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Pustalcardak, Kathmandu, Tel: 4438877, E-mail: orbit@orbit.edu.com
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Weekly Internet Poll # 313

Q. What is your opinion about the role of the civil society during the current political discourse in Nepal?

Total votes: 3,258

Positive	35.4%
Somewhat Positive	17.8%
Somewhat Negative	10.6%
Negative	32.4%
Don't know	3.8%

Weekly Internet Poll # 314. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should the king appear before the Rayamajhi Commission?



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JOMSOM TRAFFIC COPS: Trekkers arriving in Jomsom this week from Thorung La were surprised to be greeted by these two smart traffic policemen on duty, Havaladar Durga Kunwar (left) and Havaladar Raju Subedi. Even though there is no road joining the capital of Mustang district with Tibet or Baglung yet, there are 125 motorcycles and 16 tractors in Jomsom. Fuel is transported by mule. There are no traffic jams yet, you can park anywhere you want, and the main traffic offence is speeding. Jomsom had its first traffic accident earlier this year when a tractor fell into the Kali Gandaki, killing two people.



SANTOSH SHERCHAN

All in a day's work

Not much has changed for Nepali overseas labour since 1 September 2004

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

On the evening of 31 August 2004, news broke of the murder of 12 Nepalis held hostage in Iraq by the terrorist group Ansar-al-Sunna. Normally, rioting stops when night falls. But the vandalism and attacks went on late that night and resumed early the next morning.

By the time curfew was imposed at 2PM, 286 of Kathmandu's 485 overseas employment agencies were

destroyed and suffered Rs750 million in damages. Although only one person was reportedly killed, 355 offices, airlines, businesses and media houses had been vandalised. The Jame Masjid was ransacked, and smoke rose from burning tyres all across the city.

Although outrage at the murders and vendetta against recruiters was blamed, it is now clear that all kinds of political forces including the parties, the Maoists, and the royalists were blamed for the organised rioting.

But an underlying reason continues to be ignored: two years after the mayhem, no government body is still actually responsible for the hundreds of thousands of Nepalis who work overseas and prop up the economy.

No one even knows for sure exactly how many Nepalis work abroad, or how much money they send back. There is only piecemeal legislation regulating foreign employment. As the recent crisis in Lebanon showed again, there is no backup for Nepali workers overseas.

Manpower agencies often make dodgy deals with foreign employers, or fleece aspiring workers

Editorial p2
The vision thing

leave the **Interview** p11
country. **Japanese ambassador**

Many are dumped at Doha or Kuala Lumpur airport when they get there.

Full story **p4**

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October revolutions

Parallels between Russia 1917 and Nepal 2006

MOSCOW—The striking resemblance of contemporary Nepal to the October 1917 coup in Russia offers insight into Comrade Pushpa Kamal Dahal's talk of a 'October Revolution'.

Just like the Maoists, civil society and the seven party alliance, the main demand of Russian political parties, intelligentsia and Bolsheviks ever since World War I started in 1914 was for a constituent assembly. King Nicholas II was unpopular



GUEST COLUMN
Jugal Bhurtel

after he dissolved the State Duma in 1906 and during the war, protests over food shortages turned into a full-fledged anti-monarchy revolt. Ignoring the Tsar, the Duma chose a provisional government represented by middle class liberals while worker councils (or Soviets) dominated mainly by Bolsheviks took over local governance. In March 1917, with the Tsar's abdication, the three-century reign of the Romanov dynasty came to an end.

Dethroning an unpopular king was surprisingly easy in a

country where 'God, Tsar and Russia' was a time-honoured formula of statecraft. However, preventing the country from sliding towards anarchy after that proved more difficult. Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, social democrats, and former royalists intensified their struggle for power targeting the constituent assembly election scheduled for November the same year.

The Bolsheviks had a strategic advantage as the workers and soldiers' councils had the local governments under control.

The central government was weak, local governance lay in tatters. On the eve of the October coup, an impatient Lenin asked his comrades to recognise that "an armed people's struggle is the only remaining option left to achieve our goal or else disappear into political oblivion". Then with Trotsky, he organised a spontaneous storming of the Winter Palace which housed the provisional government.

The Soviet of Workers and Soldiers Deputies set about nationalising land and replacing the old judiciary with people's tribunals. A flurry of laws designed to tame the national army were passed. But the Bolsheviks needed to legitimise their coup and the constituent assembly election offered a favourable opportunity. Their initial reluctance to consider peasants as 'proletariat' and the image of being led by workers undermined their position.

They won only 25 percent of the seats, while liberal democrats and moderate socialists had a majority in the assembly. Lenin rejected the verdict, declaring the Soviet of

Workers' and Soldiers' Council the supreme authority, higher than any constituent assembly, saying: "All power to the Soviets." The Bolsheviks dissolved the assembly after a one-and-half day session.

The system finally crumbled in 1990, but not before more than 40 million people had died in war, repression and famine.

The Russian experience shows that with careful application of land, peace and local government any spontaneous revolution is possible as long the urban presence is strong. Just as workers and soldiers councils, Maoists have local *jana sarkars* to implement their agenda.

The seven party alliance's vacillation on the status of the defunct monarchy must have further encouraged Dahal. Civil society street protests provide the Maoists a much-needed urban platform. Kathmandu is fetooned with Maoist banners this week that read '*Sampurna shakti krantikari jana parishad ma*' similar to Lenin's 'all power to the Soviets'.

Nevertheless, Russia in 1917 did not have mass-based political parties like the Nepali Congress which is able to resist the extreme left despite being targetted in the past 10 years. Hence, despite Dahal's repeated threats of an *Oktober kranti* political parties and the NC in particular will continue to remain the biggest deterrent. The Russian experience proves that democratic forces and especially the two factions of the NC must strive for lasting unity. ●

jugal@yahoo.com

THE VISION THING

Sanduk Ruit was born in Olangchungola, an area so deprived and remote that the nearest school was a week's walk away. There were no health posts, and Ruit's sister died of TB when he was 17.

That painful loss convinced the young Ruit to go into medicine. With hard work and perseverance he completed medical school in India and returned to Nepal. Working on the Nepal Blindness Survey in 1980 brought him in touch with his Australian mentor, Fred Hollows. As Hollows' protégé, Ruit found his mission in life: to make Nepalis see again.

The doctor faced resistance from the medical establishment and fellow eye surgeons in Kathmandu. But Ruit took that and government inefficiency as givens. He asked himself: what can I do despite the government, how can I bypass the naysayers?

Hollows taught Ruit the latest cataract micro-surgery technique using implanted intraocular lenses. But Ruit also learnt a sense of service, and decided to take his knowledge to the poorest of the poor. He walked across the remotest regions of Nepal conducting eye camps, restoring the sights of tens of thousands of people.

Often, elderly cataract patients would burst into tears when they saw their children again after many years. Ruit was innovating all the time, trying to reduce infections and invented a suture-less procedure that made surgery and recovery quicker.

He opened the Tilganga Eye Centre in 1994 and this has become the primary eye-care facility in Nepal, managing six centres across the country. In Kathmandu, Tilganga treats 3,000 patients a week and surgery fees are waived for the neediest. At the nearby Pashupati cremation site, Tilganga runs an eye collection centre for retinal transplants from donors.

Tilganga manufactures high-quality intraocular lenses and has exported over 1.5 million of them all over the world. Ruit himself is now better known outside Nepal than here, having taken cataract camps to North Korea, Tibet, Cambodia, Ethiopia and Bangladesh.

On Thursday, Ruit received the Ramon Magsaysay Award for 2006 in Manila from the Philippines president. In its citation, the Magsaysay Foundation said Ruit was recognised for placing Nepal at the forefront of developing safe, effective, and economical procedures for cataract surgery, enabling the needlessly blind in even the poorest countries to see again.

If sometimes we feel hopeless about our country's future we just need to look at the work of visionary Nepalis like Ruit. They didn't sit around and complain about getting no help from government, or just talk about injustice, order people around and pontificate about how things should be.

There are many Sanduk Ruits in Nepal, and we often feature them in these pages: people who work quietly and selflessly with their only reward being a sense of inner fulfilment that their work has improved the lives of neediest Nepalis.

We are glad Sanduk Ruit's work was recognised abroad, and hope it will inspire Nepalis in other fields to become like him.



DDR, SSR, RRR and the SPA

Let's oppose all foreign interference except the UN's

The conflict tourism season is well underway.

Foreigners have found that their expertise in dispensing gratuitous advice is in high demand here.

John Parr and Chris Goostrey from the British Ministry of Defence passed through purportedly at the



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

invitation of our own security establishment. Two more of their colleagues have arrived at the behest of the United States Institute of Peace, a body that claims to promote, well, peace. Ann Fitzgerald and Gordon Hughes are academicians-strategists, the kind who specialise in manufacturing consent for clients.

They join US security experts

apparently already in Kathmandu to train the Nepali Army on how to run a écivil military campaigní, a euphemism for propaganda warfare.

Such missions are usually hush-hush, but they're already having an impact on the capital's seminar circuit. At Chez Caroline's you often hear the word iDDRí wafting in from adjoining tables. Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration has become the flavour of the month. The in-thing is to deplore Maoist donation drives, support the restored parliament and dismiss calls for a political accommodation of the insurgents. iThey must disarm first,í is the battle cry.

Before his departure, Congressman Jim Kolbe repeated what Senator Arlen Specter had said earlier: iUS laws would not allow the US government to provide financial assistance to Nepal if the

Maoists are included in the government with their weapons.í

Yet, it's the combatants that the government should worry about, not their weapons. And to address the issue of their rehabilitation, a mutually agreeable political settlement is the primary condition. The seven-party alliance leaders seem to have failed to convey this convincingly to high-profile foreign visitors. If the peace process flounders, western embassies will once again dispatch non-essential staff to Thailand. That will leave the rest of us who must live or die here to set our own priorities.

