

MIN BAJRACHARYA

Whether it came down due to Maoist anti-aircraft fire or an accident, the loss of one of the army's three remaining airworthy MI-17 helicopters on Wednesday night in Malangwa could lead to an escalation in the conflict.

Exposed to deadly Maoist ambushes along highways, the army has been relying increasingly on air support to subdue the Maoists but strafing and bombings has led to higher civilian casualties. The army is using 81mm and 120mm mortar rounds called "Tora Bora" dropped from helicopters. After the Thokarpa raid last week, tail fin parts of the army's new 200mm bombs were found. (see p 2)

The night-vision equipped helicopter with call sign RAN-37 (pictured, above, after the Pandaun battle two years ago) took off from Kathmandu at 10PM on Wednesday on a "tactical mission" to foil the Maoist attack on the border town of Malangwa. Eye-witnesses said the helicopter hovered for an hour, then returned after refuelling in Simra but exploded in midair at about 1.30 AM. It fell in many pieces and eight bodies were found.

The Maoists said they shot down the helicopter and claimed this "glorious victory" ushered in a new phase in the war. In February, Maoist leaders admitted being vulnerable to aerial attacks and had been firing at choppers using GPMGs. The army says it is investigating the crash but one military expert told us it could have been caused by ordnance exploding on board. However, the army could now be tempted to buy even more sophisticated helicopter gunships to counter Maoist capabilities. ●

Editorial p2
Conflict of interests

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 293

Q. Should the seven parties push through with their Kathmandu rally next week?

Total votes: 6,510

Yes 51.1%
No 46.3%
Don't know 2%

Weekly Internet Poll # 294. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Can parliamentary polls be held within a year under current circumstances?

American Standard

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Keys to the kingdom

Are the constitutional forces really still constitutional?

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

When he took over last year, King Gyanendra gave himself three tasks: restore peace, control corruption and improve governance. If the king looks around beyond his circle of yes-men he will see he has failed on all three counts.

Even as a strategic move, February First was a colossal blunder. It stopped military assistance to his army, froze aid to his government, made him an international pariah and set off a republican wave at home. Instead of one enemy, the king now has at least three: the Maoists, the political parties and the international community. Instead of winning the parties over to his side, he has pushed them over to the Maoist fold. Some moderate royalists are now even wondering how to save the monarchy from the king. But others have given up and are considering a Plan B for post-monarchical Nepal. It is difficult to save someone who is so determined to self-destruct.

At every fork on the road in the past year when the king could have taken the right path, he has taken the wrong one. There is another crossroad coming up in a week's time: the traditional new year royal address to the nation. A message announcing general elections in 2063 without the main parties on board will be another monumental mistake. It is too late to reshuffle the cabinet to buy time, it is too late to recycle another prime minister, it is too late to call another pretend poll.

But it is still not too late for the king as supreme commander of the army to use his speech to declare a ceasefire, invite the seven party alliance for dialogue leading to either restoration of parliament or setting up of an all-party caretaker administration to pave the way for elections to amend the constitution.

We aren't saying anymore that the king should do this for the country's sake. This time, he must do it for himself out of enlightened self-interest for the continuation of his dynasty. Or else we may as well start considering Plan B.



KIYOKO OGURA

There have been a lot of discussions and demands from different sides that have called for the 'constitutional forces' to come together for a solution of Nepal's crisis.

But who are these forces? The 1990 constitution mentions a number of such forces: a parliament, a government elected by and responsible to this parliament, a constitutional king with no direct executive and legislative powers, an independent judiciary with the Supreme Court, political parties

GUEST COLUMN
Karl-Heinz Krämer



as agents and converters of public will, etc. Hardly any of these institutions is functioning in the way as prescribed by the 1990 constitution.

Those who claim loudest to be 'constitutional forces' come from the camp around the institution of monarchy: King Gyanendra himself and his ministers, security chiefs as well as institutions and persons installed in office by the king after 4 October, 2002. The second group who see themselves as constitutional forces are political parties.

But the misunderstanding is that these forces are not constitutional per se but that they are only constitutional forces as long as they follow the rules of the 1990 constitution.

Part of the compromise of 1990 has been that the absolute monarchy became a constitutional one that had to obey to the rules of the constitution which defined not only the power but also the duty of the king. The latter's executive and legislative powers became reduced to formal functions. The king had no longer any right to intervene in the affairs of the government or parliament,

neither concerning their compositions nor their decisions. Article 27 (3) gave the king the duty to protect and safeguard these fundamental principles of the constitution.

The current position of King Gyanendra has nothing to do with this definition of constitutional monarchy. The constitution of 1990 gave the king neither a right nor a necessity for all steps undertaken since October 2002. Article 53 (4) requires that new elections have to take place within six months after the dissolution of parliament. This means its dissolution in 2002 became automatically invalid when elections could not take place in time. There was no need nor right for any intervention of the king who especially was not allowed to dismiss the government and later install governments himself.

King Gyanendra's attitude towards the political parties and civil society, especially after 1 February, 2005 further proves that the king has left his constitutional position and thus can no longer be called a constitutional force. Therefore, the persons and institutions nominated or installed by him are not constitutional forces either.

Political parties are generally groups of like-minded citizens who want to succeed in getting shared political ideas implemented. The constitution of 1990 requires that such political parties identify themselves with the principles of the constitution. Only the Maoists totally distance themselves from these principles and thus can't be called a constitutional force. The two most important parties, the UML and NC have limited their stand towards the institution of monarchy in

autumn 2005. But in contrast to the Maoists they are not against the institution of constitutional monarchy but only against the institution of monarchy in its current unconstitutional form. So, they fall within the framework of the constitution but without the people's mandate. So these political parties also can't be called constitutional forces.

A crisis is imminent and needs an urgent peaceful solution for which four basic preconditions need to be fulfilled:

- The autocratic rule of the king has to be ended immediately. All militant activities of the security forces and of the Maoists have to be stopped. All political prisoners have to be released. This intermediate process should be supervised by an independent institution like the UN.

- There must be a common will that the Maoists become integrated as a future democratic force.

- The country needs a new constitution that avoids the compromises of 1990 and guarantees that neither insurgencies like that of the Maoists nor putsches like that of King Gyanendra are possible in the future. This constitution must have provisions for the inclusion of all Nepalis and the definition of the state should not have any connections with a special culture, religion or ethnicity.

- To underline the people's will, this constitution should be worked out by an elected constituent assembly (as already promised by the monarchy in 1951) and it should later be confirmed by a public referendum.

Karl-Heinz Krämer is affiliated with the South Asia Institute at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, and runs <http://nepalresearch.org>

A duty to defy

As fellow-Nepalis, even security officials have a higher calling

Legally, just about every constitutional expert in this country agrees that King Gyanendra's direct rule has no *de jure* authority. Since October 4, 2002, the government has been operating on the basis of *de facto* power accumulated through a phased royal-military coup. The wishes of the king are his command, and his council of ministers doesn't really need laws enacted by royal ordinance to run the government.

Riot police arrested 37 journalists, lawyers and academics at New Baneswor on Wednesday. A day earlier, 50 madhesi protestors demonstrating peacefully were taken in. The government has issued even more draconian ordinances to hound political activists opposed to an interventionist monarchy.

Professionals have come out on the streets to

register resistance. Teachers are protesting. Lawyers, engineers, doctors, students, employees of Nepal Telecom, media and financial institutions have joined to oppose the repressive policies. Even civil servants have now decided to show their support.

Senior bureaucrats have not spoken out yet, but their humiliation at the hands of handpicked royalists is boiling over. The country has been in the grips of unprecedented political, administrative, and economic crisis for quite sometime, and something has to give.

Polarisation of all people's forces against the authoritarianism of the palace seems to be almost complete, though with an important caveat: the security forces are still in confusion about their roles and responsibilities in a conflict between the people and the regime.

In the People's Movement of 1990 too, the RNA was the last line of defence of the totalitarian Panchayat regime. The top brass took their time to

decide that there was no future for a monarchy opposed to the wishes of the majority. Eventually the army used its influence and made a recalcitrant establishment see reason. History may repeat itself if the movement for democracy intensifies, but this time the response of the forces has to be quicker and more intense. The people's patience is running out.

Meanwhile in the countryside the conflict is intensifying. The use of bombs dropped from helicopters has changed the face of war. Suddenly, bombs can drop out of the sky without warning on schools, cowsheds, villagers tending livestock. At Bagh Bhairab Secondary School in Thokarpa last week the army dropped mortar rounds from helicopters (see picture above).

The bombs killed four Maoists among a group that was holding a mass meeting at the school but also two civilians. And that is the problem with aerial attacks: it can cause civilian casualties.

The Maoists routinely violate the rules of war

by meeting at schools and using civilian homes for shelter, and the army has been flouting norms by indiscriminate aerial bombardment. The destruction of one of the army's MI-17s used for aerial attacks in Malangwa on Wednesday night shows just how dangerous this war now is.

When a means of combat includes methods that is not just directed at a specific military target and can strike non-combatants it can be construed as a breach of international humanitarian law: so the Maoists were clearly in breach by using a school building and the army violated these norms by reckless endangerment.

The army says it took all precautions to 'minimise' civilian casualties but obviously those precautions weren't enough in Thokarpa. It says we in the media don't criticise the Maoists. But we do with coverage of the bomb in Dailekh at exam time last week, the Madi bus bomb. What the royal regime forgets is that the state is expected to live up to higher standards than the mindless violence of armed insurgents. It's time the security forces realised they are not mere instruments of the regime but thinking and compassionate Nepalis.

Mahatma Gandhi had once observed that the need for sacrifice and the duty to defy unjust laws were two higher calling for every individual living under any tyrannical regime. Those suppressing peaceful protests this week must remember that there is a higher calling. Nepali society expects nothing less from those it pays to protect. ●

STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal



LETTERS

POLL
 Congratulations to the Himalmedia team for initiating a culture of public opinion polls in Nepal. Although they aren't 100 percent and come with several caveats, the polls can give us a baseline hypothesis and be helpful in the deliberations. In 'Listen to us' (#292) you have done a good job in simplifying the results for the general reader. Plus, not going overboard with the numbers and sending a balanced message should allow the results to be discussed carefully within a measured context on radio, tv and by analysts.

We have seen enough punditry from just about everyone on all sorts of crucial issues with grave consequences. Sometimes we tend to engage in a holier-than-thou attitude. Thus these opinion polls can put a set of parameters on such debates and give us better deliberations. Extreme slogans and unsubstantiated claims have torn us apart and it is quite refreshing to see that the Nepali people are more 'sophisticated' than we give them credit for.

The people of Nepal have spoken loudly that violence does not win people's hearts and minds. They have shown no interest in the extremes—of either the right or left variety. This is a triumph for democracy and freedom. There is perhaps a lesson for all of us while we grope around for solutions. The 1 February move has been a complete failure and yet the people are still not with the Maoists and their extreme agenda. But this may not last forever. The country has seen enough carnage and is being pushed towards isolation, and the king should take a note of it. What is he going to do about it? The ball is in his court.

