do you think the budget adequately reflects the country's priorities?



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KIRAN NEPAL

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat presented his government's budget for the coming year but in trying to please everyone he seems to have ended up pleasing no one.

He has increased VDC grants to Rs1 million which should spur local development. The military budget and palace allowance have been slashed. But Mahat presupposed too much: that there will be durable peace, investment will pour in, revenue will be up and donors will come with sacks of cash. Then the Maoists put a dampener on the day by saying they were never consulted.

The trouble is the budget just doesn't reflect the monumental political transformation of the country after April. "I was expecting some surprises," said planner Yubaraj Khatiwada, "but

there weren't any. At a time when we needed a transformatory budget we got one that is incremental."

Other speakers at the Himalmedia Roundtable on the Economy on Wednesday agreed. "It looks like the minister looked at tv commercials and decided which products to tax," said Binod Chaudhari of CNL.

Speakers felt that if the seven parties and the Maoists could agree on a joint political agenda for a constituent assembly, they could have easily agreed on a common economic program.

"We have seen in post-conflict countries that the people's expectations are so high that if economic issues aren't addressed properly the whole peace process can fail," said economist Biswombar Pyakhurel. "We should have had a budget with a vivid vision for the future. I didn't see any."

Parameswor Mahaseth of Salt Trading Ltd agreed: "If they can do a 12-point agreement on politics, why can't there be a six-point agreement for the economy?"

But Chandi Dhakal of FNCCI felt it would have been unrealistic to expect the finance minister to have come up with anything better. "There may be no bandas and blockades but things are worse in the industries," he said. "Extortion is intense, the export sector is on its knees, things are worse than before."

Indeed, businessmen don't know what to make of the contradictory statements from the Maoists. Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai met FNCCI delegates this week and assured them they are not against private enterprise. But the very next day the head of the Maoist economic cell, Deb

Gurung, said his party was for nationalising private property and assets of big capitalists.


"We put the cart before the horse," said Radhesh Pant of Bank of Kathmandu. "A consensus on which way we should go should have been reached before the budget, not after."

Industrialist Rajendra Khetan said the constitution should guarantee every Nepali two meals a day, primary health and education. "Rapid industrialisation is the only way to deliver that," said Khetan, "this budget should have shown us how to get there."

Former NPC vice-chairman Shankar Sharma saw a way out. "Instead of getting bogged down on what they don't agree on, the government and the Maoists can concentrate on what they agree on, like the Jumla Highway, the need to generate 500 megawatts in four years, on health and education." ●

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History keeps

This week in 2000, when the first issue of Nepali Times came out we were still cautiously optimistic about the future and idealistic about the media's role in protecting democracy. It's been a rollercoaster six years. We have seen freedom squandered, usurped and returned. We have seen a massacre of ruling royals that was unprecedented in human history, a bloody war, a military coup engineered by a king and his ignominious downfall.

Re-reading the editorials in this space, we sound naïve and prescient, hopeful and cynical, exhortative and preachy. We have dispensed unsolicited advice, and repeated ourselves tiresomely. We have excerpted below some editorials from the past six years, and they show that the more things change in Nepal the more they remain the same.

#1
19 July-25 July 2000
A sign of the times

Newspapers...do more than hold a mirror to society. They become the mirror itself. Journalism is called history in a hurry. It is also culture, sociology, anthropology, philology, and philosophy in a hurry. Nepali Times will aspire to be a true reflection of our times—a journal to record the life and times of Nepalis in the decades ahead.

There is a belief that literature is generally not read, and journalism is often unreadable. This newspaper will be different; it will seek to be informal, lively, clear and direct. Liveliness is serious business, it should not be confused with frivolity. Don't be fooled by the tabloid format, this is also a serious paper that tackles serious issues head-on, as this issue perhaps proves.

A newspaper needs a set of values to sustain itself. In a society cursed with extreme inequality, some of those values are fairly obvious: to speak for the last, the lost and the least. We will be fair, and we will protect our independence intensely. This is a modern newspaper for a new Nepal. A sign of the times.

#40
27 April -3 May 2001
Something rotten

Something is definitely rotten in the state of Nepal. Our erstwhile warriors of democracy have wasted 12 precious years quibbling about who gets to be on the top bunk, making people more and more disenchanted with this thing called democracy, feeding frustrations on which the Maoists have shrewdly cashed in with some classic grassroots mobilising and periodic senseless slaughter. With a little bit of help from like-minded friends from the right the Maoists are on the verge of throwing parliamentary democracy into the dustbin of history. That is the story so far.

A year ago, this could have been termed alarmist, but not anymore. The country and people are in danger of

regressing by a decade. Meanwhile, even when they are faced with the prospect of systemic erasure, our political parties haven't stopped playing games. There they go, bickering over power which will give them the opportunity to top up their war chests for next year's local elections. After the last bout of blood-letting in Rukumkot and Rumaule, you would have thought they would have learnt their lessons and agreed on some fundamentals. But no, it was too much to expect from these visionless, self-centered ostriches.

#46
7-14 June 2001
"I may die, let my nation live on"

This is a line by the late King Mahendra that was turned into a patriotic song. Words particularly prescient in a week when two kings died in a carnage that nearly wiped out Nepal's entire royal family. Yet (and this will come as a surprise to those who see only the shroud of death that presently covers the country) the institutions of democracy have held. Confusion prevails among commoners about this mass murder of their royals. This was an aloof, but respected clan in a country of multiple ethnicities, castes, faiths and languages.

King Birendra was correct to a fault, as the political parties in power came and went in a welter of crises. It is the precedent that he set over the last decade of his reign that strengthened the foundations of our democracy. He had made it easy for his son Dipendra to follow, but

Dipendra too is by now reduced to ashes by the banks of the Bagmati. It now rests on the survivor, Gyanendra, to make up for his brother's absence.

However, all will not be smooth for the newly anointed king. To begin with, Gyanendra will have to win the confidence of the people on two counts: first, he will have to convince conspiracy-obsessed citizens that the kingship was thrust upon him. Second, there is the matter of his son, Paras. With his reputation for lawless behaviour, the fact that Paras could be crown prince is unbearable for many Nepalis, who are additionally suspicious because the young man remained unscathed in Friday night's slaughter. This will be a tough one for King Gyanendra: he may well have to choose between the people and his son.

King Gyanendra must support the elected government and parliament to find a peaceful solution to this raging problem, and our squabbling elected leaders must support him. They must remember that they need to first save the country. If the nation ceases to exist, they will have nothing to fight over.

#50
6 -12 July 2001
Shi shi qiu shi

This Karl Marx aphorism translated into poetic Mandarin was Mao Zedong's favourite: "Seek truth from facts". Politics is a fleeting thing. The good guys don't seem so good after a while, and the bad guys in retrospect look like they were acting in enlightened self-interest. Just like there



SUBHAS RA I #15 3-9 NOVEMBER 2000

LETTERS

NEXT LEADER

Your editorial ('Beyond Koirala', #305) has genuinely exposed the urgent need to look for a new face to replace the aging leader. At this critical time we cannot afford to have the prime minister run the country from a hospital bed. The same people who once despised him are praying for his recovery because they realise that Nepal will have a serious problem if he dies unexpectedly. The ball is in the Congress party's court and it is time for them to come to their senses and abandon their habit of fighting among themselves for power for the sake of the country and to honour the popular wishes of the people. The king and the parties failed to run the country and are equally responsible for the country's present state. They better respect the people's wishes before it is too late.

Swoyambhu Tuladhar, Geneva

● After Girija, who? (Editorial, #305). This nation of 26 million people has enough potential leaders with vision and statesmanship to meet the challenge of these crucial times. Elections are the only way to find such leaders. If we go back and start selecting the prime

minister from the party we will fall into the same old trap. If we are successful, parliament will not be dissolved again and again and the elected prime minister will serve for six years without having to face a no confidence motion every six months.

Shree Shrestha, email

● Your editorial is quite relevant in the present context. The country is at a crucial historical juncture and we need a prime minister who is energetic, dynamic, dedicated, honest and whose vision and mission are progressive as mandated by the historical People's Movement II. The octogenarian, bed-ridden Koirala should have retired from active politics long ago and can't fulfil the aspirations of the people. He is lucky that we have forgiven him and let him lead after the Jana Andolan. Otherwise, he would be remembered as a stubborn, power hungry leader who most of the time promoted not only nepotism, favouritism, sycophancy and deceitful tactics in Nepali politics but also showed no intention of reforming the NC's feudal structure. Now is the time for him to resign from the premiership, not only to save his stature as a statesman but also to allow the country to realise full

democracy through constituent assembly elections. We have enough qualified and aspiring leaders in the young generation to take on this historic job.

Tilak Lama, Kathmandu

● The government urgently needs to form an advisory body comprised of military personnel that would provide it advice on matters such as reorganisation of the Nepal Army and liaising with the UN. Its members should include retired military intellectuals and young, in-service tier 2 cadres.

Iswari Pradhan, email

● I am wary of the Maoists' commitment to peace. They are still violating basic human rights, still refusing to return confiscated land, extorting money and abducting political parties' cadres. During their current propaganda campaign, Maoists leaders are happy when their views, articles and opinions are expressed in the media but they threaten those who oppose them. The government did its share by releasing Maoist detainees but what about those held by the Maoists? When will displaced people be able to return to their homes?