Our ruling political parties are restrained, by diplomacy and economic pressure, from raising their voices against important donor countries. So it's up to civil society to oppose unwarranted international meddling. But given the composition of the Nepali civil

society (mainly bahuns, all male, mostly western-educated, largely donor-dependent, and almost exclusively upper crust) it's unlikely that they will spit on the very hand that feeds them. That leaves us with the hyperactive muckrakers of the civic movement. Unfortunately, they too seem to have their priorities mixed up.

Activists have every right to caution the government and rebel group about the pitfalls of delaying the constituent assembly elections. But after a point, disparaging the ceremonial monarchy ad nauseum, denigrating political party leaders, needling rebels, and vilifying the security forces become irritating.

The Disparage, Denigrate, and Ridicule the monarchy agenda of the civic movement activists is as trite as the donor DDR. Activists must come up with fresh ideas to clean up the mess. One could be unequivocal opposition of all

foreign interference, other than that by the UN in the ongoing peace process.

Fortunately, Ian Martin knows the limitations of outsiders in armed conflicts as entrenched as the Maoist insurgency. Short-term consultants on lucrative assignments will only be making his job difficult by dropping another acronym heard commonly these days during lunch break at Baber Mahal, iSSRí (Security Sector Reform).

All that we need from bilateral donors is their assistance in the 3Rs of economic revivaló Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Reinvigoration of physical infrastructure. Since not a paisa of promised US assistance is meant for any of those purposes, there is no fear of losing it if we accommodate the Maoists in the government on our own terms, rather than those of US diplomats, congressmen or senators. ●

LETTERS

BAD GAMBLE

CK Lal (ēThis way or that?í, #312) wrongly implies that King Gyanendra decided to seize power on February 1, 2005 because he ēbegan listening to [me] and gambled on [my] supportí. This interpretation stands the facts on their head.

†Long before 1 February, 2005, I told the King that any attempt by him to seize power would be a serious mistake and would do great damage to Nepal. I further told him that my government would not support, and instead would condemn, any such move on his part. The King ignored this advice.

†On the day he seized power, the United States declared it was ideeply troubledí by the Kingís move, which it called ía step back from democracy.í Two weeks later, the State Department recalled me to the United States to show our governmentís displeasure. The Kingís action was indeed a bad gamble, but neither my government nor I ever encouraged it.

James F Moriarty,
US Ambassador

● You have either woken up to the fact of tyre power (Editorial, #312) a little too late or you have wilfully chosen to neglect the issue until it worked in your favour. I would have loved to see you denounce it sooner when the streets were filled with calls for free press or democracy. Then you kept quiet, and now you say†things need to follow process and policy.†The present democratic government is a result of street power, not by ballot or due process. If I remember correctly, it was fully supported by the media. Were you placing your bet on the very short memory of us Nepalis?

Rahul Shrestha, email

● The profits of the international petroleum products price hike goes directly to the Arab world and the US multinational companies. The government should heavily tax imported petroleum products and then spend the income for developing indigenous alternative power resources.

Shree Om Prakash,
Hetauda

● Baburam Bhattarai in the interview you translated from a tv show says he never killed anyone (ēRevolution from citiesí, #312), but perhaps the guruji would like to explain how he is guiltless of exploiting the frustrations of the young who, having grown up with a series of governments that squabbled instead of planning for the young job market, were quite willing, and angry enough, to take up arms. All they needed was a Brahmin to tell them who was to blame and where to point the gun.

K A Tamang
Middlesborough

● There goes Baburam Bhattarai again justifying violence and the needless

deaths of 14,000 Nepalis. His comment in the *Bahas* show íPeople would have died anywayí is callous and insensitive.

Gyan Subba, Kumaripati

● I am not sure if Baburam Bhattarai is joking, lying or if he is plain foolish. But one thing seems to be very clear: he and his comrade Prachanda have not learnt anything from history. As a former citizen of the ex-German ēDemocraticí Republic, I have heard these theories for 30 years. I know the former eastern European communist countries, the so-called ēPeopleís Republicí of Laos, Cuba and some African countries very well. But even the leaders of those countries donít have the nerve to say that they will turn their countries into Switzerland. These countries were ruled or are still under the predominance of communists, Marxist-Leninists, Stalinists or Maoists for decades. and up to now there are no Swiss living

conditions, full employment, equal rights, freedom of speech or other democratic fundamental rights. Instead there is widespread poverty, oppression,

the now-defunct interim constitution drafting committee is spoilt broth. ēIf you try to please all, you please noneí is a good adage for this sensitive issue. If things go this way, what can we expect out of the all-inclusive new interim government, much talked-about alternate legislature and the constituent assembly? Itís high time our leaders stopped listening to the Moriartys and Yechurys. The only solution is national reconciliation.

P Sharma, Mumbai†

myself, I feel I have to speak up for the soldiers who are doing so much for the people without getting a word of encouragement. I wonít disagree that the Nepal Army has violated human rights on several occasions but havenít the PLA always violated them? The very Maoists who have terrorised the entire country are now made heroes while the Nepal Army is the culprit.†The merger of the two is out of the question.

Agya Khand, email



contempt of human rights, and torture. So Baburam, do your country and millions of ignorant Nepalis a favour: start telling them the truth.

B Mueller, Germany

● The draft statute submitted by

WHOSE ATROCITIES?

Hari Roka (ēSwitching campsí, #311) seems to be offended by the Nepal Army for no apparent reason in his op-ed you translated from *Kantipur*. He says ēthe crimes and atrocities committed by the army is plentyí. Why does Mr Roka not mention the crimes of the ēPeopleís Liberation Armyí? The Nepal Army represents the entire country unlike the Maoist army and just follows the orders of a legitimate government. Belonging to an army family

BAREFOOT DOCTOR

Thank you for introducing us to†Panchtharís wonderful district health officer (ēBarefoot doctorí, #312).†General practitioners like Gunaraj Lohani are ideal for rural Nepal, where a doctor is compelled to be an all rounder, wielding the scalpel and helping mothers during delivery, treating children and the aged.†All Nepal needs is more committed doctors like Lohani.

Rupesh Jaiswal, email

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Three-way trust

Resolving intractable conflict boils down to one simple term: trust-building. Building trust between the various sides is what Ian Martin's new UN mission will be doing for the foreseeable future. The task ahead is difficult for many reasons. The Maoist militia is one. The intent of the palace and army intention is another. Do-good but ignorant donors could also add to the complexities involved.

But spoilers can emerge from among us too. Unintended consequences of good intentions (partisan pressure from civil society, for example) and ignorance among the seven parties of the mechanics of negotiations could be just as disruptive. The history of conflict resolution is littered with examples of innocent players unknowingly derailing the process. The immediate difficulties though lie in two key areas: little trust in the government's negotiating team, and almost non-existent civil-military relations.

Sitaula's failing tightrope:
The first difficulty is right near the top, in home minister and chief government negotiator Krishna Prasad Sitaula. His job requires good personal relations with his Maoist counterpart Krishna Bahadur Mahara. The two Krishnas have, by all accounts, developed a good partnership. But this is also eroding Sitaula's base within his own party and the alliance. More importantly, he has alienated powerful members of Prime Minister Koirala's inner



MEANWHILE
Suman Pradhan

circle. Many see him as giving away too much to the Maoists without proper discussion. He had a difficult job to begin with. It's even harder now because Maoist militia are intent on wrecking the notion of law and order, his primary task as Home Minister. He seems a nice person, but lacks the maturity to do this tightrope walk, says an experienced peace adviser, he is losing his base.

This perception is undercutting Sitaula's authority with the Maoists, who have gained concessions at his expense. A recent example, critics say, is the UN-brokered agreement which gave the Maoists what they wanted: confinement of the Nepal Army within barracks and no separation of Maoist arms from their PLA. It won't be surprising if Sitaula ends up as the fall guy in the near future.

Maoists will take the government seriously only if it is backed by a strong army

Civil-military relations:
All sides dread negotiating from a position of weakness. For the seven parties this is even tougher because they already suffer from being perceived as lacking full control over the Nepal Army. Worse, many politicians also lack knowledge of the mechanics of conflict resolution, particularly the fact that arms and weapons do have a role in finding a political settlement.

Despite repeated army proclamations of loyalty to the civilian government, the alliance's hold is still tenuous. Nothing has changed as far as the army is concerned, says a foreign conflict analyst, it's still doing what it wants, as it wants.