Alok K. Bohara, PhD
University of New Mexico, USA

● The Himalmedia Public Opinion Poll (# 292) raises a few methodological questions. How was the 'stratified random sample' drawn? Almost all of the questions asked are highly sensitive even for surveys in normal times. Thus, rapport-building between the enumerator and respondent would be absolutely crucial. In the present circumstances when the people, both in rural areas and small towns, are caught between the Maoists and security forces, they have only learnt to remain tight-lipped. What miracle methodology for rapport building

was used so that people suddenly decided to fully open up their mind and mouth to the visiting stranger? Since many of the specific alternative choices in the response could more logically belong to 'multiple choice' type, how did the enumerator decide that a given respondent meant only one answer and not more than one?

A 'sample' in Nepal is bound to include a large number of illiterate and uneducated respondents even as the questions and their choices of responses are highly esoteric in nature. Even in normal situations, such questions would need lots of patient explaining to such respondents to make sure that the answers being given are 'valid'. How was this problem handled? How were the enumerators taught to stay away from the element of 'suggestion' when formulating the questions for uninitiated respondents? In such statistically significant exercises, it is necessary to share with the readers the degree of 'standard deviation' and 'margin of error' both of which have gone unreported.

Given the fact that Himalmedia has been highly politically biased against the king and in favour of the corrupt politicians, the latter having been squarely responsible for Nepal's democratic debacle of the 1990s, it would be a fair question to ask how much of 'doctoring' of the responses was involved to make the 'poll findings' consistent with its political prejudice?

Unlike in the west where people are mostly urban, educated, highly exposed to both print and electronic media and have a long tradition of poll taking, its problems would be vastly different in a traditional social context like that in Nepal. If the problems that it implied were not properly addressed for a highly sensitive exercise of political poll taking, it would amount to a gross misuse of methodologies of social science.

Bihari Krishna Shrestha, Kathmandu

TOO LATE

What Anna Neistat and Sam Zarifi say in their Guest Column ('It could get worse', #291) is already too little too late. It is already a lot worse than what they depict. Our economy is in utter chaos, our politics is ruined, our rights are being abused by all: the palace, the political parties, the Maoists and our international '(f)riends' namely India, UK, US and UN. Why? They reinforced corruption and nepotism and

authoritarianism into our country through their 'aid' and our gullible 'leaders' fell for the easy money. One thing is for sure: there will be bloodshed if the rebels can't be disarmed or if the seven party alliance can't bring the Maoists to the negotiation table. Please let us live in peace and let us prosper, this country is not an experiment lab for irrational ideologies.

Rishav Shrestha, email

● Even though I am getting used to reading on a daily basis the sad news from home about the continued killings of our Nepali sisters and brothers the article by Shiva Gaunle ('Not knowing if they are dead or alive is killing us...' (#292) broke my heart. I simply have no words to express my deepest condolences and sympathy to the families of so called 'disappeared people'. One question has been bothering me recently is why everyone thinks it is ok if we blame both the state and the Maoists for their gross human rights violations? Shouldn't the state be more responsible towards its citizens?

G Gurung, Switzerland

● I was dismayed to read JB Pun's reportage 'Raining bombs' (#292) about how both the RNA and the Maoists are putting civilians in harms way by targeting schools and residential areas. The distraught picture of the daughter of Ram Bahadur Gharti was heart-rending and showed the grief and sorrow this conflict is creating for children and civilians. I just wish all of us Nepalis will soon wake up from this nightmare that our nation is going through.

Dinesh Rai, email

CK LAL

Who is this 'name withheld' guy sticking a knife into CK Lal's prose labelling them 'dull, repetitive'? For all his kangresi credentials, CK Lal is one of the four most prolific writers of our land. CK's writings routinely outshine those of the world's best publications, like *The Economist*. His lines are smart, style witty and content intense. Here's the warning: let CK go on a sabbatical and I will start my own andolan here in Pennsylvania to boycott *Nepali Times*.

Shreya Singh Budhathoki, USA

● A reader not having the courage to disclose his/her name criticising CK Lal and comparing Lal's multifarious writing to the one-issue rants of Bihari Krishna Shrestha is profane.

Shiva Sharma, Kamalpokhari

● 'Name withheld' (Letters, #291) finally said something I'd been meaning to say for some time now. CK Lal has run out of things to say, his space should be given to someone else and he should take a sabbatical. But one piece of advice: you shouldn't print anonymous letters.

Gyan Subba, email

● I completely agree with CK Lal taking a sabbatical. He has been a star columnist but it seems he has profound hatred and anger. We can hear enough hatred and anger from our political leaders. Enough of your ramblings, Mr Lal, we have heard all what needs to be said. Take a break and come back when you regain that touch you used to have couple of years ago.

Jeevan Lal, Hong Kong

NO SHARED CULTURE

Kanak Mani Dixit in Southasia Beat wonders why there are no airlinks between Indian cities and its neighbours ('The sky is the limit', #292). The answer is quite simple. Even though it is fashionable to talk about the subcontinent as one shared culture the reality is different. As a south Indian I have zero in common with someone from Lahore. I have religion in common with Nepal and Sri Lanka but that is about it. I am really tired of this nonstop talk about a common culture. As if India is just Punjab and Lucknow. So, yes, a small number of Indians share language Punjabi and 13 percent share Islam with Pakistan and while you might think Hindi and Urdu are the same (they are if the extent of your conversation is limited to "Hi, how are you, pass me the salt"). For a large number of Indians, Pakistan is another country not a sister culture...so despite all the spin about shared culture the reality is different. Do I want to visit Lahore, not really. Dhaka? Not really. But I do want to visit Singapore not because we share a culture but because there are things in Singapore I want to do that attract me. Ditto Bangkok and Dubai and guess what there are flights on the hour to some of these destinations. So there will be more flights between Pune and Lahore the day Lahore becomes a tourist or business attraction. But there certainly won't be more flights on the false notion that it is a shared culture.

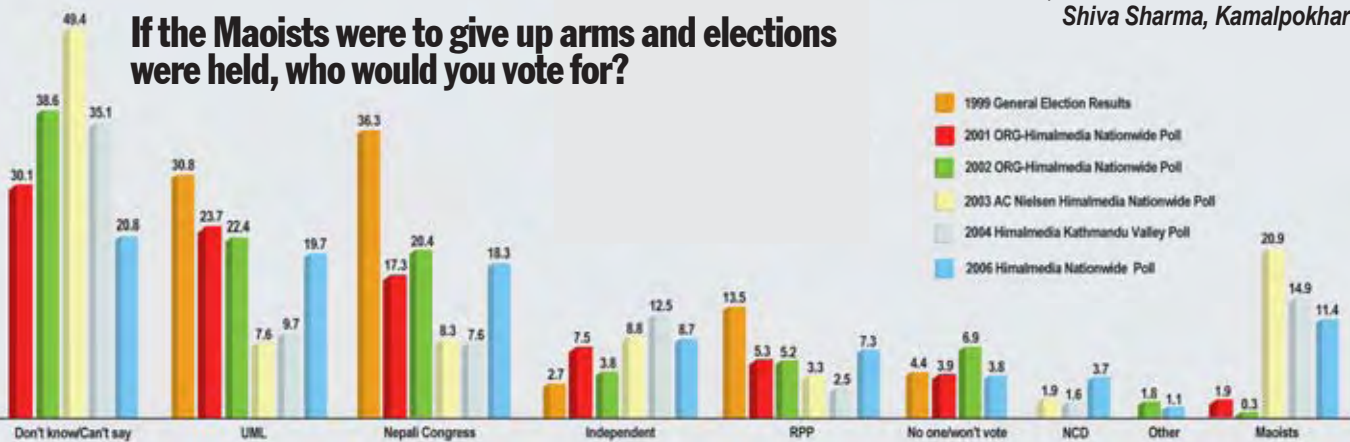
D Damerla, email

CORRECTIONS

In 'Listen to us' (#292) the bar chart depicting answers to the question in the Himalmedia public opinion poll 'If the Maoists were to give up arms and elections were held, who would you vote for?' the blue bar should have stood for the '2006 Himalmedia Nationwide Poll' instead of what inadvertently appeared. The reason the results don't add up to 100 percent is because some were rounded off and negligible results were not included.

● The caption for the picture accompanying 'Not knowing if they are dead or alive' (#292) should have read 'Motimaya Poudel and Tinam Rai as they relate their struggle to find a son and a brother'. Tinam Rai was misidentified.

If the Maoists were to give up arms and elections were held, who would you vote for?



2722

Imagine what it can do.

Passover in the Hindu kingdom

Nepal hosts more people for the Jewish festival than any other Asian country



SHABBATH SHALOM: Israeli holiday makers in last years Pesach.

BETH CHABAD

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

The annual Jewish Passover or Pesach holiday, which begins after sunset on Thursday 12 April and lasts for a week, is one of the most important festivals in the Jewish calendar and draws Israeli tourists holidaying in Asia by the hundreds to Nepal. Their arrival is a reminder that Israelis, mostly backpackers, are venturing here at a time when tourist alerts and rumours of Maoists have scared away many other would-be visitors.

The Jewish community has been celebrating Pesach in Nepal for almost two decades, and it coincides with the Nepali new

year. The first proper Passover meal was held in the Pumpernickel Bakery in Thamel in 1989 after Israeli and Jewish travellers asked the Israeli Embassy here to help them organise a celebration. The number of people attending the festival since then has grown steadily, in part because Nepal's peak trekking season is the time that backpackers in other parts of South Asia start drifting northward to escape scorching temperatures.

Last year, 2000 attended Pesach here and this year the Beth Chabad, the community's religious centre in Thamel, hopes to draw at least as many to the event at the Hotel Radisson. Two

truckloads of kosher food arrived from Israel two weeks ago. "This is probably the largest gathering of Israelis to celebrate Pesach anywhere outside Israel," says Rabbi Mendel of the Beth Chabad. For many young Israelis who may not strictly follow their religion at home, taking part in the festival here becomes a way to reconnect with their community and culture.

Among industry wallahs, Israeli tourists don't have a great reputation: they spend less than other tourists, particularly because they are younger than visitors from other countries and are known to be bargain hunters. Most of them arrive here straight out of compulsory army service in Israel seeking the freedom they have been denied for three long years (for men—women do one year of voluntary service).

But while they spend less per day than other tourists, Israelis stay longer. For many, the trip to Nepal is just one leg in an Asian voyage that easily stretches to six or seven months. First-timer Dana Efraih, 23, travelled overland from India after spending a few months there. "I had the option of staying longer in India but I decided to come here and I found the people much friendlier and hospitable," she says. According to Israeli Ambassador to Nepal Dan Stav, "The major treasure of Nepal is her people. You will never meet such friendly people anywhere else. Even with the conflict, tourists have never been targeted here and I see no reason not to come to Nepal."