Prakash Sharma, email

● I was taken aback reading Maoist leader Badal's interview ('It's everyone's right to rebel', #305). His remarks degrading the UML, especially KP Oli, were really unwarranted and provocative. People expect the Maoists to show a certain level of dignity and shed that repugnant attitude if they wish to join the mainstream. Badal's comments on bahuns are also highly objectionable—such communal slander can only fuel hatred which could create discord, something we do not need right now. Let us not destroy the social fibre in our multi-ethnic society. The Maoists must show restraint and maturity.

Prateek B Raimajhi, email

URBAN FORESTS

After a few decades the naked hills of Chautara are flourishing again ('The greening of Nepal', #305) but due to political reasons migration to urban areas like Kathmandu has increased and overpopulation is stripping fields and forests. Since the political scenario has changed, can we also expect the return of greenery to our urban areas?

**Rabin Rachalica
Green Team, Bhaktapur**

repeating itself as a farce

are no permanent friends and no permanent enemies in politics, maybe there are no permanent good guys and no permanent bad guys either.

Nothing extraordinary, therefore, about Chairman Prachanda's 180 degree turn after the royal massacre to state that the Shah dynasty was the epitome of Nepali nationalism, and that King Birendra had Maoist sympathies. This week, the Chairman announced that his group will henceforth only bump off supporters of the "fascist Gyanendra-Girija clique". Everyone else is free to live.

Ultimately, the battle is over ideas. The only way to counter support born of fear and intimidation is through an even freer and fairer society that fosters greater public debate and forges a truly representative democracy. Unlike the dialectics of totalitarianism, democracy does not have ready, cut-and-dry answers. All democracy does is give competing ideas a legitimate forum so that the people can decide which way to go. At some point the Maoists, too, will have to contend in the arena of free ideas.

#70
30 November-6 December 2001
Just another Third World War

How could things have gone so wrong? It is futile looking too far back to the roots of this conflict. After all, you can go as far back as you want. The 12 years of democratic decay, the Panchayat years that stifled dissent and let social pressures build up, a hundred years of Rana rule, or the socio-cultural substrate of apathy and belief in the preordained.

We know the roots of the problem. It is the prolonged neglect and indifference of the Kathmandu elite and political class to the needs and aspirations of the majority of Nepalis. Adding fuel to the fire were the Maoists with their twisted vision of an outdated utopia. They cashed in on the people's silent rage at persistent injustice and inequality, the frustration that political freedom didn't translate into even the hope of economic wellbeing.

It is clear now that the Maoists took another of the Great Helmsman's helpful hints to regroup, re-arm and train during periods of rest. And when they did resume fire last Friday, it was with decisive and vicious force, exposing the vulnerability of the army and the total failure of intelligence.

#115
11-17 October 2002
The king and us

We wouldn't exactly say that the Nepali people were euphoric about King Gyanendra's move to sack the prime minister and form a new government. But they were beginning to hold politicians in such low esteem, and had watched the country suffer chronic abuse from greedy and selfish politicians for so long, that they did not complain when the king took over executive powers last Friday.

In fact, they welcomed the fact that here at last was someone who could take a decisive step, assume responsibility, and try to take the country out of the rut it is in. For a lot of Nepalis it has stopped mattering who rules over us, as long as peace is restored. Trapped between the far right and the far left, abused by both the security forces and the Maoist militia, the Nepali people were desperate enough to cling to this straw.

But the king's move is fraught with dangers: for himself, for the constitutional monarchy and for this country's future. The king seems to have reasoned that if he waited any longer, the politicians would have made such a mess that the Maoists could just walk into Kathmandu. But therein lies the biggest paradox in all this: the king has sidelined the very political parties that he will need in the long term to build public support against the Maoists and restore peace.

The king has gambled his throne on this one. And that act, by its very nature, has dragged the monarchy into the political muck. A constitutional monarchy needs to be above it all, untainted by partisanship and upheld as a symbol of national unity. It is now in danger of being just another political force jostling for power.

Having pushed the envelope on the constitution by assuming executive authority, the king has removed the parliamentary buffer, bringing him face-

to-face with revolutionary republicans. Born-again Panchayat throwbacks will be doing the monarchy a great disservice if they see this as a chance to turn the clock back. Time has moved on. And that is our advice to the Maoists as well: study your history, comrades. Remember how countries pushed to the brink by domestic rebellion are ripe for the picking by outsiders. You have gone as far as you can with the gun.

#146
23-29 May 2003
Politically incorrect

What is it with our politics that anytime anyone has a grudge against anyone else, it is the classrooms that get bombed, teachers that get harassed, schools that get padlocked, universities that get shut down, and children that get forced to join political rallies?

Nepal's education system, or what remains of it, has been the first target of every political agitation. The Maoists demolished the national school system in the two years of mayhem in which hundreds of teachers were killed, tortured and hounded out of the villages. Schools across the land were forced to close down, and in many places they remain closed. Their rationale was the irrational logic of revolutions: destroy everything before rebuilding.

The present state of flux actually presents an opportunity for reform. And that initiative rests with King Gyanendra, who by his act of taking on executive powers through a nominated cabinet will have to show required statesmanship. A meeting with the parties to come up with a new interim team to prepare for elections is long overdue. What is preventing him from doing this? The king's advisers should note: the lack of public support for the street agitation does not mean that the Nepali people want a return to pre-1990 autocracy.

#187
12-18 March 2004
10,000+

One little item of news two weeks ago escaped the notice of most people: the Home Ministry's announcement that the number of Nepalis killed in the past nine years of the 'People's War' had crossed the 10,000 mark. That this is now a five-digit conflict, in itself, shouldn't make it any more serious than it already is.

At the rate we are going, with 30 reported deaths a week on average, it won't be long before we hit 20,000. Then, 30,000. And then, what? Will the Maoists be any nearer to a republic? Will the Royal Nepali Army be any nearer to wiping out the Maoists? All we will achieve is more Nepali deaths, thousands upon thousands will be orphaned and widowed, millions will be forced to leave

their homes. What kind of Maoist utopia commands that sort of a price in blood and misery?

The Maoists gave their revolution an ethnic edge with the declaration of seven autonomous zones in January. It is now in danger of going the way everyone feared: turning a class war into a caste war. It is now getting more and more difficult to believe that this revolution is moving along a pre-determined game plan. It looks seriously out of control. Giving the struggle an ethnic tint smacks of desperation, pointing to fatigue at its political centre. In any civil war, hardline militant or ethno-separatist elements gain supremacy when the political part of the struggle erodes or gets sidelined.

Cold-blooded murders of innocents, ambushing dairy tankers, torching buses, lynching six people in Saptari and leaving their bodies to rot by a school all indicate that violence has now become an end in itself. Why should the people be made to suffer any more for their endless power struggle? Announce elections, agree on a ceasefire, and let the people decide who they want to be ruled by.

#233
1-5 February 2005
Hariyo ban Nepal ko dhan

The sudden epidemic of tree-felling along Kathmandu's streets is drastic, misguided and not consonant with the needs of the population. In an increasingly congested valley, foliage provides both utility and aesthetics. It gives us fresh air that allows us to breathe freely. The role of trees is to introduce oxygen into the atmosphere and to ingest the carbon dioxide that human and mechanical activity spews into our enclosed airspace so prone to inversion.

Trees reach down to the grassroots and hold the soil together, they reach up to the sun and use their chlorophyll corpuscles to convert that energy into food useful to itself and to other animals. The sun and the trees, together with the supportive action of water, soil and air, make possible photosynthesis, the driving mechanism of life on earth. The action of cutting down trees that have lined our streets seems to have been hasty.

All in all, the trees should not have been axed. Because the damage has been done, can we ask the concerned authority to promptly correct the move and bring back greenery?

#298
19-25 May 2006
A New Nepal

Building is harder than destroying. Revenge is easier than reconciliation.

Now that the parliament has been declared supreme, and it has taken the far-reaching historic decision to find a way to accommodate a figurehead king we must start looking beyond dismantling to building. If we don't, we'll forever be stuck in this rut of retribution and counter-retribution.

Parliament's Magna Carta for Nepal is nothing less than revolutionary. But it is also accommodative. By giving the monarchy a last chance it has shown considerable courage in standing up to the republican wave that swept the country during the April uprising. By doing so, it is leaving the final decision to the fate of the monarchy to the people.

The decisive and radical measure to bring royal successions under purview of the people's representatives was actually the only decision that was really necessary. The rest (removing 'Royal' and 'Shri Panch', appointment of the COAS, parliament's state affairs committee to over see the royal palace) were just details. The other decision we applaud is the one to declare Nepal a secular state.

The seven party alliance has saved the institution of monarchy by a slender thread. We hope the king and his absolutist and fundamentalist cohorts have got the message. In the end, it was the moderate middle-path of the parliamentary democracy that rescued the institution whose current stakeholder was bent on destroying it.

The special resolution of parliament on Thursday lays the groundwork to resolve the political and legal questions once and for all so the nation can finally turn its attention to socio-economic progress.



Hard work, hard choices



MIN BAJRACHARYA

I had the privilege of visiting Nepal two weeks after Jana Andolan II and witnessing first-hand the excitement. Two months since the transition, however, I already see some old patterns setting back in.

In the absence of leadership, the people's energy is focused on gaining immediate benefits for



GUEST COLUMN
Ashraf Ghani

themselves. Groups, from organised labour in private businesses and schools, to even the civil service are demanding more for themselves, expecting the New Nepal to bring payoffs to them.

Political leaders have been unable to counter such demands because they have not articulated

the new vision and defined the new compact. The people's movement was able to bring down the old regime but without leadership of vision and action, it will not be able to construct a New Nepal.