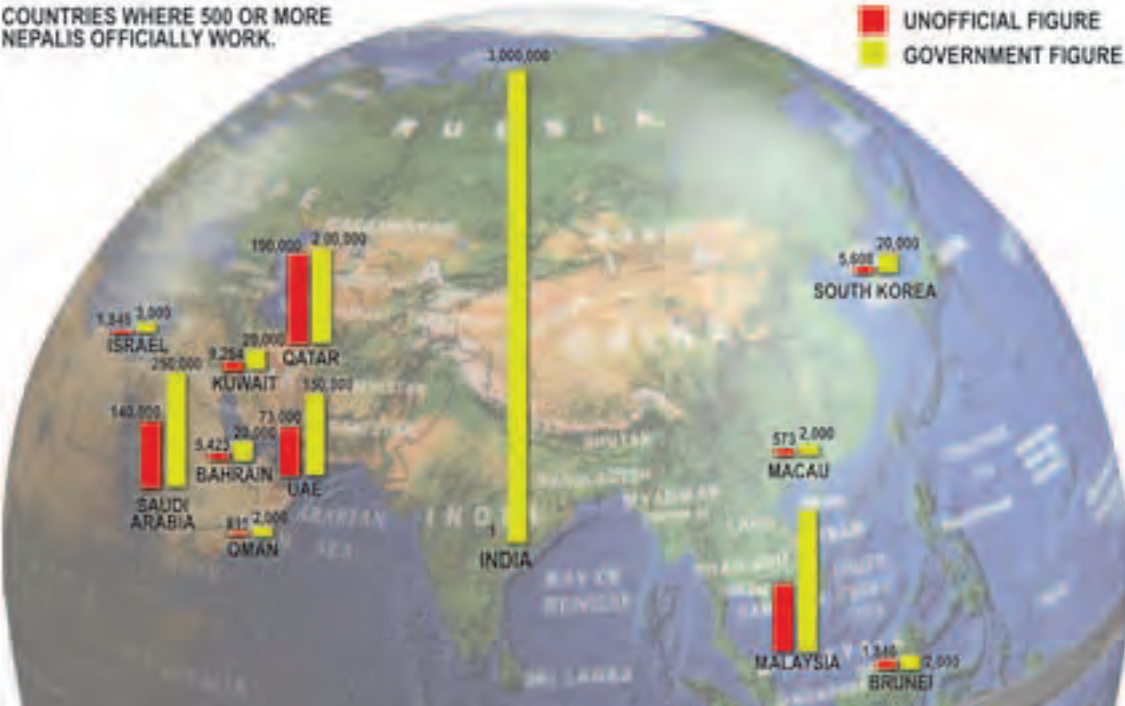
That may not be wholly true, as human rights violations and disappearances by the army have dwindled in the last four months. But the army still acts with impunity and is intent on protecting its way of life. Right now, that translates into protecting its chain of command, budgets and lucrative UN peace-keeping operations. A smart government can leverage these wants into cooperation and loyalty. But to do this, it must begin by listening to the army.

The chain of command army officers talk about do not necessarily include the king, they say. It means the generals at the top. We will abide by the constitutional arrangements, says a top army general. But the politicians will be playing with fire if they remove one general for another, much like they have done with the police. There will be a revolt in the army if the chain of command is touched.

This indicates a degree of vulnerability in the army's ranks so the recipe for a military coup. Asked if a military takeover is possible in this transition phase, another senior army officer says: Whatever the politicians do, they must not make the army feel vulnerable and threatened. I may not do anything, but how can I guarantee that some aggrieved or ambitious officer down the line won't?

Given the domestic and international situation and the complete loss of UN peace-keeping dollars if a coup were to be launched, this is probably a bluff. But there is a message to the seven party government: durable peace can only be attained through a political settlement. But for that it needs a loyal and strong army. But to get a loyal army though, you need to build trust. The Maoists will take the government seriously only if it is backed by a strong army.

The challenge now is how to build trust with an army that has historically served a regressive monarchy? Our chances of peace rest on finding an answer to this question. ●



“If you close the door they will leave through the window.”

-Saru Joshi, UNIFEM

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

There are now anywhere between 3.5 million and 4.5 million Nepalis working abroad, no one knows for sure. They send back up to \$1 billion to Nepal every year, but no one has an exact count. Every day of this week, 500 Nepalis left for jobs overseas.

It has kept Nepali economy, torn apart by 12 years of insurgency, from collapse. Recent World Bank figures show a 10 percentage point drop in poverty, from 42 to 32 percent, despite the conflict, and the decline is attributed to remittances.

But the government treats overseas employment as a safety valve and seems only too glad to see the workers go. There is little effort to encourage better earning potential through training, to regulate the industry and to stop exploitation by unscrupulous recruiters here and abroad.

The government's apathy is seen in the woeful lack of statistics. Although there are anywhere up to three million Nepalis working in India at any given time, government records show only one Nepali officially working there. The joke is that it is Manisha Koirala.

The Labour Ministry says that going by the papers it processes over 500 Nepalis leave the country

every day for employment elsewhere. But official records show only 175,000 having left in 2004/05. Similarly, while official records show a million Nepalis working and living in India, Ganesh Gurung, who has researched foreign employment for some years, says that the real figure is over three million.

“When the war between Israel and Lebanon started, the government called on manpower agencies to see how many Nepalis were in the region, but could not get the numbers. Much later our estimates showed over 5,000 Nepalis living and working there,” says Gurung.

But the industry is vulnerable to instability in West Asia, on suddenly policy changes of foreign government. An attack on overseas workers causes fear and insecurity among those who aspire to work abroad and those who live off family members' remittances.

The standard response to the killing of 12 Nepalis in Iraq in September 2004 or the exploitation of female domestic workers is a blanket ban. But this doesn't stop the workers from taking the India route.

Saru Joshi, UNIFEM's South Asia Program coordinator, says, “If you close the door, they will leave through the window, if you close the window, they will dig

an underground tunnel to leave, there is no stopping those who leave to escape unemployment.”

The government and agents need to jointly initiate programs on overseas employment and understand the framework in which the labour market operates, she says.

Even problems right in Nepal are not being fixed. Manpower agencies continue to take advantage of the loopholes in Nepal's laws, and many who try to leave for a better life overseas end up losing their land, home, and life savings to agency fees. “People take loans with up to 37 percent interest rate to leave the country, when they start working abroad they are not paid enough so they end up with debt,” says Sagar Nepal, vice president of Non Resident Nepali Association (NRNA). There is no follow-up from any side about the living conditions of overseas workers. Says Hafij Khan of Prism Employment Overseas, “The government is too busy sending Nepalis abroad and labour ministry is too busy collecting remittance.”

The foreign employment industry, in ruins after the riots, is limping back to life. But overseas labour will remain a potential flashpoint, until the contribution of foreign employment to the Nepali economy is not institutionalised. ●



1 September 2004

KIRAN PANDAY



Nepali workers at Bahrain airport

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

Oily ruckus

Disband NOC and make way for the private sector

Much adulterated fuel has been dispensed through the fuel pumps since this weekly broke the story of corruption at the oil corporation five years ago (‘Nepal Oil Corruption’, #19). The Beed

 **ECONOMIC SENSE**
Artha Beed

has kept prodding this issue (‘Oil yo-yo’ in #139, ‘Mixing oil and money’ in #185, and ‘Fuel for fear’ in #262). The media is focusing entirely on how the poor will suffer from a price hike and the vandalism that followed the sudden increment. But there’s more to this particular price hike.

First, oil like vegetables or fruits is a commodity in the market. Global prices are swayed by demand and supply and geo-politics. For Nepal our fixed currency exchange rate with India means our prices fluctuate with the Indian market, and prices are hardly ever declining. (See page 6,7). By selling oil here at lower prices than in India, we are giving our business people an opportunity to bring in vacant tankers into Nepal while the precious oil is already emptied in India. This has opened up the jerkin economy where people load fuel products into jerry cans and peddle them across the border. The primary objective should be price parity both in Nepal and India rather than the cost of product or taxation.

Second, an oil price hike is seen as a political issue and not an economic one. How can we believe that a government unable to stand by a decision on a simple oil price hike to handle critical issues like arms management, monetary policy and fiscal discipline? The government itself has given petrol mafias the freedom to hoard and this raises doubts about the intentions of those in government and in the corporation.

Third, oil dealers are the least trusted. The consumer believes and prefers the government run gas stations. This is because dealers make money by hoarding supplies and adulterating fuel rather than providing good customer service.

Further, the entire business works like a cartel, defeating the whole concept of market, consumer choice and pricing. We need to open up the sector to global companies who believe in serving the consumer.

Finally, the government monolith has to be disbanded. While some of the losses of NOC (No Oil Corporation) are actually due to taxes levied on the petroleum products, it is an institution that constantly survives on the taxpayers’ money and loans. The government needs to disclose all the properties pledged to NOC to keep the company afloat. NOC under a management contract can remain custodian of the storage facilities and leave everything to credible private players.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

It’s terrible to lose millions of dollars a day because the government cannot take charge of law and order. Consumers need to be told why a price hike is necessary, and be assured of a perennial supply, quality and service. ●

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Hague unlikely for Maoists



INSEC

On 25 July, parliament directed the government to ratify the Rome Statute that created the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2002. Representatives of NGOs forming the Asian Delegation for the ICC were here 25-27 August to lobby the government to take that next step. We spoke with Ahmed Ziauddin of the Asian Network for the International Criminal Court.

Nepali Times: Why are you here now?
Ahmed Ziauddin: Nepal was supposed to accede to the treaty long ago but then came the king’s axe and everything stopped. So now we’re resuming that long-overdue process. In a way we’re also managing expectations. People say there’s the new court. It will solve all our problems. But we say no.

You met the prime minister and other political leaders but you didn’t meet the Maoists.
We had a meeting scheduled but they didn’t come. One of the comments we heard is that they understand all the implications of the court, but they’re not really confident about their future, so they’re slightly hesitant. Nobody has to worry about whatever happened in the past because the ICC deals only with those who commit very serious crimes, such as genocide. What is more important for them to understand is that we are here talking about how to ensure a secure, democratic future for Nepal.


Are you saying no crimes were committed during the conflict that would come under ICC jurisdiction: genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes?
My personal belief is that there were no crimes against humanity or genocide committed. Yes, torture is a war crime and it’s very, very serious. In that sense, the Maoists are vulnerable; one can argue there’s been widespread (human rights) violations. But then again, the (ICC) Prosecutor must analyse and put all of this into the international context what’s happened in places like Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur. No doubt what happened in Nepal was horrible, but the scale, nature, and intensity is not at the top of that league. Realistically, we don’t expect the Maoists to be before the court.