NTB's monthly statistics ignore tourists who arrive overland, including many Israelis. For example, of the 9,342

tourists who entered through the Sunauli border in March, 339 were Israelis, according to Naresh Pokhrel, sub-assistant at the NTB desk in Sunauli, but they don't appear anywhere in the tourist tallies.

Michal Dror first visited Nepal last June and now works as a language instructor at the Himalayan Multiple Skills Training Centre, which trains Nepalis who want to work as caregivers in Israel. "For many young Israelis a trip to Nepal is their dream," she explains, "they come here looking for something they can't find back home."

Tova, 53, first came to Nepal three years ago with her son who had already visited four times and couldn't stop raving about Nepal. Now she spends three months a year in Kathmandu as the general supervisor at the Israeli run OR2K restaurant in Thamel. "I feel very much at home here," says Tova, but she has a quibble about foreigners being charged higher prices here: "it should be the same price for all."

While the large number of Israeli visitors to Asia is explained in part by their inability to get tourist visas for Muslim countries, their ability to adapt and survive is an advantage. Because conflict is not new to them, and because Nepal was the first country in this part of the world to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, in 1960, you would think that officials here would be doing more to reach out to Israeli visitors. ●

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Nepali nurses to Israel

In 2005, Himalayan Multiple Skills Training Institute (HIMSTI) started training workers who could meet the growing demand in Israel for caregivers for the aged and physically challenged. Its month-long course, during which students must live at HIMSTI, includes English and Hebrew language classes, training in hospitality and primary nursing care as well as a dip into Israeli culture.

Trainees pay Rs 430,000 for the program that includes air transport to and from Israel and visa processing. "The basic salary a caregiver in Israel earns is \$550 a month plus \$70-120 as pocket money and with the fact that they live with the employer's family and labour rights are very protected there it's a very safe bet for them," says HIMSTI's Bhaskar Devkota. The institute has published a caregivers' manual in Hebrew,



ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

English and Nepali called *Shalom with Namaste*.

In the past 15 months, 432 Nepalis, most of them women, have been trained and are working as nurses in Israel. At present the 14th batch, 33 women and two men, are undergoing training (pic). They include Yasodha Siwakoti, 31, from Jhapa. "It will be easier for us to work if we learn something first and the institute is wonderful," she says.

2722

The Choice is endless.

Nepali water filter award finalist

A filter developed in Nepal to remove arsenic from drinking water is one of three finalists for the prestigious US\$ 50,000 St Andrews Prize for the Environment. As reported in *Nepali Times* ('Easy to Swallow', #280) the Kanchan Arsenic Filter uses everyday items, including sand, brick, chips, gravel and iron nails to remove arsenic, pathogens, iron and other contaminants from water. The filter was developed by the Environment and Public Health Organisation (ENPHO), a Nepali NGO, working with researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and another local NGO, Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Support Program (RWSSSP). More than three million Nepalis living in the terai are drinking arsenic tainted water. Long-term exposure to this poison can lead to melanosis, vascular diseases, birth defects and even lung cancer and kidney problems. The St Andrews Prize is awarded by the University of St Andrews in Scotland and the international energy company ConocoPhillips to celebrate practical solutions to environmental challenges. There are two other finalists for the 2006 award, a wind power hydrogen production plant in Scotland and a project to educate women in Mexico and Central America on the use of the Maya Nut. The winner will be announced on 9 May.

Low growth in 2006: ADB

Low crop yields in both winter and summer will keep Nepal's growth rate at just two percent in 2006, says the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Poor weather will hamper production, added the bank's yearly *Asian Development Outlook* released on Thursday. The report blamed lower paddy yields, slow industrial growth and faltering tourism as major reasons why growth fell from 3.5 percent in 2004 to 2.3 percent in 2005. But it projected growth to rise to 3.4 percent in FY2007.

Good news skyward

Twenty-seven percent more visitors arrived by air in March compared to the same month last year, according to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. Both Indian and non-Indian visitors grew, led by a 77 percent hike in Indian air arrivals. Other Asian markets increased significantly (88.3 percent) during the month as did US (31 percent) and Australian visitors (60 percent). "It is a positive sign that the Indian market has recovered almost at par with 2004. The new Nepal tourism brand to be launched in the market later this month shall help to further enhance the trend," said Nepal Tourism Board CEO Tek Bahadur Dangi in a news release.

NEW PRODUCTS

POST-PAID NEW YEAR: Nepal Telecom is offering Rs 500 worth of free calls to users of post-paid cell phones from 14 April, the first day of the Nepali New Year 2063. NT is also introducing email alert service on post-paid lines from the same day. The service will initially be available to customers who have subscribed to NT's internet and email service. Pre-paid recharge cards of Rs 200 are also being introduced, says NT.

PLASTIC CASH: Laxmi Bank has introduced its Dhana Laxmi pre-paid card, which can be used like a debit card, even to make purchases on the internet. Available to both account holders and non-account holders of Laxmi Bank, the card can be used wherever SCT cards are accepted, including at retail stores. Cardholders can also make cash withdrawals from any ATMs in the SCT network.



COCA-COLA SUMMER: Coca-Cola this summer will award 50 lucky winners trips to Coca-Cola Fun Island. To be eligible you must buy Coca-Cola, Sprite or Fanta soft drinks and check the liner under the bottle cap. Winners must collect three liners that have engravings of airplanes. This offer is valid from 2 April to 31 May.



KUNDA DIXIT

Grounded private sector

Business should not exploit the war but start working to stop it.

While trying to find a place to stand at the airport departure gate, a parachute consultant asked your columnist why there were so many grounded aircraft scattered around the airport.

He wanted to know if they

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed



were linked to the large advertisements appearing in local newspapers. Sure enough, two of the planes sitting on the tarmac missing engines and wing parts were Fokker100s. In any case, Cosmic's debacle is just the latest airline scandal that has meant one step forwards and two steps back for the airline industry. How can one request the government to please hand over airport management to the private sector when the majority of private airlines have stalled?

Non-payment of lease rentals, dues amounts to billions to the Nepal Oil Corporation, and to CAAN. The only blame that perhaps can be pinned on the authorities is that they were not diligent in awarding licenses. How else to explain private promoters of airlines that have

folded to emerge again and again in new avatars?

In previous columns, this Beed delved into the opportunity for the private sector to lead when the political quagmire is stalling all other economic and development processes. Instead, it appears the private sector has seen the political situation more as an opportunity to move closer to power centres and not to their consumers. Yet what better opportunity could business have had than a government whose cabinet itself includes private sector stalwarts?

In Nepal, the private sector is more synonymous with the *sahus* who even the most remote villagers can identify. The image is of an exploitative, rent-seeking community that sucks profits out of the poor. The conversion of many of these erstwhile *sahus* into corporate houses has only modernised them, not changed their modus operandi.

The average citizen sees the private sector not paying loans on time, not abiding by the rules of law, using bureaucrats and politicians to further personal goals, not being just to workers, shying away from appointing professional managers, evading taxes, playing politics in their

associations and being translucent instead of transparent. Is anyone interested in shedding this image?

The class war that began in a small part of the country has engulfed the entire nation. The frustrati and anger of rural Nepalis at the business and political elite concentrated in urban centres has led to violence that has consumed the lives of so many people. The private sector must also take a part of the blame. In many countries ridden by conflict and political turmoil, the private sector has emerged as the change agent, creating more jobs and services and taking calculated risks with the larger objective of doing good for society rather than only bloating the bottom lines of their income statements.

The objective here is not to blame a particular business, group of firms or business associations. It is rather to persuade people in the private sector to consider their conduct in the larger context of the nation. We need peace restored, not just because the conflict has shattered lives but also because it will be the private sector that will ultimately benefit from peace. Business should not exploit this war but start working to stop it. ●

Big help from small grants

When foreign aid is discussed Indian assistance to Nepal is rarely mentioned

MALLIKA ARYAL and SHAILEE BASNET

When we speak of 'foreign aid' or 'donors', Indian development assistance to Nepal rarely comes up even though the southern neighbour is one the largest contributors.

In fact it was with Indian assistance that Nepal built its first highways, large hydropower plants and airports in the mid-1950s.

Such mega-projects continued until recently with support for Nepal's east-west fibre-optic backbone, a project to build feeder roads across the tarai and upgrade customs and immigration checkpoints along the common border.

But there has been a shift since 2003 from large infrastructure projects to small grants to grassroots communities. In the past three years the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu has helped 58 rural schools in 35 districts, 1,000 drinking water projects, and 10 solar electrification projects.

Of Rs 22.4 billion overall Indian economic cooperation to Nepal at present, Rs 700 million goes to small projects. And while other donors have frozen or suspended their aid since February First, Indian aid has not been cut.

"We continue to help Nepal because of a very simple and firm commitment, a peaceful and prosperous Nepal is good for India," explains Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukharjee.

But why the shift to small grants? Explains Khaya Bhattacharya, minister in the Economic Cooperation Wing



LET THERE BE LIGHT: Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukharjee at the inauguration ceremony of a solar electrification project in Katunje, Dhading. Over 2000 people will directly benefit from the electricity generated by this Rs 10 million project.

at the Indian Embassy: "We felt the need to be more people-centred in Nepal in terms of economic cooperation."

Anyone can apply for the grants, proposals are reviewed for sustainability to ensure they fit within priority areas in health and education and include a high degree of grassroots participation. Successful applications are forwarded to the Nepal government for approval.

Indira Sapkota of the Bhotu-Indira Social Welfare

Organisation in Gokarna is one successful applicant. "I was looking for funds to expand one of our schools that supports children from low-income families," says Sapkota, "by chance I met an embassy official at a fair and dropped off a proposal that was later accepted and I got Rs 1.6 million for a new school building."

The new strategy in Nepal has been so successful that New Delhi is applying it to other South Asian neighbours. "We are encouraged because Nepali people are coming to us with ingenious ideas and some of these projects are even being completed way before deadline," says Bhattacharya.

But isn't the political situation making it difficult to carry on with the program? Says Bhattacharya: "We can't wait for the political situation to get better because it is people who will be most affected if we stop assistance."

At the Ministry of Finance, joint secretary Rameshwar Prasad Khanal says the new Indian emphasis on small grants dove-tails nicely with decentralised development and great participation of communities in local decision-making. "It coincided with our own understanding that grassroots projects are most sustainable," Khanal told us.

The government's own spending on community-based, small-scale projects has grown from 1.5 percent in 2002 to over six percent in 2005. "The demand for such small projects come from communities themselves and implementation and ownership also goes back to them," he added.

The military wing of the Indian Embassy has long been involved in similar small-scale projects in education, health, drinking water and solar electrification in areas where retired Gorkha soliders live. And one of the least-talked about but most effective forms of aid has been Indian assistance in iodising salt since the 1970s which has led to the eradication of visible goitre from Nepal.