If the leaders fail in this critical moment, the state is bound to fail under the weight of excessive expectations alone. Surely the people of Nepal deserve leadership from their politicians to ensure that Nepal embarks upon a path towards a new future. In this unique moment, even the age-old social barriers to inclusion seem surmountable. A new future is no longer a dream, it has become possible.

However if this chance is wasted, the mobilised energies of the people could not only dissipate but, worse still, feed

into a vicious cycle of violence and destruction. Nepal would rapidly fall back into the old orbit defined by the old dynamics. Seizing a rare, historic moment and turning it into the beginning of a new future requires a clear vision and sustained action. A clear vision enables collective efforts by citizens and sustained action reinforces their belief in the attainability of the new future.

The political transition has naturally raised expectations. The people now believe durable peace is around the corner and a more democratic political system is in the making. They expect their daily lives to get better as well, and quickly. More jobs, access to better government services, improvements in roads and other infrastructure, and simply freedom from insecurity are their

key demands.

What Nepal needs is a new compact between the state (and political leaders who run it) and the people. Such a compact must focus on moving the country toward a peaceful, inclusive and prosperous country, in short, a New Nepal. Equally important, the nature of the relationship

breaking out of the trap of low revenues and low services have achieved a national consensus to raise the state resources to 20 percent of GDP or more. This demands much greater willingness on the part of the people to contribute to the common cause.

The euphoria of April 2006 alone cannot attain a New Nepal. It

The euphoria of April 2006 alone can't attain a New Nepal

must change. The old compact was an extension of the patronage relationship between the feudal lord and his subjects. The new compact must become a true partnership between a democratic state and its citizens. Yet, no political leaders, or for that matter civil society leaders who were credited with mobilising the people in April, seem to be talking about the need for realism and the obligations—as well as the rights—of the people.

Who is going to pay for all the good things the state is now expected to deliver? A state that raises only 13 percent of GDP in revenues cannot be expected to deliver many things. The cuts in the palace budget and the security forces will not enhance the financial means of the state to deliver public services. Most countries that have succeeded in

requires hard work and hard choices. And it will not happen overnight. This is what the political leaders of Nepal should be talking about. If they are afraid to do so, they should step aside.

Common people, especially the poor, understand the budget constraint, for they face it every day. They often have to make harsh choices, such as between feeding a hungry child and sending another to school. If they are given a convincing vision with a clearly articulated implementation plan and shown determined actions by the state to achieve it, they will be willing to wait. ●

Dr Ashraf Ghani, currently Chancellor of Kabul University, was finance minister of Afghanistan during 2002-04. He visited Nepal for a rapid assessment of the country situation at the invitation of the World Bank.

Putting education to work

The BEST way to create jobs for school leavers



Ministers in the present transitional government know that their freedom to take independent decisions ends where the conditions of bilateral donors and multilateral lenders begin. Since their



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

capacity to introduce fundamental reforms in state policy is limited, they compensate by making cosmetic changes.

The UML minister of education

couldn't do much to improve teaching and learning at government schools, so he decided to make news by doing away with the list of SLC toppers. Powerful arguments have been made for and against this decision. However, the pointless controversy over this non-issue has pushed some real concerns out of the media glare: the plight of the 53.49 percent of examinees who 'failed' to get through the exam.

The family values that produced the newly-introduced category of distinction-holders is worthy of sociological analysis. These young seekers of

excellence often come out of urban, educated and gainfully employed middle-class families. Most of them will do well in life regardless of the professions they choose. Almost all of them will negate the role of social networks in their professional advancement and claim they rose by the dint of their hard-work, talent and luck. Very few will even remember their SLC batch-mates that fell by the wayside.

But the state can only ignore the future of these involuntary school-dropouts to its own peril. Over half the students that appear for SLC examinations 'fail' every year. Some manage to graduate in subsequent years but most are left out as social rejects. A SLC youth is too 'educated' to plough the fields, cut wood, lay bricks, mend shoes, tailor shirts, sell vegetables, or tend cattle. But they are hardly good for anything else. Little wonder, almost every one of them heads for the manpower agency.

Networks of skill-enhancement institutes for SLC-failed needs to be created to enable the students to lead a life of work and dignity. Tentatively, let's call them Basic Employment Skill Training (BEST) Institutes. By offering four-month long craft-based and artisan courses such as masonry, plumbing, electric fitting, carpentry, vegetable and herb farming, dairying and motorcycle repairs, one BEST Institute can train

about 1,000 students a year.

A hundred such schools can easily cater to the needs of over 100,000 students who fall off the SLC ladder every year. An existing infrastructure of government schools at district capitals can be used to run these centres during the evening. DDCs and municipalities can be entrusted with running these centres.

The experiences of Balaju, Lahan, and Jumla technical institutes offer lessons to open, run and manage training centres of smaller scale at dispersed locations. The Technical Instructor Training Institute at Sano Thimi is a centre of excellence in the field, and branches will have to be established in every development region.

Experts will scoff: what can you teach a tenth-grader in four months? But 100 days are enough to impart survival skills. In addition to basic occupational ability, the capacity to fill out forms, open a bank account, keep a record of income and expenses and the curiosity to learn new things are all the skills one needs to get along at the bottom rung of market economy. Progress thereafter depends upon factors beyond the scope of any basic training.

The BEST Institute method would not just rehabilitating school dropouts but also go some way to create the 500,000 new jobs that young Nepalis entering the labour market every year need. All this can only be a powerful antidote to incipient insurgencies. ●

Mero goes to metros

Nepal's first GSM provider prepares to take mobiles nationwide

MIN BAJRACHARYA

On the top floor of Spice Nepal's new office block at Krishna Tower in Baneswor, CEO Damir Karassayev looks down at bustling Kathmandu, and tells visiting reporters: "Ask me any question you like."

Then he hesitates and adds: "Except about the SPA and the Maoists."

The Kazakh head of Nepal's first private GSM service provider is literally moving up in the world and has reason to be confident. Since September, Spice Nepal's Mero Mobile has signed up 125,000 subscribers in Kathmandu, Pokhara and Hetauda. Engineers are working to hook up Butwal, Biratnagar, Bharatpur, Janakapur, Biratnagar and Dharan and the company hopes to reach 500,000 subscribers by the end of the year.

When Spice Nepal started in 2005, skeptics called it a fly-by-night operation—pointing out its overseas investors and royal connections. The company is owned by Group Visor, a Kazakh company and other investors include Russian-Nepali businessman Upendra Mahato and the Indian Modi group. Mahato has also bought the 17 percent stake of King Gyanendra's son-in-law Raj Bahadur Singh.

But it looks like Spice is here to stay. Last year it signed a \$29 million contract with Siemens Communications to build a nationwide GSM network with base stations, switches and microwave technology. By 2008, the network will be capable of handling one million subscribers.

We ask Karassayev why a Kazakh holding company should be interested in investing in Nepal. He answers with the look of someone who has been asked this question many times. "It's



WAP: Spice Nepal CEO Damir Karassayev poses with his GPRS-equipped phone at his office on the top floor of Krishna Tower in Baneswor on Tuesday. The technology allows Mero Mobile users to browse the Nepali times eSpecial website, (below, left) among others.

not just because Nepal is exotic," he says, "we looked at Nepal's teledensity and saw a huge potential for growth here."

Indeed, Nepal's phone penetration rate is one percent and the reason it is so low has nothing to do with affordability. The state monopoly is just not able to provide phone lines even to people willing to pay for it. Karassayev believes even this demand will rise as mobile

telephony takes over and there are economies of scale.

With the cost of handsets now less than Rs 4,000 Spice hopes to add 250,000 new subscribers every year as its network expands. The company is also marketing aggressively with no trunk tariffs on city-to-city calls, one hour free calls within the network and no-charge for incoming even from other networks. Spice has already brought in GPRS, and Karassayev demonstrates by logging on to *Nepali Times eSpecial* with his sleek O2 handset. By August, Spice will also introduce MMS which allows subscribers to send images, video and download personalised ringtones.

Although Mero-to-Mero calls are cheap and convenient, subscribers have encountered difficulty connecting from other networks like UTL and NTC. The reason for this appears to be NTC opening only a limited number of E1 interconnect nodes to other

subscribers.

Also, many NTC subscribers have been reluctant to switch to Mero Mobile because they will have to change their numbers. Karassayev isn't worried about this. "Nepalis have a choice, they can switch to Mero Mobile or they can stay with NTC. Besides as more people use mobile phones they make the pie bigger and everyone benefits," he says.

Spice is also testing its procedures to introduce roaming in the next month but expects more inbound users than Nepalis demanding roaming services when they travel abroad. Outbound roaming also requires special Rastra Bank permission since it means a hard currency outflow.

Asked where else Spice is hoping to expand, Karassayev looks out at the hills on the other side of the Valley and says: "We will bring our service wherever there is demand in Nepal." ●



PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA



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KIRAN PANDAY

Budhabar, 12 July

Interview with Minister of Education and Sports Mangal Siddhi Manandhar, a geology professor who has worked at the National Planning Commission. He is a UML MP from Kathmandu.

Budhabar: Do you feel the government is not picking speed?

Mangal Siddhi Manandhar: The people have complained that the government has not worked according to their wishes and that may be justified. But we are in a transitional phase right now. On one side there is so much confusion, and so many legal hurdles while on the other are the people's expectations. They are demanding action right here right now or threatening to strike. I had to face protests the very first day I entered the ministry. Discussions and homework are necessary when making

"When there is motion there is friction"

policy decisions. It is due to these factors that work is being delayed.

