

TOO YOUNG FOR GUNS: On sentry duty at the Maoist camp in Harnamadi VDC, Makwanpur, last week, Comrade Sita told us that she is 18, too old to be considered a child soldier.

KIRAN PANDAY

Times Weekly Internet Poll # 307

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

Total votes: 3,255

Yes	21%
No	62%
Don't know	13%

Weekly Internet Poll # 308. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What do you think of the pace at which the SPA government is moving?

What comes first: giving up arms or securing a peace deal?

NARESH NEWAR

A disagreement between the government and the Maoists over laying down arms threatens to deadlock the peace process. The government wants to start a process leading to demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR). The Maoists want to keep on talking without laying down their weapons.

The wrangling is over process not substance, still posturing by the two sides via the media is delaying compromise. Maoist leaders are angry about the government's 2 July letter to the UN not because they weren't consulted but because it mentions monitoring, disarming and decommissioning Maoist combatants only.

"There is going to be no DDR

until there is a political solution and the government should stop making too much noise about decommissioning us," says Maoist negotiator Dinanath Sharma, using an acronym that is much in vogue these days.

To make their point, the Maoists are sabre-rattling by taking media on high-profile tours of their military training camps. "If there is going to be any demobilising and disarming, it should be for both sides, not just for us," Sharma maintains.

The UN has not officially responded to the government's request but we understand behind-the-scene discussions are going on. Experts from the UN and other conflict resolution groups are in the capital this week.

"If you do not discuss the future, you can't shape it and in

this case the process is technically and politically complicated," says expert Dan Smith from International Alert. "Disarming only the Maoists is not enough." (see interview p5)

Experts say the demobilisation process must also include 'right sizing' the army and rehabilitating not just ex-combatants but also vigilantes and especially child and women soldiers.

"We are already too late trying to gather information and resources," says Adrian Verheul, adviser at a DDR workshop in the capital on Monday. Even if the UN and other international agencies acquire money and expertise, the government hasn't done anything to use them.

"An immediate agreement for DDR is essential between the Maoists and the government in the presence of UN representatives so

that no party is suspicious about the intent of others," says Deo Bahadur Ghale, a retired brigadier general who has experience in UN peacekeeping in the Congo.

Delays in demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration until the constituent assembly elections would be expensive and risk a return to conflict, according to Smith. But other military analysts say rushing DDR may actually jeopardise peace talks. "This is not yet a post-conflict situation to push decommissioning because the peace process is ongoing," says conflict expert, Indrajit Rai.

The Nepali Army objects to being subjected to the same rules of demobilisation as the Maoist

army, arguing that it is an armed force of a democratic and legitimate state power. ●

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Come back, Ian

Why has Kofi yanked off the UN's human rights man just when Nepal needs him the most?

There was a tremor of anticipation in Kathmandu when Ian Martin was appointed Nepal Representative by Louise Arbour, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). For a country that had descended the hellish pit over the years, it was hoped that the former head of



COMMENT
Kanak Mani Dixit

Amnesty International would bring his diplomatic skill and humanitarian sensibility to bear to extricate the country from the brutal Maoist war and the dreadful state reaction.

Ian Martin did not disappoint. Arriving in Kathmandu last year even while the OHCHR office was being set up, he began high profile meetings and pronouncements to try and contain the situation. With the staff in place, the work turned to fact-finding.

Arbour had made a good choice, having realised that the damage being inflicted on this fair-sized country of 26 million could well be irreversible. Acts of

impunity including extrajudicial executions, torture and disappearances had become the norm. But the very presence of the OHCHR made a difference: the rebels and the army became somewhat restrained. Hundreds of lives were saved. The OHCHR was beginning to be proactive, as when two months ago it confronted the army about 48 disappearances at the Bhairabnath Battalion.

Ian Martin was yanked off even as the Bhairabnath report was made public, and assigned by Secretary General Kofi Annan to firefighting in East Timor. The UN's peace-building effort there was suddenly in jeopardy and he apparently was the man for the job. Unfair though this was from the perspective of the Nepali public, the expectation was that Martin would be back by mid-monsoon. There is now talk he might be permanently shifted to East Timor.