Have you been approached about taking particular cases to the Court?
No, not at all. In the last couple of days no one has talked about revenge. The prime minister didn’t say a word about the king. Even the former prime minister (Sher Bahadur Deuba) didn’t say anything about him until one of our NGO friends mentioned that he had been jailed by the king.

Will the treaty be ratified retroactively?
If it chooses, the government can predate its ratification to 2002 or possibly earlier. That doesn’t mean the court would entertain an application it has stringent standards. From the discussions we had, the government has no intention to predate it.

What are you especially concerned about?
We have to guard against an impunity gap. The ICC will be dealing with only a few cases; 99.9 percent of cases are dealt with in national courts. If governments don’t have proper laws and the intention to prosecute, criminals could commit major crimes and afterwards face no consequences. Our mission is to help strengthen Nepal’s legal system.


What about the past?
The people of Nepal and the government must decide on how to deal with the past. I understand there will be a major conference here on transitional justice in October. Afghanistan and East Timor are still having problems, and they didn’t deal with the past. It’s very important to have some sort of resolution and, more importantly, to have development. In order to develop, you need better laws. You need to create hope to keep extremists at bay. If people become disappointed, very likely the Maoists will reappear.



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mazda

How Maina was killed

Kantipur, 30 August

The army's verdict [on the Maina Sunuwar case] is one of the many incidents of violence and killings disguised as 'encounters' by the security forces mobilised against the Maoists.

The board of the Court of Inquiry set up by the Military Court has concluded that the army killed young Maina Sunuwar of Kabhre by subjecting her to severe torture, despite the availability of 'alternative measures of interrogation'. Maina was arrested on the morning of 17 February 2005 by a covert team despatched by the Birendra Peace Operations Training Centre, Panchkhal. She died while being tortured, but the army's story was that she was killed while trying to escape, in the Hokse area.

The verdict states that the local army leadership tried to keep even the Military Court in the dark. The Board comprises Colonel Mohan Bahadur Basnet, Lieutenant Ratna Prakash Thapa, and Major Bharat Kumar Khadka.

According to evidence collected by the Board, the army went to the village acting on information provided by Maoist cadre Bimala BK who was arrested by police in the Palanchok area and told the army in course of interrogation that Debi Sunuwar and her daughter Maina Sunuwar were in contact with the Maoist party. Bobby Khatri, the officiating chief of the training centre, sent a 12-member team commanded by Captain Niranjana Basnet to Palanchok. Maina's mother was not at home, and Captain Basnet and Captain Adhikari found no evidence linking the Sunuwar mother and daughter to the Maoists, the report says. After Maina was arrested, Basnet had told her father: 'We will take

her in for interrogation. When your wife returns, send her to the Panchkhal barracks. We'll interrogate her and send her back.' Nothing untoward happened on the trip to the training centre.

Maina's interrogation began in the presence of seven persons, including Khatri, Basnet, and Adhikari, Captain Amit Pun, Sergeant Maj Khadka Bahadur Khatri, Dil Bahadur Basnet (a runner in the officers' mess) and Shrikrishna Thapa. Captains Sunil [Adhikari] and Amit [Pun], acting on Khatri's orders, asked Dil Bahadur and Shrikrishna Thapa to bring in a large container of water. Then the task of torturing Maina began, and the army men in attendance shoved her repeatedly into the water. It has been learnt that she was drenched, and that she choked time and again due to [being held under] the water, the verdict states.

After they failed to make her speak [by repeatedly holding her under water], Captains Sunil and Amit, under the orders of Bobby Khatri, decided that Maina would receive electric shocks. They ordered Shrikrishna Thapa to do the job and he pulled a live wire out from a geyser line. When he asked which part of Maina's body [he] should

electrocute, he was told 'the soles of her feet and her hands'. Maina was thus administered electric shocks on her feet and hands, which were still wet.

According to the verdict, Maina's wrists started to bleed. Shrikrishna Thapa slowly stepped back in fear and stopped electrocuting her. By then Maina was very weak and admitted that she had been involved in Maoist activity for a couple of months. After Shrikrishna left, Captains Sunil and Amit ordered Sergeant Maj Khadka Bahadur Khatri to 'convince' her by administering more shocks, and Maina was again electrocuted. After severe torture lasting one-and-a-half hours, Maina had still said nothing remarkable.

She was then taken to a *ghara* near a temple and it was agreed that the interrogation would continue after they had eaten.

Maina was blindfolded, her hands were tied behind her back, and there was a sentry guarding her. Shrikrishna Thapa and Khadka Bahadur were also there. At around 11AM, Bobby Khatri was informed that Maina was vomiting and foaming at the mouth and in serious condition. When a medical orderly came over to check on her, she was already dead, the verdict further says. After Maina Sunuwar died, Bobby Khatri ordered a cover-up of the incident. A plan was worked out to bury the body secretly. [Bobby] Khatri ordered Amit Pun to do so, and ordered Niranjana Basnet to bring police over from the Panchkhal Police Post to prepare a report, the report states.

Pun called JCO Surendra, informed him of the incident and instructed him to dig a pit in a spot northeast of the officers' mess, 50-60 meters outside the concertina wire. A little later, soldiers Dil Bahadur Basnet and Shrikrishna Thapa were asked to bring over a sack each. The two sacks were slipped over Maina's head and feet, before her body was put into the vehicle. Amit [Pun] had driven the vehicle to where the body was.

Captain Amit ordered soldier Dil Bahadur Basnet to fire a shot into back of the deceased with a Colt command weapon, telling him to also remove the sacks after placing her beside the pit. The soldier misfired, and then Amit himself fired two shots from the same weapon. Only one hit Maina's body in the back, the report states. After shooting her body, Amit photographed it and buried it, with the help of those present.

Meanwhile, Captain Basnet reported the incident to a sub-inspector, an assistant sub-inspector, and a police *jawan* at the Panchkhal Police Office. Colonel Bobby Khatri asked the police to 'make-up' a story about the body. The story stated that Maina was arrested, tried to break the security cordon in Hokse and jump out of the vehicle. She was shot by the security forces while doing so, and died.



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Petro prices



Samay, 24 August

Nepal Oil Corporation’s losses

Petroleum products	Retail	Wholesale	Loss per litre
Petrol	68.2	57	1.2
Diese	56.45	44.66	11.79
Gas	986.40	718.72	267.68
Kerosene	55.47	45.51	9.53

(Corporation’s price in rupees as quoted to dealers)

Price disparity along Nepal-India border

Petroleum products	Raxaul	Birgunj	Difference/litre
Petrol	81.36	67	14.36
Diesel	56.37	52.50	3.87
Aviation fuel	76.38 (Kolkata)	55 (Kathmandu)	21.38

Next conflict

Pradeep Giri in Kantipur, 28 August

Nepal is in search of a new starting point. The interim constitution submitted by the drafting committee hasn’t helped this search. The leaders of the seven parties and the Maoists should accept equal responsibility for Nepal’s present confusing and difficult situation.

The prime minister has vowed not to accept the CPN (M) as a legitimate party unless they give up their weapons. As PM, Koirala must have been compelled to say that. War-weary Nepalís also want the Maoists to disarm. The seven parties are still wary of the Maoists and world opinion does not favour them either.

When the Maoists started their ‘People’s War’, socialism was on its way out. Their military victory need not have come as a surprise because they had the support of the people who were tired of the state’s indifference. Their success was easy. But the real test begins now. In a guerrilla war, you hit the weakest point. In a people’s war, you hit the strongest point to gain victory.

Nepal’s strengths are our culture, thinking, class and ethnic structure. From now on, the war will not be fought in some district or at some fort, because it calls for original thinking and strategy. Arms can be managed when the Maoists are ready, but when are we going to address the issue of property, citizenship, language, caste and ethnicity?

The Maoists and the seven parties are yet to agree on the role of the monarchy. On the surface it looks like the conflict over monarchy is the most important. We are so caught up in this king thing that we can’t see a future conflict over caste and ethnicity simmering away underneath. The discussion should not be limited to monarchy vs republic. If we are really serious about a republic, we have to start

working on a framework now. Those in power want the king to leave the throne and the Maoists to give up arms. But what about them? What will they give up? The future of the monarchy is but a small issue in the interim constitution, which was solved when everyone agreed to a referendum. To achieve peace all of us have to give up something. We can start by giving up our traditional mindsets.

Chasing the king out of the palace or snatching guns away from the Maoists are not the only ways to peace. An all-inclusive interim constitution is not possible until we realise our share in the conflict.

Royal deposition

Jana Aastha, 30 August

Ministers in the formal royal cabinet have alleged that the cabinet chair played the main role in suppressing the people’s movement. This means that the high-level Rayamajhi investigation commission now faces the challenge of getting a statement from the king. While some members of the commission have proposed sending a written questionnaire to the king, others say that that he would not be answering those questions. A few of the members of the commission say that the king who came down to Narayanhiti Palace from the Nagarjun Palace on Tuesday to receive the Egyptian ambassador, may give an audience to the chairman and one member of the commission but may not answer questions. The commission has called the palace secretary Pashupati Bhakta Maharjan to its office on Thursday to figure out the king’s mood. A case has already been filed against Maharjan, who is chief secretary of the palace. Maharjan relayed orders to the ministers of Home as well as Law, Justice, and Parliamentary Affairs, and he is now accused of ordering the suppression of the Jana Andolan II, and encouraging the king.