Bhattacharya denies India has stopped funding large projects. Besides the fibre-optic backbone India is also helping to add a Rs 760-million emergency and trauma centre to the Indian-aided Bir Hospital complex in Kathmandu and a detailed geological study for the Kosi high dam is currently underway. ●

“We’ll find a way”



KIRAN PANDAY

Interview with State Minister for Finance Roop Jyoti in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 2 April

समाचारपत्र

International organisations like the World Bank have claimed that financial sector reforms have slowed under the present government.

I wouldn't agree. Recently, the World Bank's Nepal chief said in a speech that reforms had slowed during 2005 and that is true but in the last three months many steps have been taken after many years. We have amended the Labour Act. We also made a courageous decision to increase the price of petroleum products.

One of the major conditions of financial sector reforms, bringing wilful defaulters to book, hasn't progressed. The report of a commission headed by NPC Vice Chairman Shankar Sharma has not been implemented.

It's not that the report has been blocked but there are a few things in it that need to be corrected. The report defines the terms wilful and non-wilful defaulters but in those definitions a few points are not correct. What we have been saying is that the two types of defaulters have to be properly defined. In a bid to correct the mistakes,

we have formed a taskforce. Once its work is done, the action steps will also need to be corrected.

But there have been allegations that you did not implement the report because of your own vested interests?

That is a completely false charge. Some media have been harping that my father (the late Maniharsha Jyoti) is also on the blacklist of wilful defaulters. It has been 14 years since he died—when he was alive he was unaware of this list. The loan amount was Rs 500,000 but now they say the sum is Rs 9.5 million. How could that be?

Moreover, that money should have been repaid by the company, which borrowed it when my father was not in the company. But this is besides the point. I believe in acting on the basis of correct principles. How reasonable is it to make someone repay a loan just because he was a member of a firm's board of directors? This is a procedural problem that needs to be amended.

You mean to say that the system of blacklisting should be changed?

I am not saying that the entire system should be abolished but if someone is to be put on the list, that should be done based on proper principles. The present system is such that if you owned 15 percent of shares in a company and it was unable to repay its loan, then you would be put on the blacklist. This will only discourage investors. That is why I say that incorrect principles like these need to be corrected right away.

The state's income has declined while its expenses have been on the rise and foreign aid has gone down. How will you balance your books?

We are in a position to collect around Rs 12 billion as internal loans, which will solve the problem. We will also focus on making expenses sustainable, in line with our income. We do not intend to cut development spending but the development budget is not being spent and there are indications that we may not be able to spend it in the near future. That would mean we would have some saved money in hand. The government will have to manage the security expenses, which have gone up due to the law and order problem and the parties' unnecessary movement. There is a possibility of resource constraints but we will find a way.

“It was me,” Girija

Deshantar, 2 April 2006

देशान्तर

NC president Girija Prasad Koirala has challenged the government to take action against him for holding talks with the Maoists instead of harassing other political leaders. “I was the one who held the talks, not only once—I held talks with the four Maoists leaders thrice... If they have the guts, they can blame Girija Prasad Koirala,” he said at a recent press conference. Pointing out the pressure that foreign powers applied to the parties after the 12-point understanding with the Maoists, Koirala said, “It is the duty of one democratic force to try and bring an undemocratic force into the mainstream. I only did my duty,” adding, “the Maoists have said they will accept internationally accepted democratic values and norms.” Calling on professionals and trade union officials to help make the 6-9 April protests successful, Koirala said, “the protest will not stop under any circumstances until it reaches the goal. If the king attempts to suppress the protest, the king will not remain either.” The leader said he would take responsibility if the government tried to harass protesters. “In the past I made mistakes as well. I have already realised this. One who accepts mistakes must be trusted not to repeat the mistakes. Democracy is a system that has to be learned. I too have learnt many lessons.”

infiltrating the seven parties' peaceful movement. This will definitely help to promote trust and keep the protest programs peaceful. But compared to the rest of the country, there is still no active Maoist presence in the capital. For this reason, the announcement is hardly significant. Instead, it only widens the gulf between Kathmandu and the rest of Nepal, reinforcing feelings of inequality between citizens of the same country. What is needed now is trust between the parties and Maoists. The rebels can play the main role in bringing the masses to the streets to protest the king's imperialistic and autocratic rule. But first, they have to admit that they have been making people attend their programs at gunpoint, forcing them to pay donations and sowing destruction. As for the parties, it is immoral for them to organise the nationwide strike without considering that ordinary civilians will be the ones directly affected. Finally, if both the Maoists and parties want peace through democracy, they must opt for a nationwide ceasefire instead of a strike.

Maoist in Europe

Nepal Samacharpatra, 5 April

समाचारपत्र

At the same time that Crown Prince Paras and Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey were seeking support in Austria and France for the royal government, the Maoists were lobbying in Europe with the help of Indian journalist Ananda Swaroop Verma. The New Delhi-based publisher of the paper *Teesri Dunia*, who also published Baburam Bhattarai's *Monarchy versus Democracy: The Epic Fight in Nepal* last year, has been in Europe for the last month speaking at pro-Maoist gatherings in Austria, France, Germany,

Cease fire now

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 4 April

कान्तिपुर

The Maoists' announcement that they have ended all military activities in Kathmandu is probably aimed at countering the government's noise about rebels



He sneezed so loud that it rang our alarm, so we arrested him under TADO.

कान्तिपुर

Rajesh KC in *Kantipur*, 5 April



Why are you targetting my new commode? There is no leader there, it's your own shadow.

समाचारपत्र

Kishore Joshi in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 6 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“While maintenance of law and order is the responsibility of the state, security considerations should not be the basis for denying citizens their right to peaceful protest.”

- UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in a statement Wednesday reacting to arrests of political and civil society leaders in Kathmandu.

A runaway train

Sambhu Shrestha in *Drishhti*, 4 April

दृष्टि

Remember the time in 2004 when Information Minister Mohamad Mohsin warned that if the Deuba government failed it would bring in dictatorship? There was outrage, and Mohasin's NC-D and UML colleagues in the government called for his resignation. And, just as Mohsin had predicted, the Deuba government fell and sure enough dictatorship followed soon after. Now, if this regime falls what will follow? It is hard to imagine, but no one believes that a government chaired by the king has much of a future. Even if you take into account the king's speech of 1 February 2005 this regime has only two years left. The country's main problem is the insurgency, it is because of this that democracy has weakened. The king pledged to make multi-party democracy stronger, but his handpicked henchmen have never done anything to further that aim. And instead of resolving the insurgency, the regime is bent on provoking the Maoists. Such behaviour will neither strengthen constitutional monarchy nor multiparty democracy. To bring democracy back on track, it is the monarchy that has to return to the constitutional track. That way the gap between the king and the parties will narrow and we can make progress in finding a solution.

The king must begin talking as soon as possible with the seven parties to find a solution. Girija P Koirala's latest statements show he is ready for such talks. If that doesn't happen, then this country will drift towards militarism. Militarism means the demolition of democracy and the failure of the king's rule, a process that has already started. The king, parties and Maoists need to be aware of this because the result of militarisation will be unpredictable—neither the king nor the Maoists will be able to say what it is. So, it is better for all players in this power struggle to travel safely in a train with a locomotive than to take an uncertain ride on a runaway train.

Desperate

Editorial in *Deshantar*, 2 April

वैश्वानर सापकास्विक

Home Minister Kamal Thapa has publicly announced that a 'special task force' of Maoists have entered the capital. He has labelled the 6-9 April nationwide banda organised by the seven parties as a "Maoist strike". The Home Ministry has said it will do anything to stop the agitating parties including deploying the army and imposing curfew. Looking at the way the present government is trying to suppress the movement, it is evident that the moral ground on which it is based on is collapsing. By calling a peaceful strike a Maoist movement, it is easy for the government to suppress it by deploying the army. Whenever the seven parties talk about taking to the streets, the government thinks the Maoists are taking over. It is a disgrace that the government



has to deal with parties that are agitating peacefully. This trend of government action only goes to prove that if the Maoists were to declare a ceasefire it would take the lifeline of this present government away.

However, the seven agitating parties are not going to back out this time around because of the government's threat.

People have vowed to come out on the street to protest the autocratic rule. Peaceful movements will not just be limited to the seven parties. From cab drivers to housewives, journalists, engineers, farmers, lawyers and political activists all think the only way out is a people's movement. As in 1990, history will repeat itself in the coming days when the parties defy the ban on rallies. Just like the Panchayat ended with the coming of the new year, this Chait we will see an end of another autocratic rule.



BHIM GHIMIRE, KANTIPUR DAILY

LIFE BEHIND BARS: Sandip Karki born in Morang prison stands with mother Sita Karki who was sentenced to life imprisonment for allegedly killing a neighbour five years ago.

कान्तिपुर

Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. The theme of the trip, organised by London-based leftist group World Peoples Resistance Movement, was 'Revolution in Nepal: A new world is possible'. In his presentation, Verma said that while the US, UK and India were helping the royal government, the Nepali people widely support the Maoists. Verma who is also general secretary of the All-India Farm Workers Union, criticised the Indian government for

helping to oppress the (Nepali) people for the past 30 years instead of working to transform the society. "The communist rebels have started conducting activities to correct the weaknesses in society, removed the tradition of untouchability and liberated women. Campaigns to provide education to all have been conducted along with the development of schools. The PLA has been helping villagers by providing medicine," Verma claimed.

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ZINC:- An enzyme involved in production of genetic material and proteins, transports vitamin A, wound healing, sperm production etc.



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KIRAN PANDAY

New generation tvs will deliver the World Cup to your living rooms in June

NARESH NEWAR

'Virtual seduction.' 'Mind boggling.' That is how tech freaks describe the new wave of plasma and LCD monitors on display at showrooms in Kathmandu.

If that's what they're saying now, imagine what they'll say when the World Cup begins in June. With high-definition, crystal clear, pictures, hang-on-the wall plasma and LCD (liquid crystal display) tvs make telly viewing a whole new experience.

Plasma technology was invented in the 1960s and uses fluorescent lights whose main element is a plasma gas, to form an image. But tv companies dismissed the new technology as an alternative to the bulky cathode ray tubes (CRT) which gave the tv its nickname 'the tube' because of the huge investment needed.

It was only in 1999, after Japanese company Matsushita

launched a joint venture with plasma inventor Larry Weber, that the plasma display panel got popular. Since then, millions of people worldwide have gone plasma and just as many have the slim tv on their shopping list.

In Nepal the passion for plasma is growing but ownership is still limited to a niche market due to the high prices. Even the most expensive CRT tv is less than Rs 20,000 but the starting price for LCDs and plasmas are in the six figures: rising to Rs 400,000 depending on screen size.

Although distributors aren't selling too many at the moment, they are confident it will not take long before more people opt for the flat, sleek tvs. "The market is still too small for plasma and LCD tvs in Nepal but we are hoping that it will get better in another three years," says LG's SC Saboo.

Prices are expected to drop

further in the coming year, after being halved in just a few years. "Barely two years ago, you could buy a car for the price of a plasma tv but now they are quite affordable," says Dinesh Shrestha from Trade Link International, the local distributor of ViewSonic, a US manufacturer.