Well, what of the peace process in Nepal? It is poised on a razor's edge and requires full UN engagement. Is not Nepal as important as East Timor (population 1 million)? And is this not one of those places where the UN can be pre-emptive for peace? How does the geo-strategic significance of East Timor compare with that of Nepal?

Martin's absence rankles because the UN should today be actively working to avert a crisis here, at a time when civil society is polarised and the National Human Rights Commission minus commissioners. In what is looking like an extended transitional phase, many things could go wrong, with sullen and confused rebels on the one hand and badly-led soldiers lacking motivation on the other. Meanwhile, there is a right-wing flank that is licking its

wounds and looking for slippage. If the present round of peace talks fails, there could well be a bloodbath across the land.

This is the time to be working intensively with the belligerents on the ultra-sensitive matter of 'arms management' as the country proceeds in a zigzag towards an interim government, interim constitution and constituent assembly. The coalition of political parties in government and the Maoist leadership need the backing and oversight of an effective OHCHR mission, headed by someone with moral authority and diplomatic acumen. Martin has the trust of all sides, including among other things for the role of his office at the time of the April People's Movement.

The fact that India is willing to accept UN involvement in 'arms management' is a welcome departure which helps promote peace-building. And Martin should be here to help define the deliberately ambiguous term, for in the correct and principled definition and implementation rest the people's visions of a post-conflict Nepal. Using his skills, standing and contacts, Martin was expected to work with politicians and the rebel leadership to provide Nepalis with hope.

Is this how the members of the UN Security Council would reward the citizens of Nepal for standing up for pluralism and peace? Do they understand the significance of the democratic upsurge that was the People's Movement of April 2006? If the gentlemen in New York are so keen in diverting Ian Martin to East Timor, it is time for his boss in Geneva, Louise Arbour, to get on the phone. ●

BHUTAN IS HOME

It has now been 16 years that more than 100,000 Bhutani refugees have been living in camps in eastern Nepal. A whole new generation has been born and grown up there.

It was no use expecting anything good to come out of bilateral talks between Bhutan and Nepal in the past decade. The Bhutanis were cynically prolonging the meetings to buy time, and a succession of feeble and distracted Nepali governments bungled the whole thing. The political deadend and compassion fatigue have now reduced the level of assistance to the camps, spreading despair.

The UNHCR and some western countries have been pushing for a solution through third-country resettlement of some of the refugees in return for Bhutan taking back a token number and allowing most of the other refugees to assimilate into Nepal and India. The Nepal government and refugee leaders have opposed the idea. But now the new government in Kathmandu has said third country resettlement could be the basis of settling the crisis once and for all.

We understand that a majority of the refugees want to go back to Bhutan ('No place like home', #306). To treat the refugees as political pawns, to allow an undemocratic regime to get away with a massive violation of the human rights of its citizens would set a precedence for ethnic evictions elsewhere. At a time when the international community talks about 'humanitarian intervention' it is surprising to hear it justify refugee resettlement because "there is no other solution". Since when did a tiny country that has evicted one-sixth of its own people have such geopolitical clout?

Nepal, India and the international community can be faulted but the bottomline is that it is the Bhutani regime that has to take ultimate responsibility. Sooner or later, it has no choice but to take its citizens back.

Nepal also has a responsibility and the new government should try to revive the negotiating process, and to mobilise support in New Delhi and other international partners to redress this gross injustice. India, through whose territory the Bhutanis were trucked like cattle in 1991 to Nepal, has to take the refugee issue more seriously. This is a potential time bomb for all three countries.

The disenfranchisement of Bhutanis also has serious implication for the security of Nepalis in various parts of India who are watching the resettlement proposal and its implications for themselves.

Scattering a people evicted by the Bhutani regime to the far corners of the world will not just undermine the dignity and security of overseas Nepalis, it will also taint the moral victory of the people power movement in their mother country.