Are you getting cooperation?

The extent of cooperation that should be there in the political level is not enough but it is there. The eight point agreement and creation of the interim constitution draft committee are political agreements. However there are problems at the ministerial level. We have not interfered in other ministries but everyone seems interested in the education ministry.

Are other parties interfering in your ministry?

Let's just say there is a lot of concern and interest. This has made it a little difficult for us to work.

Both Tribhuban and Pokhara University are without leaders now. What is stopping new appointments?

We have not been able to work because others have shown unnecessary concern. It has been more than four months that Pokhara University hasn't had a vice chancellor. TU is facing the same problem. A three-member recommendation committee under the joint vice-chancellor should have been formed but it has not been done. I requested this from the prime minister in writing but why nothing has been done is a matter of conjecture.

Is it possible you will be seen as a failure?

It is not important whether I as a person will succeed or fail, but the future of the students will be affected. Who will take this responsibility? Will the education minister be a failure? No, the whole cabinet will be responsible.

It is said that it's very difficult for ministers to meet the

prime minister, that the kitchen cabinet is all powerful. Is this true?

Due to the prime minister's health we don't get to meet and talk very often. I have met him separately during cabinet meetings and informed him of things that need to be done under my ministry.

Have you told him that your work is stalled?

I don't know who advises him, but I certainly feel that he is being advised wrongly. Why isn't he being allowed to decide? If recommendation committees were formed in time there would not be as much confusion as there is. We must give up our narrow - minded thinking to solve the problems in higher education. It affects millions of students.

What changes will you contribute to the education sector as minister?

The gap in education between rich and poor students should end. Education should be provided to all equally. Until and unless we can provide equal education opportunities to everyone there won't be social justice. Without social justice, democracy will never be stable. The present situation where government schools cannot compete with private schools is untenable. Issues of nationalising private schools are being raised but this must not be viewed from one angle. It is not possible right now. This is why the quality of government schools needs to be raised. Equal education and equal opportunities are my main agenda.

Will the education mafia let you do this?

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Birthday bash

Deshantar, 9 July

The Nepal Army has not changed despite the parliament removing its royal tag and bringing it under its authority following May’s historic declaration. The NA is today considered an important part of the government but instead of supporting and working for the government, the army has been going its own way. This was evident on the king’s birthday. The cabinet had decided to not officially celebrate the birthday and to make it a holiday for the palace staff only. But the army celebrated as before, giving a 21-salute to the king and organising a special function at army headquarters. Orders were even sent to all army bases outside the capital to celebrate the day. Such an act of defiance clearly implies that the army is not willing to recognise the government’s authority over it. Neither the Nepal Police nor the APF celebrated the birthday or organised any special function for the occasion, they simply put a garland over the king’s picture. Even hardline royalists did not dare to organise a big birthday function outside the palace. Inside, there were only a few participants, including Pasupati SJB Rana from the RPP and the RJP’s Surya B Thapa. Even former vice chairman of the royal government Tulsi Giri was absent. And unlike in previous years, the king did not host a banquet.

Stolen weapons

Jana Astha, 12 July

The Maoists and the government have both agreed to disarm and permit arms monitoring by the UN to prepare for the interim government and constituent assembly. However neither party has publicly clarified its stock of weapons. The Nepal Army is reportedly in the process of preparing statistics on the arms stolen by the Maoists from both the police and army. The Maoists took most of their weapons from the police and and, according to our sources, stolen arms account for 80 percent of their weapons. In 10 years of fighting, the Maoists



NAYAN TARA

have taken over 3,000 weapons from security forces. The army says that the Maoists stole 1,499 .303 rifles from the police and also captured more than 385 SLRs during their November 2001 attack on Dang. At a press conference last year, the police said that 2,286 of the .303 rifles were taken and 288 were recaptured by the police. Although security forces have successfully recovered weapons on many occasions, they have not recaptured all of them from the Maoists, who have also stolen: Colt Commando rifles (one), LMGs (56), GPMGs (4) Chinese Sniper rifles (3), Galil rifles (5), INSAS rifles (138), M16s (5) and LMSWs (3). Army headquarters has always been reluctant to talk about stolen weapons because they believe it would affect soldiers’ morale. When they have publicly admitted the loss, the numbers have always been less than the actual amount taken. To boost soldiers’ confidence, the army has repeated that the Maoists are armed with outdated, small weapons and failed to acknowledge their more powerful arms. Another army source told us that in the last four and a half years the Maoists have captured four GPMGs, 15 two-inch mortars, eight 81mm cannons, five 40mm rocket launchers and one 51mm mortar. Immediately after the Dang attack, then COAS Prajwal Shamsher mobilised the army to recover stolen weapons but the plan failed because the Maoists took more.

Parties clash

Drishti, 11 July

Maoist and UML workers have resorted to fistfights and worse as they compete for support. UML workers were badly beaten at Ratnapark after a gang fight erupted between the two groups just a few months before the People’s War. Maoists killed eight UML cadres in June 1996 by burning them alive in Harganj of Rolpa. In the last 10 years, hundreds of UML workers have been attacked by Maoists, who accused them of working as government spies. The Maoists have now shelved their military activities and are actively organising their political activities but they are politically weaker than the UML, especially in the cities where the Maoists are desperate to make their presence felt. As a result, Maoist cadres are now constantly trying to undermine the UML. The conflict between the two parties often breaks out among their affiliated student unions at ASCOL and Tri Chandra colleges in Kathmandu and in other cities. Maoist cadres are often seen pasting their posters and banners over those of the UML and that party’s students have accused Maoist students of ordering their military personnel to attack them. Maoist student leader Lekhnath Neupane says he wants such conflict to end because the UML agenda is closer to the Maoist one than is any other party platform. But the UML says that the Maoist students have not given up their military attitudes and activities.

“We must save KU”

Excerpts of an interview with vice-chancellor Suresh Raj Sharma of Kathmandu University in Samaya, 6 July

समय

Samaya: What kind of university is KU?
Suresh Raj Sharma: In Nepal people make a distinction between government and private universities. KU is a public-private partnership. But KU is an independent institution and it belongs to the community. It is neither government nor private, and that is how its by laws are formulated.

Some professors seem to be unhappy.
We have 230 professors in management, education and medical, sciences. The professors who are unhappy are from the science section and they are different. So one department’s problems can’t be put together with other departments. And even within the science department there is no unanimity about the demands. There can be some issues about procedures, qualifications, but they haven’t been able to point out where there has been a violation of rules. We are ready to correct things if there are problems.

Why is it a problem allowing the teachers to unionise?
According to the rules, I can’t allow a union. We didn’t make these rules, the ones who made the rules have to change them. They can only criticize us if we go against the rules. If they don’t take classes, it will affect the semester calendar, and the students may leave. The faculty and students have representatives in the university’s supreme body, they could easily have raised it there.

So there are some demands that are valid.
We can’t keep unqualified people. But if 10-12 people use their dissatisfaction to influence 225 others... In 15 years we have got this far, if you want quality you have to have stick to some principles. If something is not suitable, you can’t suddenly say it is terrible. The guardians and students must also have a say, but they haven’t complained to us. Some want promotions, but they may not be qualified. If you didn’t get a position it’s because it depended on your qualifications.



BADRI PAUDYAL

How is this going to be resolved?
There will be obstacles when you try to do something good. If we let the obstacles affect us, then nothing good will get done. We have to solve them. If we didn’t have the determination we wouldn’t have started on this work. Our wish is not to let anything spoil the work we are doing here. I have a year-and-a-half left here, I don’t have to stay till the end of my tenure. But I will try to resolve the problem, I won’t quit. We must save KU.

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A show of FORCE

PICTURES by NAYAN TARA

Media-savvy Maoists took journalists last week to their mountain hideout at Kami Danda four hours walk from the Banepa highway to show off their military preparedness. The all-women unit of the ‘people’s liberation army’ go through their paces amidst lush monsoon scenery, drilling, taking up mock battle positions, crawling and crouching along the grass. The fighters in the front hold the prize weapons, a Heckler & Koch G36 captured from the army, an AK-47 and an assortment of SLRs and INSAS rifles. But at the back most have bolt-action .303s and some have no guns at all. The Maoist intention with this photo-op was obviously a bit of sabre-rattling to remind Kathmandu that they are still around and battleready. It was meant to impress, and it worked. Kathmandu-based photojournalists couldn’t get enough of the guns on display even posing with the prize weapon: a G36. Somewhere along the line the whole thing transformed itself from an insurgency into a tourist attraction.



SHOOTING EACH OTHER: With guns pointed at camera, Kami Danda in Kabhre on Friday. A Singaporean student is also present. Nepal Tourism Board take note: we can sell this as a tourist attraction.



PRETEND GUN: Towards the rear of the drilling formation, the women guerrillas have .303s but this one doesn’t even have that.



LET THE SHOW BEGIN: With their big guns lining up the women guerrillas, a young Kabhre mother watches with her child in tow.



STAND UP: Kantipur Television reporter Ganga BC speaks into his camera while a Maoist propaganda cadre also shoots the talking head.