Resettlement trap

Teknath Rizal in Kantipur, 30 August
We don’t understand whether the Nepal government doesn’t regard the Bhutani refugee issue as a priority, or if it’s being eclipsed by domestic political concerns.

The refugee issue has been raised in parliament following April’s restoration of government, and civil society’s 12-point mandate to the government gave us some hope. The seven-party alliance and even the Maoists seemed extremely positive. But now nothing has happened and we are concerned. The longer we wait, the greater the chances of a conspiracy.

International powers are trying to take advantage of the fluidity of the current situation to make the 100,000 refugees stateless. Thimpu tries to confuse matters and buy time. Its attention is focused on not taking back the citizens it unjustly evicted and avoiding a threat to its government. It is their aim is to let the refugees disappear in Nepal or migrate under the guise of third-country resettlement, and it has mobilised the Indian and western governments to do this.

The saddest part is that even UNHCR’s Nepal representative, Abraham Abraham, is openly speaking the language of the Bhutani regime. A person whose salary is paid by Nepali and Bhutani citizens’ contributions to the UN and who is an employee of an international institution is openly critical of the Nepal government. Who gave him that right? Why is the government quiet about an international civil servant who openly criticises it, and conspires against the refugees?

Abraham has no desire to solve the refugee crisis. He gets away with saying things like: a large number of refugees trying to return to Bhutan will endanger peace and security. Is Bhutan’s internal security the responsibility of the Home Ministry in Thimphu or Mr Abraham? Europeans and the Americans are suddenly backing the Abraham plan and conspiring against us.

The Bhutani refugees had to travel through India to enter Nepal. The Indians, who helped the Bhutani regime then are now blocking the same refugees from going home. On third-country resettlement, our view is clear: it is unjust to take able-bodied, smart literate citizens (who would be a thorn in the side of the Bhutani regime) to developed rich third countries, and leave the sick and illiterate, children and the elderly in Nepal.



The Nepal government should oppose this plan. We are against it, and can think of no alternative but to return to Bhutan.

It is sad to see a UN official act like the organ of the Bhutani state. Or to see so-called civilised European countries and the US assist in this plan. Instead of opposing the forced eviction of citizens and making Bhutan take back its people, it is difficult to understand why these countries are actually helping the unjust dictators.

Third-country resettlement is a trap, and falling into it or being forced into it by the international community will only let the unjust dictators in Bhutan who created this problem to get away with it. We are greatly saddened by the international community’s role in allowing this to happen.

- In summary, third-country resettlement will:
- Give sanction to the Bhutani king’s atrocity
 - Encourage the Bhutan regime to evict more people it doesn’t like
 - Take only the best and brightest to third countries and leave the rest high and dry in Nepal
 - Split the refugee community and deepen their sense of injustice, which is neither in the interest of the Nepal government nor that of the refugees.



It looks good, seems like there is enough space for everyone.
Box: Draft of the Interim Constituion

Batsyayana in Himal Khabarpatika, 1 September

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ You cannot unite parties by issuing notices out in the newspapers or handpicking those who already hold leadership posts. All our cadres have to be given honourable positions. ”

Nepali Congress (Democratic) Chairman Sher Bahadur Deuba in Nepal Samacharpatra, 31 August.



Win-win-win

Reva cost	Rs 658,000
Landed cost (includes 80 percent duty, 5 percent special tax. 13 percent VAT and 32 percent excise)	Rs 1,437,858
Dealer margin, VAT and excise	Rs 105,000
TOTAL PRESENT COST	Rs 1,545,093
TOTAL COST if 1997 rebate is applied	Rs 817,000
Savings to government over 10-year lifecycle of car from losses to NOC, and income to NEA from electricity sales (not including savings from reduction in health problems and losses to tourism caused by pollution):	Rs 800,000
Savings to customer in running costs of Reva over 10 years compared to Maruti:	Rs 1,012,120

Electric switch



Why isn't the government promoting electric cars by giving them tax breaks?

KUNDA DIXIT

In an ideal world, we would have a smart government. It would recognise our growing dependence on expensive imported fuel and give tax breaks for electric vehicles.

Nepal is going bankrupt subsidising fossil fuels, but still it tries its best not to allow vehicles that run on electricity. Fossil fuels don't just harm the

ecology, they ruin the economy. The spectacularly mismanaged Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) already owes Indian Oil Rs 10 billion, and this is growing at Rs 300 million a month. How on earth are we going to pay up?

After last weekend's riots, this government just doesn't have the stomach to push through another necessary price increase. So, the only sensible thing to do is look for urgent

alternatives:

- Announce tax breaks to domestic manufacturers of electric vehicles
- Cut import duty on electric cars
- In the long term restart trolleys, cargo ropeways and trains

Successive governments in Singha Darbar have been too beholden to the fossil mafia to push electric. Officials are concerned that giving tax breaks

to electric vehicles will cut government revenue from petrol and diesel cars.

But calculations show that instead of losing money, the government could actually save in the long term though tax rebates on electric vehicles like the Reva, MiniEV and ElectroBus. Sale of hydroelectricity that would otherwise be wasted and savings on fuel subsidies alone would cover up the revenue loss over a

car's ten-year lifespan (*see box*). Running costs of electric vehicles like the Reva are so low that even including battery replacement every three years, the total saving to a customer over a petrol car is a staggering Rs 1,012,000 over ten years. That is when petrol prices are at the present Rs 67.25 per litre, so the savings would be even higher as petrol prices go up to Rs 80 per litre or more.



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MiniEV

The fully-functioning MiniEV van made by Hulas in Biratnagar is undergoing road tests. It is as big as a Maruti van, comfortably seats seven plus the driver, can run for 70km on a full charge, and would cost the same as a Maruti but run for one-sixth of the cost. (See: eClean, green & electrici, #290)

While the rest of the world is into energy independence we in Nepal have a solution staring at us right in the face, says

Megesh Tiwari of the Kathmandu Electric Vehicle Alliance (KEVA), which worked with Hulas on the MiniEV.

So what is Hulas waiting for? Customers. It just hasn't sunk in into the minds of vehicle owners in Nepal that the age of fossil fuel dinosaurs is over. Even if they don't become extinct very soon, they will be too expensive to run.

Safa tempos have shown that electric transport makes economic and environmental sense. Yet, even transport entrepreneurs already using electric vehicles are unwilling to make the jump from three wheels to four wheels. It's time they did.

Hulas Motors, Akash Golchha (01)4244254

Reva-lution

This cute car is ideal for Kathmandu's terrain, road width and distances. Manufactured in Bangalore under US license, the Reva is becoming a hit in Britain, Australia, and India.

And it can also be a head turner in Kathmandu, as we found out during a test drive this week. People waiting in long lines at the gas station walked over to ask: is this electric?

How much does it cost? When will it be in the market? But the government just isn't willing to reduce a cumulative 234 percent tax, even though in 1997 it was gazetted that EVs would have to pay only ten percent and VAT.

The Reva comfortably seats a driver and a passenger and can, if push comes to shove, squeeze in two more passengers at the back. It's a zippy little car that easily overtook the startled-looking driver of a Suzuki Ignis on the Pulchowk incline the other day.

In fact, the Reva is a traffic hazard because other drivers take their eyes off the road to admire this smart little thing. The Reva can run 90km on a full charge which means you can circle the Ring Road three times, if you'd ever want to do that. Or you can drive all the way to Pokhara and recharge it at Kurintar while you take a lunch break.

The Reva has a top speed of 65km/h and can be nearly fully charged at home by simply plugging the car to your 220v wall socket for three hours.

Eco-visions: info@eco-visions.com.np



Safa bus

Safa tempos were a great idea: for ten years ago. Now, Kathmandu streets are so congested by slow-moving safas that although they themselves are zero emission they contribute to traffic snarls so other cars pollute even more.

Now we need to go for electric vans like the MiniEV for public transport on narrow streets, like this prototype Electro Bus II made by the Himalayan Light Foundation (pictured) that seats up to 25 tourists and 60 bus passengers.

Like the MiniEV, the Electrobus also has an AC motor which gives it more of a punch.

Because of the success of safa tempos, Nepalis have always thought electric cars are only three-wheelers. We have to change that mindset, says Bibek

Chapagain of KEVA, which is working with Surendra Golchha at Hulas to promote the MiniEV.

Switching to electric buses would not just reduce the country's fuel bill and replace Indian-made buses with Nepal-assembled ones, it would also lessen pollution. But best of all, these buses will use off-peak hydropower that would otherwise be wasted. It's a win-win-win situation.

The government could change all that with one stroke of the pen, and reduce the tax on electric buses. Which transporter won't dump his diesel bus if he can run an electric one for one-sixth the cost?

Himalayan Light Foundation: (01)4418568†



My 10-point transport agenda

BHARAT BASNET

Nepal has nearly 18,000km of roads, but every year new roads are being built. The percentage of Nepal's 26 million people living in urban areas has crossed the 25 percent mark. We have to import all of our fuel, and international fuel prices have doubled in five years.

So we have two options: find alternatives or go under. Nepal Oil Corporation is one of the most mismanaged and corruption-ridden parastatal parasites in this country. It has to buy expensive oil and subsidise it to sell cheap. So what do we do?

Here is my own 10-point agenda that will reduce oil consumption:

1. The prime minister downwards in government set a proper example by riding smaller cars and reducing the size of their security convoys.
2. Same for donors. They should switch to smaller, fuel-efficient or electric cars for city travel.
3. All government offices auction off their Prados, Pajeros, Landcruisers and start using smaller cars.
4. All civil servants start using



MIN BAJRACHARYA

public transport wherever possible to commute to work.