NARESH NEWAR

Anjana Rajbanshi's journey

Anjana Rajbanshi scored 92.38 percent marks in SLC examinations this year. Even though the controversial rankings have been abolished by the UML education minister, Anjana's feat catapulted her to national prominence for four reasons:

- she was born and brought up in a janajati family of Madhesis



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

- she attended an ill-equipped private school in the tarai
- her score puts her at par with SLC toppers of last year's examinations
- she is a girl

Establishmentarians would like us to believe there is ample space for the advancement of the disadvantaged. This is a myth. Despite her ethnicity, Anjana's parents are mainstream teachers. She didn't attend a government school, but went to a private one howsoever decrepit. Her

parents are salaried employees and the family owns land. She has been to Japan, for two weeks. After appearing in the SLC examinations, she came to Kathmandu and attended a bridge course.

Anjana stands out because of her personal performance. Any student, not just a Rajbanshi girl from the tarai, deserves to be congratulated for scoring over 90 percent in an examination as competitive as the SLC. She wants to study science, go to medical school and maybe migrate. There is nothing wrong with such middle-class dreams. Operators of teaching shops in Kathmandu are trying to outbid each other to turn Anjana into their brand ambassador. She has been offered Rs 1.5 million, free education, funded medical school and a future in England or America. These must be tempting offers.

Unfortunately, they indicate just how deep the rot that has set in in our education system. The free-market of higher education is a free-for-all arena where the morality of business and ethics of teaching both have lost all relevance. Dozens of private medical schools have opened but there are

fewer, not more, doctors in the countryside. Suga is a relatively accessible village in Mahottari district with a direct bus to Kathmandu. It has electricity and telephone lines, a private school, a few shops and a weekly bazar. And yet, this village of over 6,000 has no doctor. We would have complained, but neither the district hospital in Jaleswor nor the zonal hospital in

The SLC topper's success masks an ugly truth about our education malaise

Janakapur gets its quota of doctors either.

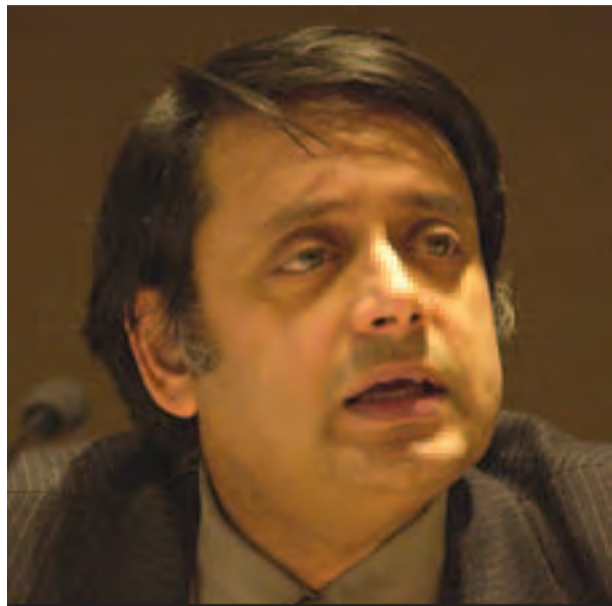
The country needs more doctors to attend to mother and child in rural areas. Dalit women in the tarai with some orientation and training can serve such needs better than the Auxiliary Health Workers who hesitate to step out of district

headquarters. The old and the sick in the countryside need physicians they can consult when they need them. Doctors trained at expensive medical schools are ill-suited to their needs.

The abolition of the ranking system for SLC graduates and the needless competitiveness it generated is a good start. It needs to be followed up with a complete overhaul of higher education. Instead of private shops selling Plus Two certificates, we need more occupational training centres. Engineering colleges have to be transformed into training centres for technical teachers. Medical schools must produce more hygienic counsellors, health attendants and barefoot doctors.

The market mechanism is unlikely to address any of these issues. They will continue training youngsters for export for that's where profits are. They should be allowed to pay taxes and remain in business. Basic education in every discipline is the responsibility of the government, a fact that Anjana's parents, both of them village teachers, will appreciate better than their celebrity daughter. ●

"We can work something out."



Shashi Tharoor is India's candidate for UN Secretary General of the United Nations when Kofi Annan steps down later this year. This week at the G-8 Summit in St Petersburg, the United States and Germany agreed to "consider" the proposal. Tharoor is currently Under Secretary-General for Communications. *Nepali Times* caught up with him in Penang, Malaysia, on Thursday during an international media conference to ask about his candidacy and the UN's future involvement in Nepal's peace process.