Not long ago, huge flat projection tvs were being hyped but the technology wave has already swamped that fad and today they are dismissed as just 'boxes'. And with reason: their picture quality pales in comparison to plasma and LCD displays.

To make it easier for you to take the plunge and order your own plasma some companies have arranged financing just like taking a car loan so you can watch the big screen at home while paying for it in monthly instalments.

"Plasma sales are still negligible but we can expect a gradual shift in the near future," says Samsung's Shekhar Golcha. Tube sets still account for 95 percent of tv sales, 80,000-100,000 units every year, half of them in Kathmandu alone. Their prices have been slashed more than 100 percent in less than 10 years. But dealers add that even without large-scale marketing, plasma and LCDs will quickly replace tubes, just as the black and white tv now rests in the technology graveyard.

"The tv market trend has changed so much because there are just too many choices," explains Amrit Kansakar from Sony Television. Even tv distributors have got a break, with the government reducing import taxes from 60 percent six years ago to only 35 percent today, helping sellers to offer tv

at prices reasonable enough for most urban families.

"Our role is to introduce new technology, so that buyers have more choices," says Saurav Jyoti of Syakar, which introduced Philips plasma sets here nearly five years ago. Other leading companies include Sony, Samsung, LG and Viewsonic.

"The best thing about electronic technology is that quality improves and the price falls every year and it's the same for televisions," says Tarun Bajracharya From D&D International.

All manufacturers are rushing to cash in on the Football World Cup in Germany in June when they expect a rush from people wishing to upgrade from CRTs to LCDs and even plasma. ●

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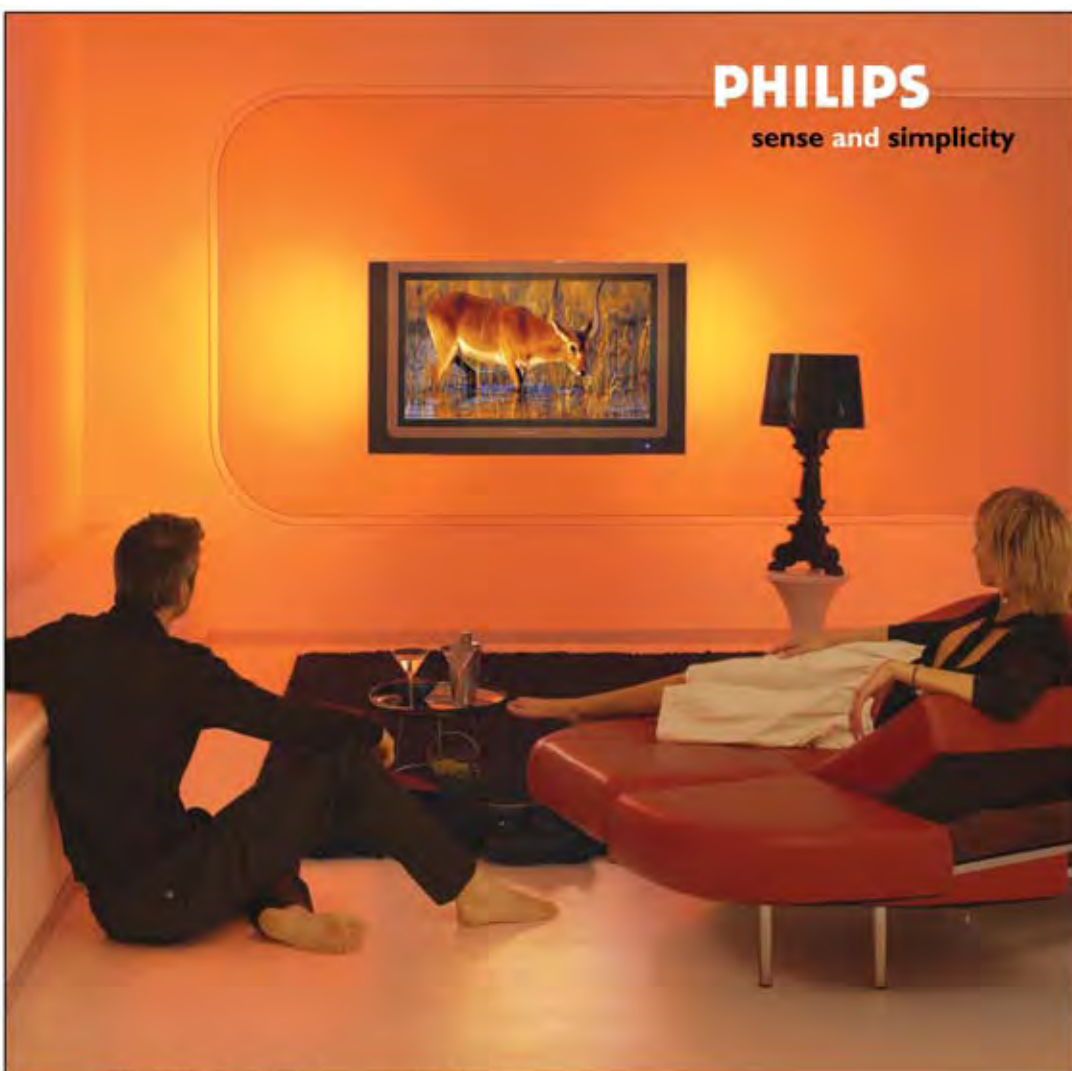
Considering how fast we've moved from semi-flat, to flat, then Plasma and now LCD monitors it is hard to predict what is next. Maybe gigantic 120 inch screens, or how about theatre quality digital projectors?

"What's next in monitors is left to your imagination," says Saurav Jyoti from Syakar, Nepal's representative for Phillips. What is certain is that the future will be digital and laser tvs. Like inventors say: make it and you'll find the gadget addicts to buy it. This is so true of plasma and LCD sets, which the tv industry was initially sceptical about.

In just a few years, they have revolutionised the industry in the US, Europe and Asia. Even in India, production of tube tv's has stopped as many consumers shell out huge dollars for the latest rage.

It is estimated that plasma and LCD sales will double in the next year, aided by diminishing prices. Asian tv makers have turned their attention to mass marketing LCDs, with Samsung alone predicting sale of 40 million next year, more than double its 18 million units in 2005. Plasma sales this year nearly doubled, to nine million from just five million last year.

But the real future will be digital and laser television, Mitsubishi, which will launch its laser tv in 2008, says that it will have far superior picture quality with bright, deep images thanks to the red, blue and green lasers that will generate images.



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Hacking off democracy's

MARTY LOGAN

Nepal's success with community forestry was largely made possible because of devolution and grassroots democracy. When local people felt they had control over forests, they invested in protecting them.

But the dissolution of village and district councils by the Sher Bahadur Deuba government in 2002 and the subsequent royal takeover is beginning to undermine Nepal's most celebrated forest conservation success stories.

Even so, 800 community forest user groups in Okhaldhunga, Dolakha and Ramechhap, for instance, have invested in 328 school buildings, 107 have paid teachers' salaries, 42 have built bridges and all have established a level of inclusive democracy that governments and INGOs can only dream about. Plus: they have accumulated a bank balance of more than Rs 7 million. Now, powerful and greedy factions are eyeing that money.

"We have seen that when you give authority, power and support to the people, they become vehicles for change," says Bharat K Pokharel, manager of the Nepal

Swiss Community Forestry Project (NSCFP) which works with more than 800 community forest user groups in the three districts.

Earlier this month about 30 representatives of forest users groups, political parties, and other civil society activists were brought together in Kathmandu by the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN) to strategise.

"We told them: you have a constitution, you have the UN human rights declaration, you have your rights. If people come to take your forest away from you, you must tell them they have no right to," says Ghanashyam Pandey, coordinator of the organisation's new policy advocacy campaign.

FECOFUN represents most of the country's 14,000 users groups, and says it has been pushed to adopt this 'rights-based approach' after security forces began to occupy community forests and the government and Maoists tried to grab their forests and savings. Now, the government is even eyeing the successful community forests that have turned once-barren hills on the rim of Kathmandu Valley for security reasons. "The people

living near the forests depend on them for fodder and firewood, for their livelihoods," says Pandey, "but these people sitting in Singha Darbar never think of that."

According to Pokharel, the 1993 Forest Act gives more powers to local forest users groups than even the Local Governance Act provides to VDCs and DDCs. The users groups, which manage more than one million hectares of forests, responded to the act's mandate by helping to check deforestation, particularly in the hills.

Nepal's forest cover, which had shrunk from 43 percent in 1979 to 29 percent in 1998 bounced back after the legislation went into effect. The reason it worked so well was because of local participation in decision-making through inclusive grassroots democracy. An NSCFP study of the three districts where it works found that women make up 33 percent of the groups' membership and Dalits are represented proportionately at both the general membership and committee levels.

To be sure, there were problems with forestry user groups: many were dominated by the high caste village elite, there was less representation of janjati,

Dalis and women but it was changing. After 1 February, there has been a lot more interference in the workings of the groups. By law, they have to renew their agreement with the government to use forest resources for local development. But there are now thousands of user groups that haven't had their agreements renewed. "They are a legal no-man's land," says Jorg Frieden of Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC).

In addition, forestry user groups have always had to face harassment from the Maoists. Usually, it is to include Maoists in committees, restricting choices in the use of resources, even changing the official name of user groups to revolutionary ones. But lately, the Maoists have been extorting money from the user group's kitty so money meant for repairing bridges or paying teachers is going to the upkeep of guerrillas. The Maoists have analysed community forestry from a purely class standpoint, and don't see the rural empowerment and environment protection that it promotes. Baburam Bhattarai in a magazine interview in February even said: "While it may seem that the community forest users committees are autonomous

units, they definitely have a class structure. Village biggies enjoy greater facilities than the voiceless." But citing the Maoist ratification of the Basic Operating Guidelines, Bhattarai added: "Our present policy is to permit all national and foreign projects which are not pawns of the monarchist reactionary government and are involved in genuine service of the community to work without hesitation."

However, it may be the very democratic bent and growing resources that have made the user groups a target for both sides in the conflict. The Maoists tax the groups and the government is trying to control them. "Those who believe in democracy support the community forestry process but the present government doesn't believe in it," says FECOFUN Secretary General, Bholu Bhattarai.

The government denies this, saying it is only trying to allow district officials to 'coordinate' local activities. "We don't want to take power from FECOFUN," says Damodar Parajuli, joint secretary at the Ministry of Forests. "A few people in FECOFUN are trying to grab resources at the cost of other poor people in the districts."

But other experts are convinced the government is

"We are in a stop-and-go situation"



Nepali Times: How badly has the royal takeover affected aid flows?

Jörg Frieden: Commitments of resources to Nepal are clearly down. To my knowledge no European country has had new formal aid negotiations since 1 February.

But how do you send the message about restoration of inclusive democracy without punishing the people?