WATCH YOUR BACK: A Maoist cameraman records the woman posing in a striking pose.



as and cameras pointed at guns, Maoists mingle with the media up on Kami
lowed to fondle the prize weapon: a Heckler & Koch G36 captured from the
s the next big tourist attraction.



e front rows, a female company of the PLA displays its disciplined drilling. A



e media visit to the rebel training site while a guerrillas with an AK47 puts up a

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Media fights trafficking

Indian and Nepali journalists have launched a joint campaign against women trafficking. At a workshop organised by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Gorakhpur, the journalists agreed that the media can highlight the concern of trafficking victims and sow seeds of change. It has been estimated that hundreds of thousands of South Asian women are trafficked every year.

Budgeting for development

Of the Rs 143.9 billion in the 2006-2007 budget, Rs 79.6 billion has been allocated for regular expenditure and Rs 64.3 billion for development. The latter includes Rs 1.3 billion for the Poverty Alleviation Fund, which will be distributed to 667 income-generating programs, 369 community infrastructure development programs and 1,700 'creative programs' in 1,200 VDCs of 25 districts. Rs 52 billion will go to the social sector, including Rs 22.7 billion for education, Rs 9.3 billion for health, Rs 6.19 billion for drinking water and Rs 4 billion for agricultural development.

NEW PRODUCTS

AFNAI TV: Goldstar Nepal, the maker of LG, has just launched its new brand of colour tv, CG tv, at a budget price. Produced in Nepal using 'ultimate one chip technology', from Japan it is available across the nation in three models: 14" round, 21" round and 21" flat. It comes with a 48-month warranty against all manufacturing defects.

BIKE SERVICING: Hansraj Hulaschand, a member company of Golchha Organisation, inaugurated Bajaj Service Station in June at Dilibajar. The station covers an area of over 15, 000 sq. feet, the team comprises of 80 technicians trained by Bajaj and has the capacity to service more than 300 motorcycles a day.

BOX DELIVERY: Shangri La Tours, the appointed service contractor for UPS in Nepal, has introduced the UPS 10KG Box® and UPS 25 KG Box® service in Nepal. The door-to-door express delivery service allows businesses to ship to more than 200 countries and territories worldwide at a fixed shipping rate.



Recognise remittances

Overseas earnings have saved us from collapsing altogether

Despite doomsayers' repeatedly pointing out that the Nepali economy was about to collapse at any time in the last four years, why was it that such a collapse did not happen?

True, annual economic growth rates fell far short of potential



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

during the four-year period. Aid budgets had to be slashed as the royal regime reshuffled development priorities, thereby alienating international friends. Revenue collections were dismal. Imports remained greater than exports. And the worsening security situation slowed down the completion rate of public development works. Yet amidst all these growing hardships, life in Nepal somehow limped on.

Armchair psychologists have seized the result to chatter in the press about Nepal's innate resilience and optimism. But looking back, it is reasonable to assume that a steadily increasing flow of remittance from Nepal's million-strong global migrant labourers did much to cushion many against the shocks wrought by the ailing economy.

Indeed, one estimate puts the value of remittances sent to Nepal in 2004 alone to be more than US \$ 1 billion. That's more than what Nepal earns every year from tourism and agriculture combined. What that further means is that Nepal's most valuable assets are no longer "Mt Everest and more" or agricultural fields. They are primarily our people: lakhs of young men and women who leave this country as poorly-educated and ill-skilled migrants to work in more than 40 countries as janitors, assembly-line workers, maids and waiters.

By regularly sending a portion of their incomes to their families in Nepal to spend on food, housing, healthcare, education and starting small businesses, they have quietly risen to the forefront of Nepal's biggest poverty reduction program.

But displaying its usual penchant for making grandly sweeping economic pronouncements, the state continues to fail to acknowledge the contributions of our global migrant labourers. Wednesday's budget speech for instance, made no mention of any contribution made by migrant Nepali labourers, let alone how to lower the social, political and economic

costs of receiving remittances across Nepal. The closest the speech came was in a paragraph about "making foreign employment business prestigious, organised and transparent," as though the state's role were to confer prestige (read: political patronage) to this already politicised industry.

But the most effective role the government can carve out in this industry is the same one it should carve out in any industry: that of a regulatory 'infomediary'—enforcing rules and providing information. To that end, its focus should be helping potential migrant labourers gather information about work abroad, making it easier for them to be linked to financial institutions for loans to pay for passage abroad, putting in place tax breaks on remittances and implementing policies that make it cheaper for labourers to make use of formal financial channels to wire money home.

Remittances appear to have saved us once from collapsing altogether. Let us now consciously look ahead to add them as a strong third pillar, alongside foreign aid and foreign direct investment, as a source of finance for development. ●

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Every monsoon Kathmandu sees an epidemic of typhoid, boil your water

The typhoid tide



MALLIKA ARYAL

Everywhere else in the world, as living standards rise typhoid makes a retreat. Not in Nepal. Contaminated food and water as well as drug resistance is turning the disease into a dangerous national epidemic.

Every monsoon sees a spike in typhoid cases because of leaky water mains. Every year 120 in every 10,000 Nepalis get the disease—which means a whopping 324,000 people fall sick every year for at least two weeks each. Even though the mortality rate is low, the loss to the economy is incalculable.

“When we went to the doctor he said I was sick because I drank dirty water but we drink water

from the spout—the water there comes from an underground source so we figured it was clean,” says Akash Magar, 18, a garment factory worker in Lagankhel.

In 1997, about 300 typhoid patients were treated at Patan Hospital, last year that figure jumped to 1,200 cases. While some of that is due to increased population, it also shows that water contamination is a chronic problem. “We have not been successful at spreading awareness about this disease,” says Amit Arjyal (*pictured*), a typhoid researcher at the hospital, “it is embarrassing that we are stuck with a disease like typhoid that is so easy to avoid.”

Indeed, awareness and vaccination can prevent

infections. Since the water mains will continue to be contaminated with faecal matter, people will have to keep boiling or treating drinking water and be careful about washing salads and fruits in tap water. In Europe and the US where typhoid cases are negligible, the disease is now known as ‘VFR’ (visiting friends and relatives) because it is mainly people of Nepali or Indian origin who are returning from vacations that fall sick.

Once diagnosed, patients are usually easily treated with antibiotics such as Ciprofloxacin which usually take effect within three days. However, left untreated the fever may continue for weeks or months and as many as 20 percent of sufferers die from complications. But doctors note an alarming increase in the resistance of the typhoid bacteria to antibiotics because over the years patients have been popping pills without consulting doctors.

Aryal’s research team at Patan Hospital is studying typhoid prevalence, natural immunity and treatment with alternative antibiotics. But doctors say that the best way to reverse the typhoid tide would be a massive public health campaign. Since dirty water is to be blamed for all typhoid cases, the focus should be on hygiene they say.

“Typhoid has been neglected. It is HIV, malaria and TB that get all the attention,” says Buddha Basnyat, a consultant at Patan Hospital. “Yet anyone from a minister to a porter can get it and every Nepali has been sick from it.”

The problem is that the water and sewage pipes run side-by-side under Kathmandu’s streets and both are leaky. In the monsoon, it is easier for the mains water to be contaminated with bacteria. “We can’t wait for the pipes to be fixed, so what do we do till then? We have to work on personal hygiene though awareness,” Basnyat stresses.

In the small room housing eight people, Akash Magar is now joined by his 15-year-old brother, Nikhil, who has also been diagnosed with typhoid. They sit together for breakfast, sipping water between bites. The water is still neither boiled nor treated.

Say the boys: “It is too expensive to boil water, we will start doing it when we have some money.” ●

Avoiding typhoid

- boil drinking water or treat it with chlorine
- eat foods that have been thoroughly cooked
- soak fruits and salads in iodine before eating them
- wash your hands with soap and water before and after a meal

More consultants the merrier

In the two months since April, the skies above Nepal have been dark with parachute consultants.

Even as I write this, more are plopping down into Kathmandu. It seems every international donor agency with any pretension of power and influence is air dropping consultants to carve out territories for aid. Conflict resolution consultants, mediation and facilitation consultants, arms management consultants, electoral systems consultants, demobilization consultants, rehabilitation consultants, re-integration consultants.

It is easy to recognise them: they travel light and just have a change of clothes and a notebook computer in their hand luggage. The usual suspects are tall and Caucasian mostly, usually male occasionally female. They have a fixed jet-lagged gaze and question marks on their eyebrows. They are brash, supercilious and shallow. They are always in a hurry,

NEPALI PAN
Rajendra Pradhan

accompanied by harried looking fixer who has phoned in advance to fix up the briefing and is always looking at his watch during it to make it to the next one.

They have numerous meetings with a whole host of key informants whose views and information they need to collect for their reports. They work at a dizzying pace, meeting with a party leader at 8.30, a minister at 10.30, a secretary at 11.15, a few civil society activists at 12.30 and another group at 2.30, a knowledgeable scholar at 5.00, a senior Nepali consultant at 6.30. Just time to jot down all the main points before meeting representatives of excluded groups the next day: women, ethnic groups, and Dalits. To save time they are invited to focus group meetings, preferably in nearby villages, and then straight to the airport to catch a jet.

Failures can always be blamed on inefficiency, corruption, dishonesty, exclusionary practices and stupid natives, never on the consultant

The Nepal interviews fit neatly into a template from East Timor, Cambodia or Afghanistan. Just change dates, places, names. Add an intro para or two about Nepal in the background section, paraphrased from some other report, add a few sound-bytes for local colour. Presto!