Nepali Times: How do you think the UN will respond to the letter that the Nepali government sent the secretary general requesting help with demobilisation?

Shashi Tharoor: In recent weeks, I've been so consumed by my candidacy for the secretary-generalship I've not seen the letter. So, the only answer I can give you would be the diplomatic one which is that I'm sure the letter would be considered very carefully and in consultation with all interested parties. Obviously the UN would like to help Nepal get out of the crisis but we'd normally like to act in a way that is acceptable to all the parties concerned.

What does arms management mean concretely?

To be honest, we don't know what it means concretely because the way the UN does business is that once we have agreed in principle to do a particular job we send an assessment mission to the country concerned which will actually take a look at how the job would be done, look at practical considerations such as logistics, where would you locate the headquarters, where you'd get your supplies from and all that stuff. We also look at a viable concept of operations which means talking to the various parties so that they behave in a manner that conforms with your approach. Only when that has been drawn up would we be in a position to make a proposal to the government and to the Security Council. So these are early days yet, I'm afraid.

From the UN's experience in other hot spots, how do you rate Nepal's chances of attaining lasting peace?

I'd rate it fairly positively for a number of reasons. First, we actually have an agreement amongst the contending parties. That is often a huge, huge consideration because all too often you find yourself in a situation where one party, or in the case of Darfur, a couple of parties, have not signed up and therefore you don't have a viable concept for resolution. In the case of Nepal because all the parties have come together on this we should be able to work

something out fairly successfully. Secondly, our sense is that where we can be useful would be in areas where we have very clear expertise, and value-added. But the nature of these considerations has to be borne in mind. For example, the UN does different things in different countries with elections: in some we observe, in some we certify, in some we monitor, in some we actually help run the elections. Now, which particular one of these various approaches would be right remains to be seen.

Finally, on what you term "arms management", which is a term we don't usually use much in the UN, again it depends on what concepts seem most realistic. There would be some which would actually call for containment of soldiers, some calling for disarmament of people on both sides and some might be a less intrusive mandate which would simply call for observation. This has to be worked out after on-site reconnaissance, and consultation on both sides.

So, which option would be most realistic for Nepal?

I wouldn't want to step into that particular minefield just yet.

How come Ian Martin was sent to East Timor at a time when the peace process in Nepal is at such a critical stage?

Simply, there was an immediate urgent crisis in East Timor and we had someone available who had prior knowledge of the territory. Ian Martin was our first envoy there when we set up the assistance mission before elections, and it was a question of someone being available who was needed. In fact, had he been in East Timor and a crisis had arisen in Nepal, we'd have sent him to Nepal for the same reason. It's a question of using on-the-ground expertise.

Finally, would you rather be the recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature or become the secretary general of the UN?

I'm not sure that either is entirely within the realm of the feasible at the moment. (Laughs). But let me just say that I'll seek one first and the other later.

LETTERS

PARACHUTISTS

Most parachuting foreign consultants (Nepali Pan, 'More consultants the merrier', #306) tend to be one of the following: friends, past employees, ex-colleagues, distant relatives, past employers, potential future employees and potential future employers of the expat heads of international development agencies who invite them to Nepal in the first place. If not, then such consultants attach themselves to a group of donor agencies for lifelong frequent short-term international assignments. In general, the more bilateral an aid agency is, the more opaque and incestuous its consultant-hiring process tends to be.

Economic conditions matter too. During recessions in Germany, the number of German consultants at German-funded aid agencies swells in Kathmandu. Ditto for other bilateral agencies. One result is that it's rare for expat heads of aid agencies to be concerned about the career paths of competent Nepali employees who they see as no more than glorified clerks. Often such Nepali employees may strut about as though they were important policy-makers but in reality they are paid well to do no more than push reams of paper, write terms of references for foreign consultants and be fixers for visiting clueless consultants. As for debating with Nepali scholars, it's a two-edged sword. Most such scholars themselves depend on local consultancy contracts. That makes them reluctant to antagonise the heads of the aid agencies by speaking and writing critically.