Frieden: We are not here to send messages to anybody. We are guests in your country and we are here to help the people and support local initiatives. We have the Basic Operating Guidelines that really define the reason why we are here. There is a sense in some quarters that the donors would like to punish somebody to send a political message. I think that is not true. The aid agencies want to remain committed to Nepal and its people. Our parliaments might have different perceptions and what they think will impact the level of resources. But we have certainly witnessed a deterioration in the relationship between the donor community and the government over the last 13-14 months. When looking at the financial relationships, one has to distinguish between commitments of funds for new projects and the disbursement of funds for the implementation of existing projects. The significant reduction in new commitments will translate into less disbursements, less investments from the next fiscal year on. However, the implementation of existing projects started before 1 February has continued as much as possible, maintaining temporarily

Since 1 February 2005, Nepal's bilateral relations with key donors have deteriorated. Aid has either been delayed, suspended or cancelled, few new agreements have been signed and the future of foreign aid remains uncertain. Nepali Times talked to Jörg Frieden of the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and Armin Hofmann from German Development Cooperation (GTZ) about the impact of recent political events on aid.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

the aid flow at the same level.

We haven't seen much change in the Maoist attitude since 1 February. But we have had contradictory messages. On one side, if you look at the declarations over the last two years, we have seen more interest for development work coming up and more willingness to discuss development issues. That is a positive fact.

The climate created by the four-month ceasefire led to the declaration by Prachanda on 22 December that the CPN-M would recognise the Basic Operating Guidelines. Although problems continued, the acceptance of those principles allowed bilaterals through the UN system to see the leadership intervening to solve problems at the local level and demonstrating also a capacity to a certain extent to maintain discipline among the rank and file. Unfortunately, we still face a lot of difficulties in many areas, more in the east of the country on the issues of formal registration of development actors with the people's government and taxation, which remain very pressing. These are demands we cannot accept and each time the CPN-M cadre have pushed too much in that direction we had to stop working.

On the government side, there is less change because the CDOs and LDOs are pragmatic and interested in development as a rule and local bodies and district authorities continue to be concerned about development.

The reality in many districts is that we are in a situation of stop and go. Development work stops when development partners and projects are asked to contribute

to the insurgency. We must indeed make sure that our taxpayers' money should not flow into the pocket or treasury of one of the warring parties.

Has Nepal's image taken a dent in Switzerland and Germany?

Armin Hofmann: Europe is a media society and the tsunami and Kashmir earthquake got a lot of publicity there. So there was overwhelming, huge support to the victims of those two natural disasters. But because there was so much focus on that, Nepal's difficulties have been sidelined. Also, we need encouraging news from Nepal so people back home will say 'let's not forget Nepal'.

But if you look at the domestic problem in water and energy, the lack of investment compared to last year is now hitting the people and will hit them even more in the coming years. These are processes of decline that will get worse and worse in the future. The macro-economic fundamentals are worrisome. One is that everyday we have an average of 450 people leaving the country and the trend is going up. Somehow, these people are the more skilled people. Ok, they send back remittances but there is the risk of imported inflation when monetary growth increases more than the rate of GDP growth as seems to be the case now.

Foreign direct investment is almost zero. We would like to support and stimulate it but there are questions of sustainability. Looking ahead three, five or 10 years, there is a lot of room for concern because we have demographic

limbs

Both sides in the conflict target community forest groups, threatening their conservation success story

GREEN PEOPLE POWER:

This community forest near Godavari is managed by a user group, and its success could be threatened by both an unrepresentative government and the Maoists.



KUNDA DIXIT

eyeing the user groups' savings. "The government has always wanted to control the funds," says Santosh Mani Nepal of WWF Nepal. Because the government is dragging its feet in setting up community forestry in areas of the

tarai, villagers have started 'capturing' them. In 2004, FECOFUN studied 178 such groups. On average they had captured 215 hectares each and had generated savings of Rs 75,000.

But such success is a double-

edged sword because savings of the user groups from the sale of forest products make them vulnerable to Maoist extortion, which in turn invites government backlash against the very groups that are protecting forests. ●

growth and we will not find qualified jobs in the domestic market or the people required may be working abroad. Even the overseas job market has limits. Some Middle East countries already have already stopped taking Bangladeshis, and Nepalis will also be hitting a cap after some time.

Frieden: Overall, the image of Nepal abroad has deteriorated dramatically after 1 February and this will have an impact on the level of resources Nepal will receive next year if things remain the same. The level of resources for Nepal has been shrinking and the commitments are clearly down.

Since the Nepal Development Forum two years ago there hasn't been any substantive collective dialogue with the government. In the West, Nepal is still perceived as a sympathetic country and is liked. It has a positive image in Switzerland in terms of nature and culture. There are many private initiatives not controlled by our government in the social sector for schools and orphanages. But even these have been hit by implementation problems. And Nepal's image has been changing from a peaceful and beautiful country to the picture of military in the streets, weapons in the hills. This has created a certain sense of anguish. The questions are: can you still work? Are our people and staff secure?

The logic of development agencies is still the logic of success. We can't get resources if we can't support meaningful efforts to reduce poverty. So the question is how can we achieve that in a conflict situation.

So, have we now reached the stage where we need aid for humanitarian support?

Frieden: The answer is yes and no. No, because fortunately even the communities in affected areas remain cohesive. You don't have social disintegration. So, you don't have large camps or huge numbers of people begging in the street. The social fabric is in order. The rural communities still cope and you can provide resources to help them cope better. We are shifting our objective from support to long-term development capacity building toward immediate effects. This is in a sense a humanitarianisation of development work but the projects fortunately remain the same so far and we haven't had to put in place a heavy humanitarian machine. But what happens in the next 4-5 years? The capacity of local communities to cope may be weakened.

There are still sectors like export promotion that GTZ is involved in that shouldn't be so affected by the conflict.

Hofmann: Yes, there are certain sectors that aren't so vulnerable. But take for example the carpet industry. They have to meet the deadline. If not, they will face a heavy penalty or be out of business or will have to spend considerable amount of their profit margin for air freight to

meet commitment to their importers. Some quality exporters may not be as vulnerable, but everyone is exposed to delays. Producers are trying to be flexible by keeping huge stocks of raw material in Kathmandu but what happens if transport is not possible? We had a very successful herb producers' fair in Nepalganj last year and there have been buyers from different parts of Asia. The potential for export of local products is there but importers would like to know whether they can trust Nepali companies, whether they are reliable business partners.

Would things bounce back quickly if the peace process started?

Hofmann: I would like to compare this with the situation in Sri Lanka, where there was a ceasefire after 20 years of war. This gave a whole lot of optimism, investments started coming in, the tourists returned, people started looking forward and planning for the future. But the peace dividend has a catch. When peace returns, the people's expectations rise but things don't get better immediately. We from the development community should have short, medium and long-term plans to provide a peace dividend so people don't get impatient. What we can also learn from Sri Lanka is that they have ceasefire but no peace agreement yet. Even just a ceasefire helps because the situation is more relaxed and stable.

We should perhaps work towards a ceasefire before heading for the ultimate peace agreement. During the ceasefire the short-term projects may be implemented to give people an immediate feeling of relief before the mid-term interventions are rolled out and long-term strategies planned and implemented.

Frieden: In case of a general ceasefire, the level of positive attention and commitment from the international community will increase. The preparation of new commitments will however take time. To commit new money takes up to two years. The private sector and the migrant workers will probably be quicker in transferring resources into the countryside. What the international community is trying to do is to redesign projects to react quickly to a future ceasefire. The implementation should be such that if you have a ceasefire, we could do more with already committed money. At the same time, we realise that the political handling of the ceasefire will determine its actual effect on the ground. During a possible ceasefire, a large part of the rural areas will be under the control of one party and we have to prepare ourselves to deal with that territorial situation. In this context I think that elections of local bodies in a multiparty framework would be a crucial first step for the resumption of sustainable development.

Sorry we bombed your school

The Maoists apologise again, but some Dailekh children have been scarred for life

SUBEL BHANDARI in DAILEKH

It was not examination anxiety that made Naresh Kumar BC and his classmate Dammar Khadka tremble as they sat for their SLC test earlier this week.

Till last week they were happy and confident high school students. On Friday, 31 March when the exam started at 7AM at Shree Sunrise English School in district headquarters Dailekh, they were writing answers to their "easiest subject", Social Science. Naresh was in Room 8 and Dammar in Room 1. The first bell was only minutes away, but instead of the bell, there was the deafening sound of an explosion right outside Room 8.

Naresh, Dammar and 58 other classmates are from Sri Jaya Janata Secondary School in Jurebanjh about five hours walk away from the district capital. Both are among the top five in their class.

"It was the most frightening moment of my life," recalls Naresh with fear in his eyes, "I was just three meters away and I thought we were finished. I fainted and can't remember anything until I was outside the room struggling to get on my feet."

The classroom was filled with dust, and there was a strong smell of explosives. Examination papers, ID cards, pens and sandals were scattered all over. Nobody knows when the bomb was planted or why.

As soon as the bomb went off, the security forces were the first to run for cover. In Room 7, they actually locked the door from inside so the students couldn't go out. When the students later broke down the door and ran the panicked policemen even fired a few rounds into the air. "It was just random firing," Naresh remembers, "but that scared us even more because if there were Maoists and if they had fired back, we would be caught in crossfire."

State security even threatened journalists not to file any news or pictures of the incident and grilled reporters for an hour. Many of the terrorised students fled, and some returned later to take out a rally through the market. Even though they were chanting anti-Maoist slogans the security forces slapped around a few of the students saying "it's your brothers and sisters who bombed the school".

Few students sat down to finish the exam later although they couldn't concentrate, while others refused even though the district education officer tried his best to convince them. The test has been rescheduled for 7 April.



SUBEL BHANDARI

SHELL SHOCKED: Naresh and Dammar are still traumatised by the bomb in their school, but they are determined to pass SLC and go to college.

Altogether 12 students and an invigilator were injured in the explosion. Tanka Khadka went back to his house in the village and suffers from post-traumatic stress. "He is very weak and is not talking sense, I don't think he will be giving any exams," Naresh says of his classmate. Hira Oli and Goma BC are still in the hospital after five days. Binod Rokaya and Devkumari from Chupra were wounded by shrapnel in their arms and will need help to write their answers when the exams resume.

The Maoists have denied they were responsible for the blast, but Comrade Prakanda, Bheri-Karnali in-charge, said his group would investigate. Interestingly, another press release by the Maoist in-charge of Dailekh apologised for the bomb which it said was 'not a part of the party's plan' and that the incident would be 'investigated thoroughly'.

All this buck-passing has infuriated the students. Dammar says, "We certainly won't have good things to say about the Maoists now would we? They shouldn't have done what they did, it was a stupid thing to do."

Naresh says: "Their war is against the state, why drag us into it? It's an act of cowardice." Both Naresh and Dammar have already been forced twice to attend Maoist mass meetings in the past year to listen to speeches and look at drills. None of the students have joined the Maoists even though one of their teachers went over recently.