The reports are all prefaced by a page or two of executive summaries, which are all that the busy donors back at HQ have time for anyway. No one has any time for anything in-depth anymore with all the hot spots around the world. They want neat recommendations. Recommendations that then become the basis, or rather justification, for implementing project that are already decided upon. Failures can always be blamed on inefficiency, corruption, dishonesty, exclusionary practices and stupid natives, never on the consultant.

It can be argued that donor agencies and their consultants are guilty of lack of transparency, poor quality reports and vague recommendations, refusal to take seriously fundamental critiques by Nepali scholars of the projects and reports, false sense of pride based solely on the fact that they are the ones who have the money to dole out.

There is certainly a famine in Nepal, a famine of intelligent, open and modest international consultants and staff in donor agencies. Are they capable or willing to engage in open, theoretical and methodological debates and dialogue with Nepali scholars? The consultants will say that they have no time and the donor agencies will argue that they are here to get a job done, not to think.

We just may need to ask for help from other consultants to figure out what to do with all the reports from these parachute consultants that will gather dust in some shelf somewhere. ●



PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA

A rescue team finds the remaining bodies of the avalanche that killed 18 climbers in Manang in October

Back to



ALL PICS: PADAM GHALE

PADAM GHALE

All Dawa Lama remembers is a loud boom and immediately after that a terrific whoosh. When he regained consciousness, he was lying 30 metres away from camp. In the darkness, Dawa located three other porters from his tent. They

looked for the others but couldn't find them and plodded down to Meta village in their bare feet. On 20 October 2005 at the French expedition to 6,800m Kang Guru had pulled back from advanced base camp because of heavy snowfall and returned to lower base camp at 4,200m. It was 5PM and the team had just


gone into their tents after tea when the avalanche struck. Dawa Lama and three porters survived, seven French climbers and 11 Nepalis were killed. Nine of the dead were from the village of Larpak in Gorkha. A rescue mission was mounted soon after the tragedy but only three of the bodies were found. The rest had been

swept by the blast wave into a 400m long-gorge that comes off the mountain. There was nothing to do but wait for the snow to melt. Last week, our rescue team that included five French members returned to the scene. It was a different world, the snow had been replaced by lush green meadows full of flowers and

monsoon clouds shrouded the peaks. The snow in the gorge had melted and the team immediately located six of the bodies amidst the boulders. Another body was found below a 50m waterfall. Three climbers took all day rappelling down to get it out. A French forensic team with dental records identified the

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The tragedy of

PASCAL BONIFACE

Those who the gods may destroy, they grant their wishes. Zinedine Zidane may be pondering that bit of ancient Greek wisdom today. Having announced that he would end his professional career with the World Cup, Zidane had his wish fulfilled. After France barely survived the tournament's first round, Zidane performed at the top of his game and led the team to the brink of a second World Cup championship. But instead of finishing his career in triumph, or at least with an ovation, he was ejected from the final for head-butting an Italian player. There have been few such tragic moments in football history. Whatever the provocation that led to Zidane's behaviour (probably a racial comment), his violent act, seen around the world, has tarnished his image. The sad paradox is that while the world had been learning of and celebrating his legendary kindness as a person, he will now be distinguished for all time by an act of aggression.



Indeed, Zidane's status as an emblematic champion of the world's most universal and popular sport does not fully explain why people have been so obsessed with him. His human qualities, as much as his talent and technical feats on the

field, counted equally in establishing his popular acclaim. Football has always been this way. For Argentinians, the diminutive Diego Maradona represented the revenge of the weak and the deprived. As a

Kang Guru



CHANGING WITH THE SEASONS: The gorge into which the climbers were swept into by the avalanche last October and last week after the snow had melted (left, overleaf). The places where the bodies were found is marked with red dots. The children of the dead Nepali porters at a school in Balaju (above). A body is retrived from a 50m deep ravine at below base camp.

bodies and flew them back to France and the Nepalis were handed to family members. The French embassy has provided compensation to the families of the dead Nepali climbers and is taking care of their children's education in Kathmandu.

The French team was led by 56-year-old Daniel Stolzberg, an experienced mountaineer and a recently retired teacher at the l'Ecole Nationale de Ski et d'Alpinisme in Chamonix, France. The head of the Nepali

team, Iman Singh Gurung, was an experienced climber and was president of the National Guide Association.

The Kang Guru avalanche last year took place during a freak autumn blizzard that devastated Manang. It wiped out entire herds of yaks in the valleys below. This is one of the first times that an expedition has returned to the scene of a mountaineering tragedy in Nepal to clean up, and the trend should be encouraged.



What made retrieval possible was that the base camp was relatively low on the mountain and the bodies were exposed after the snows melted. Not all accident sites are as accessible and a clean up operation can be almost as costly as the expedition itself.

But where possible it should be done not just for the memory and dignity of those who died, but also to preserve the sanctity of the mountains that they wanted to climb. ●

Zidane One moment of stupidity has erased years of respect

result, his countrymen excused his frequent bad behaviour time and again. Similarly, Pelé became the symbol of a harmonious, inter-racial Brazil.

Zidane offered neither of these romantic images. Moreover, after his career is over, he is unlikely to become a manager of his sport like Jean-Claude Killy, the former Alpine skier who was co-president of the 1992 winter Olympics or his fellow football legend Michel Platini, who helped coordinate the 1998 World Cup. After all, Zidane, arguably the world's best football player, left with a gesture that has no place in any game.

Nevertheless, Zidane will remain a global icon, owing to his profoundly human character and his extreme simplicity. Here is a man who is known in the most hidden corners of the planet, yet he retained the presence and discretion of a silent next-door neighbour. At a moment when integration is being debated in France, Zidane embodied the ideal of success through talent

and hard work – while never betraying himself or his Algerian origins.

Moreover, Zidane incarnated values that seem threatened nowadays but to which ordinary people remain attached: loyalty to family, diligence and cooperation. Here is a man who was not only a world champion, but also a model son and father. The almost timid way in which, after France's victory over Spain, he expressed his love for his mother touched viewers around the world.

To understand Zidane's popularity, one need only set his modesty and attention to others against the arrogance and indifference that characterize the behaviour of so many other celebrities, including football players. At a time when, in France as in the rest of the world, the chasm between the elite and ordinary people has never been so wide, when the smugness of the affluent has never been so cruelly felt by the less fortunate, Zidane, a son of despised immigrants, became an international star and yet

preserved the simplicity of his origins.

For this, Zidane was not only admired but also respected. His success was never to the detriment of others. On the contrary, he is active in causes such as helping sick children. It is obvious that he could one day become a tremendous ambassador of peace, or for children, working with the United Nations or another international organization.

But now the hero has fallen. Zidane was not Superman but a human being. In a single instant of unfathomable fury, his moment of glory was transformed into one of madness and a curse. His tragedy is ultimately a personal one. Nevertheless, it would be a great loss – extending far beyond the world of football – if Zidane's disgraceful exit as a player comes to define his legacy as a man. ●

Pascal Boniface is the Director of the Institute for International and Strategic Relations (IRIS, Paris) and author of Football and Globalisation.

Buried but not beaten

Follow these tips to escape bunkers in few strokes

Most seasoned golfers have a hard time getting the ball out of sand bunkers and simply accept adding a few strokes on every round. You also witness disasters at hardpan greenside bunkers, where even single handicappers suffer simply due to a lack of skills.

From my experience, bunker play is one part of the game that golfers of all skill levels need to work on to improve their scorecard, so today I will share a few ways to hone your bunker play. These should help both seasoned and improving golfers.



TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya

Ideally, most seasoned golfers should expect to get the ball out of the pit, anywhere on the green, in one shot, while more experienced ones should look at putting from good lies and hitting the green even in the most adverse circumstances, such as a buried lie, hardpan surface or a downhill lie.

For almost all of these bunker shots your posture should be similar: draw an imaginary line from the ball to the hole, then place your feet at a 45-degree angle left of the straight line and the clubface 45 degrees right of the line. Take your backswing and follow through along the line of your feet keeping the clubface at the same angle.

Usually the best bunker shots make contact a quarter of an inch behind the ball, which also generates sufficient backspin for control. It is paramount that you don't unhinge your wrist until you make contact with the ball. Players who unhinge their wrists at the start of the backswing remain in the pit even after many attempts.

More experienced golfers should also work on the pace of their swing and the length of their backswing and follow-through so they can control distance and end up close to the cup.



Buried Lie and Hardpan

Too many golfers are too rigid about their club selection when their ball is buried in a sand trap—they prefer sand or even lob wedges (both high lofted clubs) regardless of the lie, which can lead to disaster. All high lofted clubs produce a high bounce, making it extremely difficult to even escape the bunker. For these shots you need to dig more sand so a pitching wedge or even a 9-iron, which produce less loft, are better options. Hitting with these clubs there is no need to close the clubface but make sure you select the club considering the distance of the shot—if more than 30 yards opt for the 9-iron. ●

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

No place like home

Bhutani refugees rebuff third-country resettlement



PICS: SHYAM TEKWANI

SHAILEE BASNET in JHAPA

The office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recently criticised the government for ignoring its repeated appeals to facilitate third-country resettlement of some of the 110,000 Bhutani refugees in camps here since 1990. The government feels such resettlement would set a dangerous precedence for other regions to evict Nepal's and get away with it.

The refugees themselves have mixed feelings, but here at the Khudunabari camp in Jhapa secretary Manoj Rai claims that fewer than 15 percent of the more than 14,000 refugees agree with third-country resettlement, the rest see Bhutan as their ultimate destination.