Pradeep Dhital, Samakhushi

● It is a shame how these so-called helpful people are acting. For them, it is a business just like selling cars. Good consultants would try to improve the knowledge of local people so they could handle all sorts of aid projects and duties at foreign NGOs. This would save a lot of money, as foreign consultants earn a lot and their

salaries are always part of the project cost. When you employ local consultants you save a lot of money on salaries and can be sure that these people know the situation in their country much better than any foreign consultant.

Leopold Hoegliger, email

● Rajendra Pradhan has illustrated well the nature of development workers/consultants working in underdeveloped countries. I am also confused about whether the activities of NGOs and INGO in poorer countries are doing any good. Parachuting consultants, as Pradhan said, appear pompous. When I run into such people, I ask myself a number of questions: are they honest in their work? Are the targeted groups/ classes benefiting from their consultancies? Do they have the required qualifications to dole out prescriptions for the development ills facing developing countries? Or are they selling illusions for their own benefit?

Jagannath Lamichhane, Kathmandu

● Ashraf Ghani's report (Guest column, 'Hard work, hard choices', #306) if it is to come, will gather dust on some shelf somewhere as guessed by Rajendra Pradhan. Despite the fact that many dozens of PhDs reigned over the NPC in the last 50 years, thousands of politicians supported by intellectuals tried their minds, thousands of consultants and advisers sold their ideas and many finance ministers offered their prescriptions for the development of Nepal, the clear path to the nation's prosperity is yet to be established. Nobody seems to know what exactly needs to be done. Shameful! Enormous opportunities but no vision and strategy. Perhaps there will be no hope of a turnaround as long as *bhajanmandalis* and the corrupt continue to get berths in key positions.

Shambhu Malla, email

BASIC TRAINING

Although basic skills training is the best option for school leavers, the Nepali government is not giving proper attention to this sector (State of the State, 'Putting

education to work', #306). If the government wants every citizen to be employed, it should invest in training courses suitable for those who cannot pass school exams. The budget for higher education should be minimised as it only produces high-level people qualified for jobs in foreign lands. If the government invested in basic training no one would be unemployed and there would be social harmony. Many people would opt for technical and vocational training rather than failing in education. Success in work is better than failure in education and failure in work means failure in generating income for one's livelihood.

Rabin Rachalica, Green Team, Bhaktapur

FEMALE FIGHTERS

I must thank Nayan Tara for her centrefold pictures which further raised the suspicions of me and my female friends about Maoist intentions ('A show of force', #306). Not only do the pictures grotesquely reveal the abuse of women's power at a time of restored national peace, Nayan Tara has now portrayed journalists as avid fans of the Maoist militia given that in the first photo she and her friends are caught toting weapons (hopefully not to shoot fellow scribes). No, journalists, don't do that! The fact is, while we women can enjoy a wholesome meal and go to work, it is sad that our Maoist sisters are caught in the middle of a propaganda war, training with guns and no enemy in sight. Please rest your lenses, photojournalists, and encourage our fellow sisters to carry seed bags to their villages instead. Also, be more encouraging to Nepali women by showing us as peaceful nation builders, not the other way around. This Maoist photo show is nothing but media propaganda to give Nepali women a bad name. Nayan Tara seems to have got a bit carried away in her effort.

Sangita KC, Gyaneswor

LEADERLESS

Most of the articles in your last issue offer little hope for Nepal. Ashraf Ghani analysed the people's movement as one which changed the regime "but without

leadership of vision and action" (Guest Column, 'Hard work, hard choices', #306). Agreeing with him, I believe that the seven parties have no charismatic and visionary leaders and that the Maoist leaders believe more in guns than people, so that we see a huge gap between their commitments and actions. The photo essay 'A show of force' is more proof of this and exposes the Maoists' hidden motive of cowering the Nepali people with psychological terror. CK Lal's analysis of the huge debate on removing the list of SLC toppers instead of on 'the plight of the 53 percent of failed examinees' and the complete failure of the education system also proves the hypocrisy of Nepali intellectuals. For whom are they advocating? For the poor or the privileged? The Nepali people need lasting peace on the basis of a democratic society, better and corruption-free government service, more employment and the assurance of self-respect and a united Nepal. But these issues are neglected and the unity of the people is being pulled to the breaking point in the name of religion and ethnicity. To succeed, we need leadership not only from the political parties but also from the media, ie, writers and journalists. Otherwise, there is a chance that Nepal will fall into a 'vicious cycle of violence and destruction'.