The children are also critical of the shameful behaviour of security personnel after the bomb went off. They don't have much faith in the security forces and are uneasy every time they see soldiers while walking to their new exam centre.

Naresh hopes to be a journalist and Dammar a teacher when they grow up. After their SLC, both plan to move to Surkhet for further studies. "That is if we pass our examination this time," Naresh says with a nervous chuckle. ●

Asia's dysfunctional democracies

Across Asia, there are signs of democratic paralysis

The abrupt resignation of Thailand's Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra this week is another sign of a disturbing paradox: the more vigorous Asian democracy becomes, the more dysfunctional it is.

There is no shortage of examples. The attempt by opposition parties last year to impeach South Korea's President Roh Moo Hyun on the flimsiest



government has been able to serve its full term. So Pakistanis grimly learned to accept military rule as their destiny.

The problem in Asia often arises from cohabitation—an awkward arrangement by which a directly elected president must co-exist with a parliament controlled by a rival party or parties. The United States and Europe's mature democracies may function well enough with the checks and balances of divided government (though the Republicans' bid to impeach President Clinton eight years ago might suggest otherwise), but in Asia the failure to bestow executive and legislative powers on a single institution is usually a terrible drawback.

This seems especially true when a government tries to enact radical economic or political reforms. The elected president wants to act, but the assembly refuses to approve the necessary laws. Or vice versa.

The pattern begins in parliamentary deadlock. Incompetent leaders blame legislatures for their failures, legislators blame presidents from rival parties. Finger pointing replaces responsibility, fuelling popular demand for a strongman (or woman) who can override political divisions.

Divided government also plays into the hands of Asia's separatists. At a critical moment for Sri Lanka's peace process, President Kumaratunga was so incensed by the policies of her political rival, Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, that she sacked three of his ministers and called elections almost four years early. The only people who seem to have benefited from this democratic division are the murderous Tamil Tigers. Similarly, in Nepal, a Maoist insurgency has taken advantage of divisions between the king and parliament to gain control of much of the countryside.

True, Asian democracies, however unstable, are preferable to autocracies, whether military, as in Pakistan and Burma, or communist, as in China and Vietnam. But the danger in a weakened democracy is not merely blocked legislation and ineffective government. Ambitious but thwarted presidents are easily tempted to take unconstitutional measures; after all, they reason, the people elected them directly. The same is true of some prime ministers. Indeed, one of the causes of the protests that led to the resignation of Thailand's Thaksin was the accusation that he was weakening his country's democratic traditions in favour of personal rule.

Given these precedents, perhaps Asian policymakers should consider the merits of adopting systems where electoral victory translates into real power. Of course, parliamentary political systems are far from perfect. Neither Singapore nor Malaysia, where ruling parties have long dominated the parliaments, has a political culture as healthy as in Taiwan or South Korea.

But in parliamentary democracies such as Japan and India, an elected leader runs the country until the day his or her party or coalition loses its legislative majority. This means that governments are judged not by their ability to outmanoeuvre legislatures, but by the quality of their policies. In many Asian democracies, only institutional reconstruction will prevent collapse. ●

COMMENT
Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri



of excuses. Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian's inability to pass legislation through a parliament controlled by the opposition Kuomintang, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo's stalemated first term and the repeated rumours of looming coup attempts against her: each bears testimony to a form of democratic

paralysis in Asia.

If deadlock and confusion were the only results, such political impasses might be tolerable. But chronic stalemate has confronted many Asian democracies with the threat of being discredited, a potential for

violence, and the prospect of economic decline.

Indeed, the precedents of democratic immobility in Asia are hardly encouraging. For example, since Pakistan's creation in 1947, partisan divisions ensured that no elected

Satyabrata Rai Chowdhuri, Emeritus Professor at India's University Grants Commission, is a former Professor of International Relations at Oxford University.

Sarah's children

Welcome to the world of silence



MIN BAJRACHARYA

A group of teenagers is practicing a dance routine on the lawn, their movements fluid and sinuous perfectly synchronised with the instrumental number 'The Dawn' coming from a CD player. The dancers go through their ballet-like movements with flawless coordination.

But the dancers are all deaf. The music is only for the benefit of their instructor, Sarah Yonzon, who has dedicated her life to helping Nepal's hearing impaired and is training this group for a charity performance soon. As a test, Sarah turns the music off. The dancers can't tell the difference, and keep dancing. The only sound is their deep breathing and the shuffling of feet on the grass—they are dancing from memory.

Sarah is the former Radio Nepal English news reader, now



SOUND OF SILENCE: Yuri Bhattachan dances from memory even though she doesn't hear the music (above). Sarah Yonzon signing with her dancers.

better known as the wife of vice-chairman Tulsu Giri. But few in Nepal know about the passion with which she has devoted herself to helping those who do not hear. While in Bangalore with her husband, Sarah enrolled to learn sign language at the Dr Chandrasekhar Institute of

Speech and Hearing. Later she worked on a program to find jobs for the hearing impaired in Bangalore's IT and banking industry.

When she returned to Nepal with her husband after the royal takeover a year ago, Sarah started trying to find out where she could help. But first she had to teach herself Nepali sign language, which was different from the language she had learnt in India. Asked to compare blindness and deafness, Sarah quotes her role-model, Helen Keller: "Blindness separates a person from things, deafness isolates a person from people."

That is why Sarah decided the deaf needed help to communicate so they could be a part of the hearing society. "The deaf hear through their eyes and speak with their hands, and they have a whole culture that is visually-defined," Sarah explains.

As a part of her effort to allow Nepali deaf children to communicate and participate in creative activities, Sarah chose the medium of dance. First she taught herself movements from popular Nepali folk tunes and hits like 'The Score' from the film *Godfather* and painstakingly performed in front of the children. They memorised the hand and foot movements, and learned to 'feel' the music. After months of practice in Sarah's backyard, it is now possible to watch the children without even knowing that they do not hear.

Rashmi Amatya, Muna Gurung, Yuri Bhattachan, Jamuna Dahal and Anita Prajapati and others have by now mastered 10 dances, and can't wait for their big day when they perform for the public. Being great mime artists, the deaf are born for dance and Sarah's children already seem to have more confidence and passion than most dancers who can hear.

Sarah doesn't want to have a standard public performance with speeches and an MC. Instead, there will be a video presentation with a voice-over for the benefit of those in the audience who can hear. And the theme? Says Sarah: "We're going to call it 'welcome to the world of silence.'" ●

Coping with losing

When the going gets tough, the tough go for the ground strokes

On the tennis court and in life, there is adversity. For the first time in 11 years of coaching at the collegiate level, my team is in the midst of a losing season. We have lost our last four matches. My players have fought hard and given their best effort but it hasn't translated into victories. Injuries and close losses have chipped away the confidence of our team. It is easy to write about winning and winners. We love feel-good stories and happy endings. Today, I want to write about losing and how I am dealing with this challenge.

Focus on the positive.

When things are not going your way, it is easy to get negative and see what's wrong instead of what's right. I am constantly looking for anything positive to build on, such as effort, attitude, focus and the energy of my players. Even when my student athletes have lost a match, it is my job to highlight what they have done well.

GAME POINT Sujoy Lama



Surround yourself with people who love and believe in you

You will be surprised to know that there are people who want to see you fail for many reasons. Some of them are your opponents, some are just envious and some don't even know why they root against you. These are the times I hold on to my family, friends and mentors. Their selfless love and support is a pillar of strength for me.

Set small goals, achieve them and build on it

When things are not going your way, it is natural to press and try harder. Wanting to win becomes an obsession. This is the time you have to let go and have mini goals that lead to the main aspiration. This week, we have got our players to go back and hammer the basics, such as preparing properly for ground strokes, staying low to the ground to use the kinetic chain and keeping the head still for balance.



Think, talk, walk and act like a winner

The natural reaction after a tough loss is to hang your head and drown your sorrows in a pity party. It is ok to be disappointed for a while but snap out of it real fast. And the best way to do this is to be aware of your posture and self talk. Walk with your shoulders up and keep reminding yourself that you are good. In other words, fake it till you make it.

Keep things in perspective

Losing a tennis match does not define who I am. How I deal with losing will tell a lot more about my character. Last week, I planned a trip for my team to go and visit young kids in a hospital. I wanted them to know that their suffering was nothing compared to that of these children facing a life and death situation. It is not ok to equate winning with self worth. Striving to win is bigger than winning itself.

Just look around and you will derive inspiration from people from all walks of life who are dealing with losses and adversities. A couple of years ago an up and coming tennis player from Miami lost a record 21 first-round matches on the ATP tour. Vince Spadea was on the verge of being in the top-20 and just like that he was out of the rankings. It was his ability to laugh at himself that enabled him to relax, recharge and come back stronger than ever.

My team and I will too.

lama@ad.uiuc.edu

2722

This is just the beginning ...

"Jasto boT ustai phal." (If your father was a great monkey, so can be you.) - as translated by UNACOOTs, the United Nation's Assn. of Cartoonists

Despite loadshedding @ Tribhuvan Airport, Customs Officials and the Nepali Bandh, Sanjeeb's Hajur Buwaa Curious George comes to visit Sanjeeb from America for some rest and relaxation... ..and a surprise retirement in Nepal!

KE GARNE? WHATEVER. But take care of (monkey) business first.

"Curiosity Cures Any Ignorance."