We asked 24-year-old Thalimaya Basnet who owns a small footwear shop that doesn't make a profit but helps her pass the time. Thalimaya's five-year-old daughter knows her family's address in Bhutan by heart although she was born in the camp. "she keeps talking about going home," says Thalimaya, "if I am going anywhere from here it's to Bhutan."

Hari Adhikari, who just passed his SLC exams with a first division score, is frustrated with refugee life. "We have seen the examples of our seniors, they studied but they can still be found working in the roadside," he says. Binod Gurung and

Dambar Karki, two more of this year's SLC graduates, complain about shrinking facilities.

But no matter how uncertain the future, everyone we spoke to wants to go back to Bhutan. "Our ultimate aim is going back to our home and not just one or two of us but everyone of us, and one day we will," says Binod. Dambar adds, "Only if I study hard now will I be able to serve people when we return."

But the growing hardships of camp life such as fuel shortages have pushed others to contemplate a future outside of their homeland.

James Sunwar says he was driven out of Bhutan because his mother was Indian. Now that he has an Indian wife, the 32-year-old doesn't have much hope of returning to Bhutan and little chance of working as a driver in Nepal because he doesn't have a Nepali license. He is ready to settle in a third country provided he is given citizenship.

Gopal Gurung, 20, used to work as a labourer at construction sites during school vacation to save money for higher studies. But the 'refugee' tag makes it difficult to find even a labour job today and if he does, he is treated badly. "A person without citizenship is like an animal. He can't do anything he wants to even if he has the ability to do it. He is looked down upon by everyone," says Gopal.

NO HOME AWAY FROM HOME: Naramaya Tiwari, 70, remembers the large fields and cattle her family owned in Bhutan. Here in camp, she has to compromise on food, clothing and all other basic needs. Driver James Sunwar says he could drive all sorts of vehicles if only if he could get a Nepali license but lack of citizenship has denied him that opportunity. He learnt watch repairing from Birtamod and has set up a shop at the camp.

Asked about third-country resettlement he gets emotional: "My first love and priority is definitely to return to my motherland but if we are never taken back, we need to be given a certain identity wherever we are made to stay."

Secretary Rai tells us youngsters in the camps are getting restless and a few of them have even joined the Maoists. "If the

Bhutani government doesn't take any positive steps, in some years the youth will rise up, that's for sure."

The only durable solution, adds Rai, lies in returning to Bhutan. "If we move, our relatives will be driven away from Bhutan," he says, "we only want to return to Bhutan, without any categorisation, with dignity and honour." ●

No burning midnight oil

The number of SLC pass at the Khudunabari camp this year dropped to 28 percent. Camp Secretary Manoj Rai says that the 60 percent pass rate of the early years has declined as assistance to the refugees has decreased.

UNHCR has replaced kerosene with briquettes and these can't be used for lighting. As a result, students now cannot study after dark.

"I used to get up at four in the morning to study. I could have scored even higher if there was light in the evening," says Krishna Gurung, who scored first division in this year's exams. Other factors have contributed to the dropping pass percentage, including lack of training for teachers, an increase in the number of students and a decrease in facilities and assistance.

The conflict made it difficult for some organisations to continue supporting the refugees. For some students, education has taken a backseat to whatever work they can get to boost their families' dwindling finances. And even some of those who are studying are frustrated. Gopal Gurung has no choice but to study commerce because he can't afford to study science, his course of choice. Moreover, refugees are not legally permitted to work in Nepal, so there are no jobs for them to take up after studies.

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Can't get away with torture

NARESH NEWAR

Sundar Bista's arms and legs were tied and he was hung from the ceiling. Maoist cadres pounded the soles of his feet until they exhausted themselves, breaking 12 canes in the process. Then they stripped off his clothes and locked the badly injured victim in a small room in a village in Kabhre. The following night, they made Bista walk in the forest in the dark, kicking him in the chest, back and legs when he asked to take rest. After four days of severe torture, Bista was rescued at Narke when he and his captors ran into human rights workers who took him to hospital in Banepa. This incident didn't happen four years ago at the height of the conflict but on 15 June, the day

personnel who had a hand in torture are being released from prisons with de facto immunity. Between July 2001 and April 2006, there were 2,271 reported cases of torture, according to a report by Advocacy Forum. Nearly 1,000 of these were in just 12 months between March 2005 to April 2006, half of these were committed by the police, followed by the military and armed police. About 12 incidents were perpetrated by state-sponsored vigilante groups and 46 by the Maoists, according to the NGO's statistics. Even today, torture is practiced inside detention centres. Advocacy Forum documented around 72 cases of torture in 21 different police detention centres in May this year alone. "Our political leaders and parliamentarians are still unable to

"Otherwise, the perpetrator will keep on torturing knowing full well that he will not have to serve any punishment," says Rameswar Nepal from Amnesty International. Activists are pushing the Interim Constitution Drafting Committee to incorporate a new law in the document that categorises torture as a crime. But the government and Maoists have ignored the issue fearing that such a law would only hurt them. "This kind of response from the parties and Maoists is disturbing as both are focused only on violations during the king's rule," says advocate Mandira Sharma of Advocacy Forum. Experts say the priority should be to develop a legal framework in the constitution



Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai were in the capital meeting the prime minister for peace talks. Bista's crime was allegedly stealing Rs200 from his cousin, a Maoist cadre. Bista doesn't want revenge, but justice. And thousands of other victims of torture by both sides also seek justice for their suffering. Rights activists are concerned that the seven party government, like previous regimes, is letting torturers go scot-free. Nor have the Maoists responded to the voices of victims who they tortured, traumatised, maimed and killed. "Nobody, neither state or non-state should get immunity by any mechanism on the pretext of the ongoing peace negotiations," says Shailendra Guragain from the Centre for Victims of Torture. Many Maoists and security

consider torture as a major issue," explains Guragain. Torture is still not a crime in Nepal despite this country having signed the UN Convention Against Torture. Victims rarely receive justice, and to win a case they have to fight a legal battle for at least five years but even then, they are unlikely to get compensation. Fewer than 20 percent of the 115 cases filed by CVICT were tried by the courts, proving that torture is not a priority for the judiciary either. About 1,000 cases have been filed country-wide but only a few victims have received compensation. Even if compensation is given (the maximum award is Rs 100,000) the convicted torturer still does not have to pay a penny, the burden is on the state. Activists are demanding that torturers be made to contribute.

Torture is still not a crime in Nepal despite this country having signed the UN convention against it

and a human rights act that would categorise which violations are crimes. Other issues would include the types of remedies needed for past violations, punishment for convicted torturers and victim compensation. Using a truth commission only as a confessional for the guilty would be inadequate, says Sharma. Very strong laws would need to be drafted to prevent future violations. The UN's Office of the High Commission for Human Rights has held workshops about transitional justice. "But at the end of the day, Nepalis must develop their own approach to address past human rights violations, achieve accountability and end a cycle of impunity," says Kieran Dwyer of OHCHR in Nepal. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Diaspora democracy

How to make sure Nepalis living away from their homes also get a chance to vote in future elections

With more than 10 percent of Nepalis now living outside Nepal at any given time, experts say future elections will have to take into account overseas voters. The first test of this could be the election for an assembly to draft a new constitution which could take place early next year. Allowing Nepalis outside Nepal to vote may not be as easy as it seems because there are no accurate figures regarding Nepalis living abroad. There is a large population of migrant workers in India who don't stay in one place and there are tens of thousands of Nepalis staying illegally in east Asia and Europe. In addition, there are anywhere up to 200,000 internally displaced within Nepal who will also need to vote. On the plus side, there are Nepali experts who have conducted UN supervised elections in Iraq, Afghanistan, Cambodia and East Timor and have experience in diaspora voting. "It will be a first in Nepali history, but it can be done," says Naresh Bhatta, who has worked in Kosovo and most recently as an electoral operation adviser in Iraq. "The right to vote is a basic human right, we must give everyone the chance even if they don't live in their home." Electoral experts also see a great need to educate voters, especially for the constituent assembly elections. A recent poll showed only a quarter of Nepalis may actually understand the purpose of such an election. And if the constituent assembly election happens without the Maoists agreeing to decommission their arms, many internally displaced people may not go back to their home villages. A mechanism must be found to allow them to vote. Last month, the Geneva-based International Organisation on Migration (IOM) sent an assessment team to Nepal to look into the political rights of Nepal's internally displaced and refugees. The team's action plan recommends that the political forces balance the need for keeping the peace process moving forward with the recognition that the constituent assembly election will need planning and a realistic timeframe. Speaking at a meeting in Geneva earlier this month's IOM's director general Brunson McKinley said: "Maintaining a focus on all the people of Nepal including those displaced by conflict is essential for the future stability of Nepal." Bhatta and his team say besides worries about disenfranchisement of the internally displaced and migrant workers, there is a need to keep the ceasefire and political transition on track. Citizenship and electoral mechanisms for the constituent assembly polls, including constituencies, must be ironed out. Then there are the nitty-gritties: voter registration, voter IDs, voter education and balloting. "We have seen from other countries that with careful planning and enough time it can be done," says Bhatta. "The trouble is we know who went abroad to work but we're not sure about who came back. Out-of-country voting will be a challenge." ●

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Little known World Cup trivia: over 38,000 feet have run up and down a WC field since the games began in 1930 - source: FIFA Book of World Cup Records.

HEROJIG'S WORLD CUP 2006
by JIGME GATON



World Cup 2006 NY-NEWS FLASH!