Prakash Sharma, email

BY THE ROPE

Ropeways should play an important role in poverty alleviation. Recently installed ropeways have benefited small farmers dramatically and they are much simpler, more economical, and much quicker to build than roads. Ropeways also reduce transportation costs enormously, therefore the poverty rate drops much faster. Also, as daily necessities become affordable because of lower transportation costs, able-bodied men will not migrate to find work but will engage in planning and developing their regions. Surely roads have to be built, but that can wait till the level of economic activity rises sufficiently.

Ishwari Pradhan, email

We need an unconventional shakeup to rid ourselves of feudalism

History foretold

“The most radical revolutionary will become a conservative the day after the revolution”. There is consolation in Hannah Arendt’s remark for those who seek peace. If true, the Maoists could relinquish arms and shed their extremist feathers once a corresponding process is simultaneously undertaken by the opposite side and their peaceful participation in the system is granted.



GUEST COLUMN
Bharat SJB Rana



MARTY LOGAN

This doesn’t mean the seven party alliance should hulk itself into complacency. The direct aggression against the people by King Mahendra and his sons has not been forgotten. On the cold night of 15 December 1960 a treacherous king staged a royal coup Prime Minister B P Koirala and his cabinet colleagues, the speaker and I, the leader of the opposition were herded off to prison at gunpoint.

The political parties combined to fight back with single-minded determination.

Our armed insurrection of 1961-2 was aborted because of the India-China war and the revolution of the 1970s under BP fell through because of the declaration of emergency in India, the land of our refuge. It took time, but the people themselves started a non-violent struggle against the oppressors.

The people’s movement of 1990, almost as massive as the one this year, had all the ingredients to dislodge the monarchy. But we politicians

failed to on build in the people’s initiative and negotiated a dubious compromise in an unseemly haste to gain power. The king was permitted to retain the crown and even his control over the army. After he ascended the throne Gyanendra followed his father’s footsteps as he conspired to dissolve the parliament and usurp absolute power.

People this summer acted with pent up rage. They didn’t trust politicians and took centre-

stage, and this put pressure on legislators to change the very character of the state into a secular state and Nepal’s own Magna Carta was achieved in the spirit and resonance of the Cromwellian Revolution.

The most redeeming feature of the April uprising was the resilience with which people resisted the high-voltage pressure of the international community to defend the anachronistic and feudal order. India was quick to realise that its twin pillar doctrine of constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy had lost its relevance and stated that it would abide by what the people decided. The only continuing voice of protest in the subcontinent is that of the saffron brigade in India which suddenly lost its only

Hindu kingdom. Nepal survives and shall survive as a free and independent secular state.

Girija Prasad Koirala has re-emerged as the redeemer of the nation but he and his alliance can retain that authority only if they fully absorb the intensity of the streets. The monarchy, even a ceremonial one, is now unacceptable to the people. Kings are genetically programmed to self-replicate and palaces, even dilapidated ones, turn into hatching grounds for feudal conspirators. History is replete with examples of kings who turned into king cobras. And revolutions, as in Russia and France, do not need the sanctity of the constituent assembly to build a republic over the tomb of tyranny.

The Maoist movement has relevance in the success of People Power II. They deserve credit for keeping the movement peaceful and also for declaring a unilateral ceasefire and taking that initial step towards a peaceful solution. Even when Gyanendra’s armed gangsters hounded nonviolent protesters in April, the Maoists did not retaliate in kind. By turning out in overwhelming numbers the people also reciprocated the sentiment and rejected the politics of violence.