5. Citizens start commuting by bicycle whenever possible (*that's me in the picture*).

6. Since the army will be confined to barracks soon, its fuel consumption will automatically go down. But can we put a cap on all non-essential travel by security personnel?

7. College students, instead of burning tyres can start employing novel means of protest, boycotting all diesel and petrol cars, riding only on safa tempos or bicycling to class.

8. Mini-vans and minibuses on long-distance routes consume more fuel per passenger km. Let's change them to bigger buses which are more efficient.

9. And let's have a national policy to encourage electric vehicles, trolley buses, trams, safa buses, electric trains, and ropeways. It is the height of stupidity to import expensive and dirty fossil fuels when we sit on a goldmine of renewable energy in this country.

10. And last but not least, let's register our protest by not going anywhere unless we have to. Let's use the time to clean our surroundings, plant trees on sidewalks or set up neighbourhood parks. Let's stop talking, and start doing something. The world will change only if we change. ●

Bharat Basnet is an environmental activist and a tourism entrepreneur.



The Reva saga

In 2002, the Kathmandu-based company Eco-visions took advantage of a government decision to reduce taxes on electric vehicles by importing five Reva cars from Bangalore.

But once the cars reached Birganj customs Eco-visions was asked to pay the same tax as other cars. Despite intense lobbying finance ministry officials refused to follow their own rule that electric cars need pay only 10 percent tax and VAT.

We tried to get them in cleanly, we refused to pay to play, recalled Jeevan Goff, co-founder of Eco-visions. So the vehicles rotted in the customs godown for four years until the company bought the cars back at an auction for scrap value recently. The five cars are now fully refurbished and are up for sale, good as new. The only trouble is the Reva is completely, and absurdly, unaffordable because of the nearly 240 percent tax.

Says Goff: People should be burning tyres on the streets to demand a reduction in the tax of electric vehicles.



The Britain-Nepal Medical Trust (BNMT)
Serving the people of Nepal Since 1967

**CEO
(CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER)**

The Britain Nepal Medical Trust (BNMT) is a non-governmental organisation that has worked in the health sector of eastern Nepal since 1967. BNMT works in direct partnership with the government, local NGOs/INGOs and local communities to advance the health rights and improve the health of society's least advantaged. It is involved in sexual and reproductive health, safe motherhood, infectious diseases, TB, and HIV/AIDS and has established itself as a pioneer in the management of essential drugs. Since 2003, BNMT has made a strategic shift from implementing separate projects/programmes to an integrated programme; the core areas of which include training and capacity building, people's empowerment, advocacy, institutional development and strengthening strategies.

As BNMT continues to grow and prepares to enter the next phase of development, BNMT seeks to appoint a **Chief Executive Officer (CEO)** who would inspire and lead BNMT forward, leading the senior management team and a staff of 60 with an annual budget exceeding £600,000.

Role
The CEO will take charge of BNMT's principal offices in Kathmandu and Biratnagar, providing strategic direction and operational support through appropriate plans, policies and managerial oversight. The CEO will strengthen organisational and programme activities through effective generation and mobilisation of resources, forging strategic alliances and networking, and promoting BNMT in national and international forums to deliver results in line with the overall organisational objectives. The CEO will also promote in the organisation a culture of accountability and performance, collaboration and creativity, professionalism and integrity. The CEO will be responsible for all aspects of BNMT's operations and will directly report to an independent, international Board of Trustees based in UK, working closely with the Board's designated sub-committee in Kathmandu.

Requirement
The CEO portfolio demands advanced training (a Masters degree or above) in public health or a related social or managerial science with a professional background which includes at least five years experience in senior management (CEO, Director, Deputy Director, Senior Programme/Project Manager) and a good working knowledge and deep understanding of development context and health sector of Nepal.

The CEO should seek organisational excellence and be pragmatic, demonstrate professional maturity and a deep passion and commitment for BNMT's mission. Assertive communication, highly developed social & interpersonal skills, effective coaching and team building ability, strategic and analytical thinking skills allied with the ability to network, represent, negotiate, resolve conflict and lead change are pre-requisite. Fluency in Nepali and English (written and spoken) is also essential.

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Candidates meeting above criteria and willing to take up this challenging but rewarding position are invited to submit their CVs, with recent photographs and three references to the below mentioned address not later than **17 September 2006 (5:00 PM Nepali Standard Time)**. Only shortlisted candidates will be notified. Final assessment will be in the week of 25 September, 2006.

Application Information Package with detailed job description and other organisational information is available for pick up from **Organisation Development Centre (ODC)** from 4 September 2006 onwards or can be accessed through our website www.odcincorp.com under the category "Recruitment". Candidates unable to pick up the package or access website may request for it through e-mail.

Organisation Development Centre (ODC)
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Downsizing the solar system

Two eclipses and Pluto's expulsion from planetary membership

The last decade has been exciting for planetary astronomy, in large part because there are powerful new telescopes positioned on the ground and in space. For thousands of years, very little was known about the planets, other than that they were objects which moved in the sky against a background of fixed stars. The very word *ēplanetī* comes from the Greek word for *ēwandererī*.

But today, hosts of newly discovered large objects in the outer regions of our solar system are presenting a challenge to our historical definition of a planet.



STARGAZING
Kedar S Badu

The International Astronomical Union, at its conference in Prague in August, decided that Pluto is no longer a planet, downsizing the solar system from nine planets to eight.

When Pluto was discovered in 1930, there were controversies about whether it should be considered a planet or an asteroid captured by the Sun.

Pluto hasn't changed now, but the definition of a planet has, after rigorous debate among astronomers. A planet is now *ēa celestial body that is in orbit around the Sun, and has sufficient mass for its self-gravity to overcome rigid body forces so that it assumes a nearly round shape, and has cleared the neighbourhood around its orbit.*



Much-maligned Pluto is automatically disqualified under the new criteria because its oblong orbit overlaps with that of the eighth planet, Neptune. Instead, Pluto along with Xena (2003 UB 313) and Ceres (an *ēasteroidī* between Mars and Jupiter) *twill be reclassified in a new category of ēdwarf planetsī, similar to what have long been termed ēminor planetsī. These are a third class of lesser objects that orbit the Sun, ēsmall*

solar system bodiesī, a term that will apply to asteroids, comets, and other natural satellites. School and college textbooks around the world will have to be changed.

Interesting celestial events for September are a partial eclipse of the Moon and an annular eclipse of the Sun. During the Full Moon on Thursday, 7 September, the Moon will be almost exactly in line with the Sun and Earth, so there will be a **partial eclipse of the Moon**. The eclipse will start at 22:27 and will end at 02:45 AM. The maximum eclipse will be at half past midnight (00:36 AM). During the 22 September New Moon, the Sun, Earth and Moon will again be in a perfect straight line causing an **annular eclipse of the Sun**. This particular eclipse is NOT visible from Asia.

†
Other highlights in September:

†
The Sun is in the constellation of Leo at the start of September, moving into Virgo on the 16th. The **Autumn Equinox** occurs on Saturday, 23 September, when the Sun crosses the celestial equator, making the day equal to the night.

†
Mercury goes through a superior conjunction on 1 September to become an evening object. We won't be able to see this elusive little planet this month.

†
Venus is still playing the role of Morning Star, but it's getting harder to see. At the start of September, Venus rises in the east an hour-and-a-half before the Sun.



Mars sets only a few minutes after sunset, so we won't be able to see the Red Planet this month or indeed probably for the rest of this year.

†
Jupiter in Libra, is the only planet we can hope to see in the evening sky this month. It's low in the southwest at sunset, and sets about two hours after the Sun.

†
Saturn is coming up in the east in the early hours of the morning, and should be visible in the east before dawn. If you can recognise the Twin Stars of Gemini, high in the east, look for Saturn well below them.

†
*kedarbadu@yahoo.com

Nippon-Nepal

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan on 1 September 1956, Japanese ambassador to Nepal, Tsutomu Hiraoka, spoke to *Nepali Times* about the history of bilateral cooperation as well as Japan's assessment of Nepal's peace process.

Nepali Times: Today is the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Nepal. What is your assessment about the way bilateral ties have progressed?

Ambassador Tsutomu Hiraoka: Japan and Nepal established diplomatic relations on 1 September, 1956. Since then our relations have grown to become very cordial and friendly. I can say we enjoy excellent and unblemished bilateral ties today. Fifty years of friendship is indeed an epoch-making achievement and we are determined to build a new chapter of friendship for another 50 years and beyond. Our friendship has been well-preserved and today we are enjoying unblemished friendship. It is my hope to work together with people of both countries to make the ties and friendship between Japan and Nepal ever stronger and pass it on to the future generations. I am very optimistic about it.

What are the areas in which you think Japanese economic cooperation has concretely helped raise living standards in Nepal?

Japan's economic assistance to Nepal began with the acceptance of several Nepali trainees under the Colombo Plan in 1954. Grant and loan aid started in 1969 soon after the Embassy opened in Kathmandu. Since then, Japan has been continuously extending economic and technical cooperation to Nepal. The cooperation covers areas such as health, education, energy, transport, drinking water, environmental conservation as well as other fields requiring development. Especially in the health sector, Kanti Children's Hospital, TU Teaching Hospital, and National Tuberculosis Centre are the most famous. With regard to the energy sector, about 40 percent of electric power generation capacity was built through Japanese cooperation. In Kathmandu, the Bagmati Bridge was built by Japanese grant. Japan also provided most of the traffic signal lights in

Kathmandu. As for ongoing projects, the construction of the 158km-Sindhuli Road connecting Dhulikhel, Sindhuli Bazar to Bardibas is expected to greatly uplift the Nepali economy, especially adjoining areas along the road.