The Deutsche Daily of Berlin reports that despite heavy monsoon flooding in the Dolakha district of Nepal, families refused to evacuate during the Germany vs. Italy Semi-Final game. Instead, Nepalis choose to enjoy the game and a foot wash. Local VDC officials went on record as "Hailing the Nepalese Spirit, proving to the world that FIFA should hold the 2010 World Cup games here in Nepal."

See all the Adventures of your favorite Nepali characters at www.extreme-nepal.com or right here each Friday.



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Pillars of Hope** paintings by Gobinda Prasad Sah 'Azad' at Siddhartha Art Gallery till 20 July. 4218018
- ❖ **Innovative Art** by Sri Lankan painter Deneth at New Orleans Café, Thamel, till 20 July. 9803002631
- ❖ **Colours of Life** an exhibition by various Nepali artists at Hotel Glacier, Pokhara till 10 August.
- ❖ Impressions of Manang, 10-12 September. Nepal Tourism Board

EVENTS

- ❖ **Travelling Film South Asia '06, Kathmandu** fifteen outstanding documentaries from the Subcontinent, 14-16 July at Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 5537408
- ❖ **Bagmati River Festival** till 20 August. 5011013
- ❖ **Dark to Light** drama and concert by people with disabilities at 1905 Kantipath, 15 July, 4-7PM. www.lights.org.np
- ❖ **Discussion with Samrat Upadhaya** at the British Council, 5PM, 16 July. 4410798
- ❖ **Bowl for a cause** a charity event, 29 July . 661666
- ❖ **Sunsilk Nepal Fashion Week** at Hotel Hyatt Regency 10-14 August.
- ❖ **Alcoholics Anonymous** problems with alcohol? 9851016079
- ❖ **Martin Chautari Aaitabare Discussion. Topic - Towards a Democratic Nepal: Discussion on Constituent Assembly and the Restructuring of the Nepali State. Speaker - Mahendra Lawoti.** 16 July 3 pm.
- ❖ **Martin Chautari Youth Discussion. Topic - Rolpa, Millenium Development Goals and Our Experience. Speaker - Sampad Jamerkatterel.** 21 July, 3 pm.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Kutumba** featuring Raman, Sunit and Mica at Siddhartha Art Gallery , Lagankhel. 22 July, 5 PM, Rs. 100. 9851065064
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM at Upstairs.
- ❖ **Live Music** at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- ❖ **Uncork the good times** with Ciney and Par-e-jat playing every Friday from 7PM at Fusion bar at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479448
- ❖ **Jatra Friday** nights, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622
- ❖ **Trance Tantra Series** - the latest club anthems from around the world. Saturday 15 July, 7 PM onwards. Tantra, Thamel.

DINING

- ❖ **Masterpiece menu** at The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La Hotel. 4412999
- ❖ **Mezza and Margarita** at Dwarika's Fusion- the bar every Wednesday, Rs 555
- ❖ **Eden Lounge Bar** happy hour 3-7PM, buy one get one free cocktails. 6th floor, Kathmandu Mall, Sundhara.
- ❖ **Mango Masti** at all restaurants in Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Traditional cuisines** at Patan Museum Café. 5526271
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** at Godavari Village Resort, a special package of Swimming & Lunch. 5560675
- ❖ **Speical budget lunches** at Rum Doodle Bar and Restaurant. 4226138
- ❖ **Breakfast** at Singma Restaurant. 8.30 – 11AM daily. 5009092.



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- ❖ **Junglewalks** rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Conferences & Workshops** conference facilities at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Park Village**, Budhanilkantha, Full room Rs 1,600. 4375280
- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Escape to Godavari Village Resort**, an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5560675

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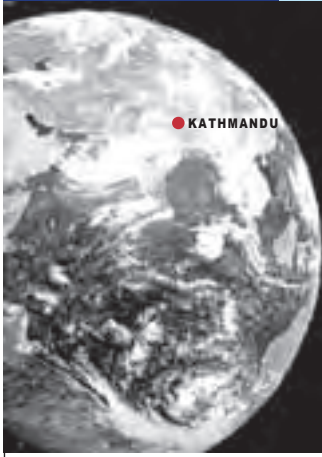


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NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED



Most met stations across the country recorded heavy precipitation this week because of a monsoon pulse from the southeasterly arm of monsoon. Some foothill stations like Dharan and Simra received storms and rainfall of 100 mm within 24 hours. A powerful low pressure zone over central Tibet seems to dominate the current weather feature which is making it possible for copious moisture to move up from the bay of Bengal. This satellite picture from Thursday morning shows more clouds massing up along the Siwaliks producing orographic rain (rain produced by rising clouds along hills). These squalls move up into the midhills every evening and night. Expect more rains over the weekend, mostly at night and less hot days although it will still be very sticky.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri 29-19	Sat 30-20	Sun 30-20	Mon 31-19	Tue 31-21
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FIRST STEPS: Prime Minister Girija Koirala leaves Sahid Ganga Lal Memorial Hospital on Wednesday.



BIG GULP: Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat refreshes his parched throat during his two-hour budget speech in parliament on Wednesday.



ROUND TABLE: Industrialists, bankers, planners and academics at a post-budget discussion organised by Himalmedia on Thursday. (See p1)



THE OLD AND THE NEW: A dancer checks his mobile phone during a cultural show at Durbar Marg to celebrate King Gyanendra's birthday on Friday.



WHIRL OF RED: Eight women perform the Astha Matrika Charya Dance at Rimal Natakghar, Gurukul, on Sunday.

Marvelous Marmelous

It is said that whatever is good for you doesn't taste good and whatever is tasty is bad for health. Not so with bel juice.

The bel fruit grows wild in Nepal's tarai forests and has been used in traditional ayurvedic medicine. Now, community forestry groups are collecting the fruit and turning it into a tasty health drink.

Unlike most non-government development initiatives however, the bel juice industry is run and marketed like a multinational cola with flashy posters, a retail network throughout Nepal and also an export initiative. The product is marketed as Marmelous and the name is derived from bel's Latin name: *Aegele marmelos*.

"We used to see the forest littered with rotting bel and decided to turn it into an income-generating activity for the villagers," says Gobinda Ghimire of Alternative Herbal Products, a private company that markets Marmelous

development.

The initiative started with seed money from German aid group GTZ and has transformed livelihoods wherever it has spread. Besides bel, communities also sell forest products like butter tree, millet and grass for broom-making. Alternative Herbal Products has increased capacity to produce 70,000 bottles of bel concentrate a year and soon wants to expand that to 500,000 bottles.

Says Prem Bohara, 52, in Saptari: "The bel in the forest used to just rot and turn into compost, now we all go into the forest collecting the fruit and selling it. Bel has given us a

new future."

Ghimire says there are large parts of the tarai forests where bel is still not collected and the project could easily be scaled up nationwide. The fruit has traditionally been used as an offering to Shiva and is believed to be good for the digestive system, the heart and memory.

Restaurants in Kathmandu offer bel juice and at Dhokaima Café in Patan you can even order a bel juice cocktail: Nepal Libre. ●

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and herbal teas in Nepal and abroad.

The company uses fair trade mechanisms to cut middlemen and ensure a commercially viable business selling forest products so benefits go directly to community forest user groups and farmers in Siraha, Saptari and Udayapur.

Says Ghimire, "The beauty of it is that everyone benefits. The farmer is paid Rs 6 for every kilo, the community forest user group get Rs 2 for every kilo and consumers benefit because they become healthier."

Indeed, an average farmer in Saptari can now make up to Rs 600 a day in the bel fruit season and the local forest user group earns Rs 300,000 a year just in royalties from bel harvests which it uses for community



Ten good reasons to leave Nepal now

However much you love your country, there comes a time in everyone's life when they have to leave for more salubrious climes. You have to take the bull by its horns or, as they say in the trade, hoist yourself up by your own petard.

We have grass in Nepal, and you know as well as I do that it's good stuff, but the weed always looks greener on the other side. We understand why you want to go and can only wish you godspeed, happy grazing and bid tearful adieu with the words: "Good riddance."

So, since space is a bit limited this week due to commercial encroachment, let's not waste time beating needlessly around the bush and plunge headfirst into ten reasons we think we should all get the hell out of here:

1 The World Cup is over so there is no longer any justification at all to drive erratically, get to work late nursing a hangover, and give the boss a headbutt.

2 The ceasefire looks like it is here to stay which means the only excitement left for us revolutionaries is to non-violently bash up night shift doctors and nurses at Patan Hospital, vandalise the windscreens of all pressure horn-equipped Sajha buses on the Ring Road and block traffic at Battisputali for two hours because this stubborn industrialist's wife refused to allow us to paint graffiti on her gate.

3 Now that the monarchy is not absolute anymore and the comrades are smiling for group portraits with senior functionaries of the Hotel Association of Nepal we may actually have to get to work rebuilding the country.

4 They're making it impossible for us wilful defaulters to live with dignity and flaunt our wealth, how can one live in a country that doesn't respect one's can-do attitude to take someone else's money and run?

5 There are no more antiques to smuggle out so one may as well follow the artefacts one spirited out of the country in the past and become a museum exhibit oneself.

6 A man has to go when a man has to go.

7 There is just too much petty corruption, and not enough major kickbacks, graft and grand larceny on large infrastructure projects to make it worthwhile anymore.

8 Oh dear, the budget has just raised taxes again on beer, pan parag, auto parts and marbles.

9 To take a bath.

10 The Public Accounts Committee of parliament wants to recover money distributed to us journalists by the royal regime but we've spent it all on pan parag already. Bye.



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