-- Sanjeeb The Nepali Space Monkey, upon the first Nepali Mars Landing, September 11, 2027

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#117 2062 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

The Adventures of HeroJig can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

❖ **Shanti Yagya** by Uma Shankar Shah, Siddhartha Art Gallery. 26 March - 18 April. 4438716

EVENTS

- ❖ **International artists' residency** by Sutra Art till 10 April. Bhaktapur. 4242106
- ❖ **Relevance of Dor Bahadur Bista**, discussion with Hari Thapa, Journalist, 11 April at 5PM, Martin Chautari.
- ❖ **Script and Orality in the Kiranti Language Movement** with Martin Gaenszle, 12 April 4:45 PM at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka.
- ❖ **Use of Pesticide in Fishing**, 12 April, 3PM at Martin Chautari.
- ❖ **The Red and the White** a film by Miklos Jancso with English and Hungarian subtitles, 13 April, 3PM at Martin Chautari.
- ❖ **New Years Eve at Radisson Hotel** Nepa Dhuku 13 April at 7PM.
- ❖ **Bullets against Bullets** Himalayan Enfielders Peace Rally has been rescheduled for 13-16 April, contact Goofy at. 4440462
- ❖ **Sunaulo Nav-Bihani**, New Years at Club Himalaya, 14 April.
- ❖ **Handicap Youth in Development** Suraj Sigdel, Project Officer Handicap International, 14 April, 3PM at Martin Chautari.
- ❖ **Student Partnership Worldwide Resource Centre Appeal** at Java Coffee House all day 14-21 April. 4411820
- ❖ **Collage** an inter collage fest 22-23 April, BICC, music, theatre
- ❖ **Children's Fun Fashion Parade** fund raiser for AmaGhar -home for children 15 April. 4PM at Kiran Bhawan, Rs 1,500. 5560652
- ❖ **World Book Day** at the British Council, 23-29 April. 4410798
- ❖ **Kathmandu International Mountain Film Festival 2006**, 7-10 December, calling for entries. Forms available at: www.himalassociation.org/kimff



MUSIC

- ❖ **Ramailo Saanjh** with Anil Shahi and Maya Mantra Rs. 1,000 7-10PM. 5 and 26 April. Poolside Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **Live Music** at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- ❖ **Reggae Night** at Moksh Live, 7.30 PM. 5526212
- ❖ **Best of jazz** JCS trio, Niek's Place, Tuesdays and Saturdays.
- ❖ **Jatra Friday nights**, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged sessions** at Jatra on, Saturday nights. 4256622
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna. 4221711

DINING

- ❖ **Exotic Nepali Cuisine** Nepali food festival at The Café in Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 10-19 April. 4491234
- ❖ **Nepali Cuisine** at Krishnarpan Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Lunch** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage 25 March. 9841371927
- ❖ **Breakfast with birds** lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fire at Farm House Café. 4375279
- ❖ **Beat the heat** with milkshakes, smoothies at Hyatt Regency.
- ❖ **Café U** for organic Japanese homecooking. Near International Club, Sanepa. 11AM-6PM. Closed on Tuesdays. 5524202
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer Splash** at Godavari Village Resort, a special package of Swimming & Lunch. 5560675
- ❖ **Breakfast** at Singma Restaurant. 8.30 - 11AM daily. 5520004
- ❖ **Barbeque** at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, every Saturday. 4451212.
- ❖ **BBQ Dinner** at Summit Hotel every Friday. 6.30- 9:30PM.

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tea House-Inn**. Nepali Salads with Nepali Thali every Saturday at the terrace garden. Nagarkot. 668-0048.
- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, award winning relaxation in Pokhara Reservations 4361500
- ❖ **Junglewalks**, rafting, elephant rides all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Conferences at Godavari** special packages available. 5560675
- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- ❖ **Star Cruises in April**, take companion at 50% discount. 2012345
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9851012245

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NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED

There is not much good news for those hoping for heavy rains this week. An emerging high-pressure pattern over northern India and Nepal will repel any encroachments by moisture from the west seen on this wide front over Afghanistan in this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning. However, isolated thunderstorms are possible in the mountains during the afternoon. Morning temperatures across the midhills have climbed into the double digits but in higher mountain valleys, such as Jomsom, Namche and Manang, they remain close to freezing levels. Expect hot afternoons in the Valley this weekend with the possibility of light localised rain towards evening.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri 27-12	Sat 28-11	Sun 29-11	Mon 29-12	Tue 27-12
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नेपाल कृषिप्रधान मुलुक हो । यहाँका ८० प्रतिशतभन्दा बढी जनता कृषि पेशामा आधारित छन् । कूल राष्ट्रिय आयको फुन्डै ४० प्रतिशत हिस्सा अहिले पनि कृषि क्षेत्रले नै ओगटेको छ । सिङ्गो मुलुकको आर्थिक, सामाजिक मेरुदण्डको रूपमा रहेको कृषिक्षेत्र उपेक्षित हुनु हुँदैन । कृषकहरू देशका वास्तविक नायक हुन् । उनीहरूलाई सम्मान र कदर गर्नुपर्छ । कृषकहरूले पनि आफ्नो पसिनामाथि विश्वास गर्नुपर्छ । नयाँ नयाँ कृषि प्रणाली अवलम्बन गर्नुपर्छ । पढ्दैमा खेती गर्नु नहुने होइन । रुन् कृषिक्षेत्रलाई आधुनिकीकरण गर्न शिक्षित र सचेत कृषकको खाचो छ । त्यसैले कृषि पेशालाई आदर गरौं, कृषकलाई सम्मान गरौं ।

श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग

BBC नेपाली

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EKAL SILWAL

NO WOMAN IS AN ISLAND: Narayangarh women stand on a traffic island at Shahid Chowk on Tuesday to catch a better view of a pro-democracy street play being performed by CPN (Ekatakendra-Masal).



RAMESWOR BOHARA

BIG GUNS: Maoist guerrillas stand guard at a mass meeting in Mainapokhari along the Nepalganj-Bardia highway on Wednesday. Hundreds of villagers were brought in to attend but dispersed when an army helicopter hovered overhead and fired warning shots.



BRIAN SOKOL

RAINBOW TRIBE: Children of 'Imagine Rainbow in Kathmandu', a film project featuring Kathmandu's children and musicians and Nepal's diverse musical and cultural heritage, at the film's shooting in Patan Museum on Tuesday.

New year meteor showers

Hope you enjoyed March's lunar and solar eclipses as much as we did in Pokhara (see picture). In April, an equally exciting event is in the night sky—the planet Uranus.

The seventh planet from the Sun is not normally considered a goal for stargazers because it's so dim. Nevertheless, it is a major body in our solar system and is on many people's to-see list.

STAR GAZING

Kedar S Badu



Binoculars will give you a good chance to find this planet despite it being two billion miles away. In the morning twilight of 18 April, Uranus will shine dimly just to the right of brilliant Venus.

Another don't-miss event is the Lyrids meteor shower at midnight on 22 April. Look towards the constellation of Lyra (*Beena*) which should be right overhead.

Comet hunters! Comet Schwassmann-Wachmann-3 may be visiting our celestial neighbourhood in May. That's a long shot—keep your fingers crossed.

Other highlights in April's sky:

The **Moon's** First Quarter is on 5 April, the Full Moon on 13 April and the Last Quarter on 21 April. The next New Moon will glow on 28 April.

Mercury is at its furthest west of the Sun on 8 April, when it is in a good position for viewing as it rises about an hour before sunrise. Afterwards, the planet appears to change direction and head towards the sun.

Venus is a brilliant 'morning star', visible low in the east at dawn. It rises less than an hour



KEDAR S BADU

ECLIPSED IN POKHARA: Ram Bahadur Gurung, 83, peers at the solar eclipse on 29 March at the Galileo Astronomical Society of Pokhara.

before the Sun but it's so bright that it can be seen even in full daylight.

Mars, in Taurus, is only 40 degrees above the western horizon at sunset and sets at midnight. For those with telescopes, look for Mars near the open star cluster M35 in Gemini on 17 April. It is a tiny featureless disk in most telescopes by mid-month.

Jupiter rises in the eastern sky about 10.30 PM. But it comes up a little earlier each night and by the end of the month, it's rising at 8.30 PM. It looks like a very bright star, shining with a steady light.

Saturn is high in the western sky at dusk and sets in the west about 4AM. It's moving very slowly south-eastwards in Cancer, left of Gemini's 'twins'. Saturn looks brighter than almost any other star, except for Sirius far below it, and shines with a steady, creamy-white light.

Uranus is in the centre of Aquarius but at the limit of visibility with the naked eye (6.0 magnitude). **Neptune** is in the centre of Capricornus but its low magnitude (8.0) makes it impossible to see without optical aid and detailed maps. **Pluto** is well beyond the sight of all but the best telescopes.

Meteors the Lyrids meteor shower begins around 19 April, reaches its peak on the 22nd and is over by the 25th. This is not a particularly good shower, averaging only 10 meteors per hour but anything can happen. The meteors seem to radiate outwards from a point in the constellation Lyra, close to the bright star Vega (*Abhijit*).

The Nepali New Year 2063 falls on 14 April at 7.52 AM. I wish you all clear skies and Happy New Year 2063.

kedarbadu@yahoo.com



Admissions Open for A Levels

Rato Bangala School, a registered centre for Cambridge Examinations in Nepal, is seeking keen students for its A Level (Advanced Level) Programme. Candidates will be selected through a competitive qualifying entrance examination.

Students who have passed SLC or equivalent (including those who have recently appeared for the SLC) are eligible to apply.

For the incoming students, the two-year A Level course will begin in June 2006.

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Interested candidates and parents, please contact the School Office for the application package.

- Forms will be given out from 10 April.
- Completed applications will be accepted up to 21 April.

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Unclassified ads

Now that under the one-window policy government ads are only given to newspapers that print news quoting reliable eye-witnesses reports that the emperor is fully-clad what are the rest of us supposed to do, huh?

Luckily, the private sector has stepped in with important public service announcements. About time, because now I don't have to write this week's column and can fill the space up with these ads:

URGENT NOTICE

Regarding the advertisement published yesterday accusing us of not paying for jet leases. How dare they?

Our attention has been drawn to the defamatory, demeaning and misleading advertisements published by a leasing company regarding two jets they rented to us. The allegation that we have defaulted on payment for the aforementioned Fokkers for a period exceeding eight months is not accurate and bears no relation to fact. In actuality we haven't paid the lease for only six months. Besides, this is well within the norms stipulated by the Civil Aviation Authorities of Nepal which allows private airlines in the kingdom to get away with paying no lease at all and being millions of rupees in arrears on landing and parking fees provided the owners are well-heeled and have friends in

UNDER MY HAT Kunda Dixit



high places. Besides, we have obtained a Stay Order from the Appellate Court granting us full Legal Authority to keep flying the planes in breach of contract and

drag it on in the courts to buy us time. And we have it all in writing!

This is well within the parameters of the laws and practices of the Kingdom of Nepal and we are in conformity and in adherence to the Standard Operating Procedures for Airline Operation in Nepal. How on earth are we supposed to make a profit if we have to pay for leasing planes? You think money grows on trees in Nepal? You think you guys can just walk in here and start interfering in our internal affairs? Necon got away with it, so why can't we? Let's see whose father can do what, year. Meanwhile, may we remind our valued no-frills passengers from rows 25 to 36 that seats have been removed as a cost-cutting measure and Nepal's civil aviation regulations require them to hang on to the overhead straps during takeoffs and landings.

Fly By Night Airlines (Pvt) Ltd

LAST NOTICE AND REMINDER

Pursuant to the Foreign Exchange Act 2054 as well as the Registration of Businesses Decree 2061 and other laws of the Kingdom of Nepal we, on behalf of our client, hereby notify Mrs Abigail Abacha (niece of Mr Sonny Abacha of Lagos, Nigeria) to return the \$750,000 (Seven Hundred and Fifty Thousand Dollars and No Cents) our client transferred to her bank account in the Cayman Islands in February 2000 as earnest money in lieu of the \$25 million in cash of Mr Abacha's assets which, as per a verbal understanding with our client, was to have been handed over to him in person by a courier.

This notice has been published because Mrs Abigail Abacha has not responded to repeated emails and has evaded attempts to establish telephonic contact with her regarding the matter. Prompt reimbursement of the \$750,000 would be much appreciated by our client and he would be eternally grateful if this matter could be discretely and amicably settled.

Bhattarai, Bhattarai & Bhattarai
Barristers-at-law
Anamnagar

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Oof yumaa!



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