Nepalis working in Japan are a source of valuable remittance, what can be done to enhance prospects for more Nepalis to work there?

Many Nepalis work in Japan. In order for more Nepalis to work in Japan there should be more qualified Nepali workers, which means training and education. In this respect AOTS (The Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship) is providing Nepalis with training opportunities in Japan. There is even the job training in Japan under a JITCO (Japan International Training Cooperation Organisation) scheme as well.

How†does†your government assess developments in Nepal after the restoration of parliament in April?

After restoration of parliament in April, the Government of Japan dispatched Mr Yasuhisa Shiozaki, Senior Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, to Nepal in July 2006. The purpose of the envoy was to express Japan's support to the Government of Nepal in its efforts to push forward the peace process in order to consolidate democracy. My country shares the values of democracy, fundamental human rights, peace and prosperity with Nepal. We sincerely hope Nepal attains its final goal.

And how do you view the prospects of the peace process and arms management?

Everybody in Nepal yearns for peace. Therefore, I think peace will be eventually established. Arms management is the most vital issue at present and should be solved imminently. Needless to say, ownership of peace of Nepal belongs to Nepali people, so it should be resolved by the Nepali people. However, in Japan, as there is no way of thinking as joining a democratic government or going to an election without arms management. Holding arms that could influence the political decision making process, leave alone if the intent to use them is not yet abandoned, is completely against the principles and norms of democracy.

What future course is economic cooperation between Japan and Nepal going to take?

When peace is restored, Japan would like to cooperate with Nepal for its nation-building.

Nepal is an Asian country and economically she falls in the category of LDC. I am sure Japan will not forget Nepal. We have cooperated for past 50 years. We will do so in the next 50 years.




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Them and Us



KIRAN PANDAY

Masala Beads

Eriko Yoshida came to Nepal as a student in the 90s, fell in love with a local and chose to settle down in Nepal. Ten years ago, she along with her husband Pemba Gurung opened up Masala Beads, a popular bric-a-brac shop in Thamel. Today, the shop is popular among teenagers and also exports locally made accessories abroad. A mother of a two-year-old daughter, Eriko feels very much at home in Nepal. 'For me, there is no difference between Nepal and Japan, I love Nepal with my heart.' She says in fluent Nepali.

Shangrila Tours, Himalyan Journeys, Rum Doodle

For over 35 years Shangrila Tours and Himalayan Journeys, run by Hanji and Yukiko Okawara, has been bringing Japanese tourists to Nepal. The two companies together employ more than 80 people and has been hailed as one of the most professional in the line. However it's the 40,000 sq ft Rum Doodle Restaurant and Bar in Thamel which the couple established in 1979 that has gained international reputation. It's the only bar in the world where you'll find the signatures of every Everest summiteer since Tenzing and Hillary. The Okawaras have long considered Nepal their second home and say, 'Our people share the same mind and heart.'



KIRAN PANDAY

U Caf 

Ayumi Matsuda runs U Caf  in Sanepa with her family. She and her husband followed her sister, who is married to a Nepali, four years ago and decided to stay on. The caf , which opened about three years ago offers organic food and Japanese home cooking. Matsuda, her husband and Aya- their 18-month-old baby, are well settled and happy. 'Business is doing so well and this is a great place to raise kids. We are in no hurry to leave Nepal,' says Matsuda.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Paubha painter

The first time Kazuko Asano watched a documentary on Nepali thangka paintings she knew she had to learn the ancient art. She came to Nepal to find a teacher and learn the techniques of paubha painting, which was called thangka after the art form was taken to Tibet from Kathmandu. After more than five years and hundreds of patient hours under the tutelage of one of the most renowned masters of paubha art Lok Chitrakar, she is now an accomplished artist. 'Painting a thangka is very difficult, but it is also like meditation. One cannot produce a good painting if one does not feel good inside,' says Kazukosan.

Tsubaki

Twenty-three years ago, Asako Shrestha came to Nepal with her husband. 'I came here as a young trekker in 1978. That was before I met my husband, so when we decided to move back it wasn't that hard because I already knew a bit about Nepali culture.' She and her husband spent a year in Japan and moved back to Nepal to live with the family. Her parents have visited her many times in Nepal and she tries to visit them once every couple of years. In 1998 she opened Tsubaki hair salon in Tripureswar, which she runs with her sister-in-law.

Going strong

The Nepal-Japan golden jubilee has a lot to celebrate

A lot has changed in the 50 years since Bharat Raj Rajbhandari and Seijiro Yoshizawa shook hands in New Delhi, officially establishing diplomatic relations between Nepal and Japan.

Since then, bilateral diplomatic relations have included a number of goodwill royal and imperial visits, then-Prime Minister Girma Koirala's 1998 jaunt and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori's 2000 visit here.

But Nepal-Japan ties are older and far more extensive. Ekai Kawaguchi, a Buddhist monk from Osaka, was Nepal's first Japanese visitor. He travelled through on his way to Tibet in 1899, but had visited twice more by 1912. By then Chandra Shamsher Rana had sent eight Nepalis to study in Japan, and an old receipt meticulously details their expenses, including kerosene, tobacco and a duck.

Up until the fifties, Japanese interest in Nepal was largely artistic and academic, including Syun-ichi Amanuma's survey of historical Kathmandu buildings damaged by the 1934 earthquake. But by the early 1950s Japanese attention, like that of the rest of the world, had shifted to Nepal's mountains, and in 1952 efforts began to secure a Manaslu climbing permit.

1956 was a major year for Nepal-Japan relations. King Mahendra's coronation in April was attended by Japanese ambassador to India, Seijiro Yoshizawa, and described by an embassy official as 'full of life'. The Japanese ascent of Manaslu on May 9 was the first in a series of Japanese Himalayan feats (including Junko Tabei, the first woman to climb Everest). On 1 September 1956, diplomatic channels between the two countries officially opened.

Since then, perhaps the most visible result has been the influx of Japanese aid, which totaled Rs 178.5 billion by 2005. Some of the more visible projects include the TU Teaching Hospital, the Nursing School, the newer Bagmati bridge and the current construction of the



COURTESY THE EMBASSY OF JAPAN

Sindhuli road. Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCVs) are also a notable presence. There have been other influences too (see sidebar).

The 50th anniversary celebrations are in full swing, events earlier this year included an essay competition and a film exchange. In Kathmandu, September will see cultural performances, and a concert, and will be followed with programs including a speech competition, a student exchange and an education fair. ●

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Celebrating
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Surya Classic Encounters is back with their series of concerts. This time, they will focus on jazz as a build up to Jazzmandu. The first group to start in this season's Surya Classic Encounters is 1974 AD, the popular Nepali band that started more than ten years ago and have consistently produced one hit album after the other ever since.

1974 AD has Adrian Pradhan on the vocals, drums, and blues harp, Manoj Kumar KC as the lead guitarist and on the keyboard, Nirakar Yakhumba on the bass guitar, Phiroj Syangden on vocals and guitar and Sanjay Shrestha on percussion. The band plays a fusion of traditional Nepali folk music jazz, blues, and western rock using a combination of native and western instruments.

Surya Classic Encounters started in May with a series of jazz, blues and fusion concerts where Looza, Stupa, Anil Shahi and the now world-famous jazz ensemble Cadenza performed at happening venues such as Upstairs, J-Bar, Moksh, Liquid Lounge and Absolute Bar. Music lovers stayed up late as Looza and Stupa belted out originals and covers at Moksh bar.

This season's Surya Classic Encounters to kick off with 1974 AD

In the second part of the series in June, classical fusion guitarist Anil Shahi and jazz virtuosos Cadenza rocked Kathmandu with their east-west fusion performance. Anil Shahi, along with flutist Binod Katuwal and percussionist Pritam Rai on tabla, performed original instrumental fusion and revamped traditional and Arabic tunes on the banjo. Cadenza returned home to Upstairs with Bharat Rai, saxophonist Mariano, bassist Roshan Gurung, percussionist Samir Chettri and drummer/vocalist Nabin Chettri.



This time, at the Surya Classic Encounters 1974 AD is going unplugged and will be performing their instrumental, jazz, blues, funk tracks like *Timro Maya*, *Irish Coffee*, *P Funk*, and *Crossing*, ever-green melody numbers such as *Samjhi Baschhu* and their new song *Madhu Masta* from their upcoming album. With their unique blend of music, the band has been able to attract young and old, Nepalis and non-Nepali fans. ●

Classic concerts





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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **3000 Trail Bridges** photo exhibition of trail bridges at Patan Museum Café, 6-19 September, 10AM-5PM.
- ❖ **Buddha Realm** paintings by Prakaash Chandwadkar at Siddhartha Art Gallery till 7 September.
- ❖ **Impressions of Manang** 10-28 September, Nepal Tourism Board.

EVENTS

- ❖ **CSGN Talk** by Sunil Pant of the Blue Diamond Society at Shankar Hotel, 9.30 AM, 1 September.
- ❖ **Promoting Nepali Goods and Services** discussion with Magesh Lal Shrestha, Ajay Pradhanang and Shaurav Jyoti at Martin Chautari, 1 September, 3PM.
- ❖ **Udaaya Handicraft Exhibition** products manufactured largely by Udaaya community at Chamber Building, Kantipath, 1-3 September. 4221511
- ❖ **Sinners in Heaven** with DJ Jazzy Joe at Hotel Yak & Yeti, 1 September, Rs 1299
- ❖ **Civic Concerns** workshop, 2 September, Heritage Plaza. 4107599
- ❖ **Civil Society** discussion with Chandra Dev Bhatta at Martin Chautari, 2 September, 4PM
- ❖ **Hogaku** Japanese traditional music at Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 3 September, 5.30 PM
- ❖ **Blood Donation Program**, 3 September, 7.30 AM at Narayan Gopal Chok.
- ❖ **Australian Embassy Roadshow** at Russian Cultural Centre, 2-7 September. 4471678
- ❖ **Kathmandu Chorale** rehearsals for winter concert starts at 7PM on 4 September at the British School
- ❖ **Indra Jatra** 6 September
- ❖ **International Literacy Day** 8 September
- ❖ **Carnival** to celebrate world literacy day at Hyatt Regency, 10AM on 9 September.
- ❖ **Dinner Spectacle** with Odissi Dance performances by Diya Sen at Baber Mahal Revisited, 10 September. 6.30 PM. 4263070
- ❖ **Courses** on participatory peace-conflict assessment and human rights/rights based approach, 13-15 September. 4432602



MUSIC

- ❖ **Stupa and Jerry Explosion** at Moksh Live, 1 September, Rs 150. 5526212
- ❖ **Music and Food** at Dolma Café with special Doner Kebab, 1 September. 4215069
- ❖ **Live Music** with Desmond O'Flattery, Bob Nunes and Anthony O'Connor at Lazimpat Gallery Café, 7.30 PM, 1 September.
- ❖ **Take 5 Jazz Night** with Cadenza, Dwarika's Hotel on 16 September, Rs. 1200, 7PM. 479488
- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** with Anil Shahi's Maya Mantra at Dwarika's, 26 September, Rs 1000
- ❖ **Oktober Fest** a fusion of food and at Dwarika's, 29 September, Rs 850
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM.
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant. 4422613

DINING

- ❖ **Mezza and Margarita** at Dwarika's Fusion. Every Wednesday at 5.30 PM, Rs 555. 4479448
- ❖ **Saffron** new Indian restaurant at Hotel Shangri-la, 25 percent discount as a promotional offer. 4412999
- ❖ **Thakali Lunch** special price, everyday at Moksh. 5526212
- ❖ **Nhuchee's Kitchen** at the Organic Village, Baluwatar for lunch, dinner, and breakfast on weekends. 4414383
- ❖ **Authentic Thai Food** at Krua Thai, Thamel. 4701291
- ❖ **Monsoon Madness Wine Festival** enjoy wines from four continents at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440
- ❖ **Grand Dosa Fest** at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Traditional Cuisine** at Patan Museum Café. 5526271
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** swimming and lunch, or overnight stay with breakfast and swimming, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Weekend Brunch** at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Breakfast** Singma Restaurant, 8.30-11AM daily. 5009092



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** open for new season from 1 September. 4361500
- ❖ **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

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com

YAK YETI YAK



by MIKU

Quest Entertainment

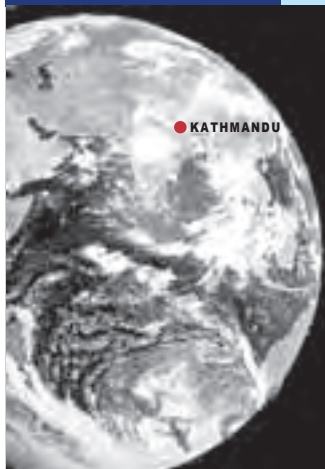
Lage Raho Munnabhai is the sequel to 2003's hit comedy *Munnabhai M.B.B.S.* Once again good-hearted local thug Munnabhai (Sanjay Dutt) and his loyal sidekick Circuit (Arshad Warsi) find themselves in a host of unlikely situations when Munnabhai's masquerades as a history professor to impress radio jockey Jhanvi (Vidya Balan). As usual, there's more than a few unexpected surprises, and hilarity ensues.

Call 4442220 for show timings at **Jai Nepal**
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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



Despite trying to play catchup this monsoon has hit record lows. And even when the rains finally came, they were dumped in southwestern Nepal where Nepalganj was hit by 310mm in one night 80 percent of the monthly total. However, the eastern tarai didn't get enough rain to rescue parched fields. Though too late for crop, this week's unexpected rains are useful in replenishing ground water and raising the level of Kulekhani reservoir. This satellite picture on Thursday morning shows a heavy cyclonic circulation smack over central India. However, its fringes will only graze western Nepal, bringing some more rain there. Kathmandu will have sunny mornings with afternoon buildup and night rain into the weekend and next week. Hot and humid when sunny.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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THEY CAME, THEY SAW, THEY CONCURRED: US ambassador James F Moriarty looks on as visiting American congressmen Jim Kolbe (centre) and Brian Baird (right) wrap up their four-day visit with a press conference on Monday, where they endorsed the prime minister's position that the Maoists disarm before joining the interim government.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

NOT A STREET PROTEST: The central pole for this year's Indra Jatra chariot reaches Maitighar as it is pulled from Bhaktapur to Hanuman Dhoka, signalling the beginning of the street festival on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

MWAAAAAH: Diya Mahaju (left) and Anil Mahaju kiss at their wedding, Nepal's first public gay marriage. Saturday's ceremony at the Blue Diamond Society office in Lajimpat is not legally recognised.



NEPAL ARMY

PEACETIME DUTY: An army MI-17 helicopter delivers emergency supplies to Khaptad VDC in Accham on Wednesday, where 90 houses were washed away by a landslide. The exact number of dead is not yet known, although nine bodies have so far been found.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

RAIN-CATCHERS: An urban rainwater harvesting project at Trichandra College, started by NGO Forum, is inaugurated on Thursday. The tank can collect and store up to 1.6 million litres of monsoon runoff each year.

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His (pretend) Majesty and real royals

Stirist Manoj Gajurel has been a hit this Gai Jatra season with his accurate impersonations of a pot-bellied Pushpa Kamal Dahal and a jowly King Gyanendra in shades. Manoj doesn't look as awesome as Prachanda, it has to be said, and his rendition of the Supremo's interviews lack a certain gravitas. But the **Sri Punch** comes across ditto. So much so, and we're not making this up, that a policeman on security duty backstage at the auditorium in Pokhara this week gave His (pretend) Majesty a snappy salute. Everyone thought the policeman was a part of the act until it turned out the poor cop actually thought Manoj was the real **McCoy**.



The king is in the news a lot these days. He must love it. Not a day goes by without some paper or other writing about his assets, bank accounts and property and who is one day going to inherit it all.

Meanwhile, His (erstwhile) Majesty is sitting out the monsoon at his **Nagarjun** getaway and keeping a certain distance from it all. After his motorcade got stuck in traffic in the Lajimpat while driving down to receive credentials from the Turkish ambassador, these days the king tries to avoid rush hour. If he must get to the city on an errand, he hops on his **Super Puma** (newly-refurbished after routine maintenance in Singapore) as he did when roads were blocked during fuel riots last weekend.

The Rayamajhi Commission wants to summon the king to ask him a few questions about his alleged role in suppressing the pro-democracy movement in April. The rate at which the police chief, the army chief, the intelligence chief, and the deputy-chairmen of the royal regime have all passed the buck to their boss, it does look like the king has some explaining to do.

But the members of the Commission are reportedly torn between whether to issue written summons to the king to appear in Lalitpur (and risk having him get stuck in traffic again at **Bagmati Pool** due to some julus or the other) or Commission members all fly out to Nagarjun in the royal chopper to take king's deposition. It's a toughie.

But trust the journalist member of the commission, Harihar Birahi, to come up with the most pragmatic solution. He told the BBC Nepali Service that the Commission could shoot the king some questions by **email**, and the king could answer by just pressing the reply button.

But word has just come from former royal sources that King Gyanendra may actually agree to go up to Pulchok to answer questions after all. He is apparently banking on running that high-profile media gauntlet at **Harihar Bhaban** looking very wronged and all, and hoping

that it will help restore his image. It may actually work because Nepalis love underdogs.



On Friday the Commission asked the chief royal palace secretary Pashupati Bhakta Maharjan to drop by for a prelim chat to suss out the king's frame of mind. Depending on what Maharjan said, members will decide on when, how and wherefore to go about sending for the king. The commission is also reportedly looking at **fall-back options** in case the king decides not to come. Idea: how about video conferencing?



All this while the Maoists are holed up in Kamidanda in Kabhre, having their central committee meeting with 35 of their 37 members attending. The missing two (Rabindra Shrestha and Mani Thapa) were expelled from the party. Our sources tell us on the satphone of a lot of **bloodshed** going on because the comrades are being eaten alive by leeches. This is making them see red and the plenum is reportedly tilting towards the *Oktober Kranti* option.

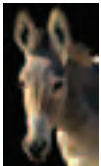


Far away from the bloodsuckers in Uppsala in Sweden, Suresh Ale Magar and five comrades were lucky enough to be attending a peace seminar. Government delegates included Arjun Narsingh KC, Chitralekha Yadav, Sarita Giri and Prakash Mahat got to replenish their Star Alliance Gold Cards. Even the new UN special rep for Nepal, Ian Martin, stopped by on his way back from New York. The organisers, an alluringly named **Silk Road Studies Project**, thought a change of scenery would make both sides feel at ease in the tranquil Swedish university town, but it seems the positions of the government and the Maoists were as intractable as ever. Next time try **Urlabari**, not Uppsala.



Just as a Technical Team from the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives arrived in Banke to do an on-site assessment and decide whether to declare the far-west a **Drought Affected Zone** the entire western tarai was submerged in floods. For once, it wasn't the fault of the seven-party alliance government. Drought- and flood-affected Nepalis should gherao Pashupati and stage a sit-in until God meets their demand to start being a little more considerate.

ass@nepalitimes.com



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