This is a clear indication that the Nepali brand of Maoism has little to do with Mao Zedong. If our Maoists want to follow Prachanda Path so be it. The nation needs a non-conventional shakeup to rid itself of its feudal hangover. ●

Bharat SJB Rana is a former NC leader. He was the opposition leader of the Gorkha Parisad party during BP Koirala’s government before King Mahendra staged a coup and started partyless panchayat governance system.

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Top refugee official arrives

UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees Judy Cheng-Hopkins will visit the Bhutanese refugee camps and other UNHCR programs during her first official visit to Nepal from 19 to 22 July. She will also call on high-level government officials and meet UN counterparts and UNHCR's NGO partners, according to a press release.

Chinese university hosted

A reception in honour of visiting Chinese delegates from Nanjing Medical University was hosted by Alfa Beta Institute, New Baneshwor, at Shangrila Hotel on Monday. Dharmanath Prasad Shah, state minister for general administration was the guest of honour. Many Nepali students are pursuing their medical studies in China with the assistance of Alfa Beta.

World Cup winners

Nepa Hima Trade Link awarded three prizes as part of its Sony World Cup scheme. A digital camera worth Rs 16,600 was won by Nabina Maharjan from Lazimpat, a DVD player worth Rs 8,800 by Ajin Awale from Patan and a Discman worth Rs 3,250 by Jean Karmacharya from Chapagaun.

NEW PRODUCTS

BANK'S INSTANT SMS: Laxmi Bank now provides customers instant notification of account activity via SMS. The bank says this makes for more secure accounts, since account holders receive notification of debit or credit activity within seconds of a transaction, making it easier to detect fraud. Laxmi Bank's existing SMS banking service includes balance enquiry, exchange rates and details of the last six transactions.

CLEAN CHIURA: The KL Dugar Group has launched Gyan Chiura, processed using "HACCP system and hygiene auditing". The *chiura* will be a quality product at a competitive price, says KL Dugar.

STANDARD CHARTER MOVES: Standard Chartered Bank Nepal Limited has relocated its Kantipath branch to Lajimpat from 16 July. The Lajimpat branch has a large parking space and can be approached by two-way traffic. The bank is a subsidiary of the Standard Chartered Group, which owns 75 percent shares in the bank.

Beyond budgets

The myopia on looking at the economy

The budget is much like the annual Machendranath Jatra. It comes, people talk about it, the chariot is built, the vest shown, and everything dismantled, to be forgotten until the next year. It's ironic that though we think the budget is a panacea for all economic ills, we treat it similarly. A great many



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

people make their annual media appearance with opinions they likely forget before the year is up. As for the budget itself, like the feast at a *jatra*, the menu and recipes are predictable.

No Nepali understands why the budget speech is broadcast live on television. Well, it's a ritual like the showing of the vest. Of course, you could do like the Beed and download and read the document before the finance minister has finished his speech. But most people, whether in Nepal or the US, just don't know why there is a budget. Like election manifestoes, the budget is a wish list of unchecked grandiosity. And the outcome is usually measured in terms of the column centimetres later devoted to the Rs 150 given to a needy

segment or a few millions allocated for a social cause. In this feudalistic culture, a budget is the means by which a state can extract taxes from the rich to paternalistically give to the poor. It's a return gift from those who were put into power by other people or a supplementary gift to those doled out during elections.

Readers have certainly noticed that seminars, workshops, and columns on the economy start appearing a month before the budget and disappear right after it is presented. Powwows are organised by venerable members of the private sector's apex bodies to provide in advance suggestions that are hardly implemented, and make comments later that find their way to the trashcan. Through this farce the budget remains a good mechanism for individuals to get favours their way.

Budgets in Nepal are isolated documents that don't dovetail with long-term economic policies or plans, or even the short-term measures that the government often brings in. There are no quarterly performance reviews, which means there is a big rush to expedite the formalities at the start of the monsoon. Of course, there are budgets that can be carried forward, but this year's

budget is par for the course—it can't be. For example, national revenue targets are based on targets given to individual tax offices, which means that people who are transparent and pay their taxes are squeezed for all they've got.

It helps to think of the budget as a statement in the present continuous. It constantly talks about legislation being enacted and policies being framed, and if one compares the budgets of the last ten years, there are many issues that are regular fixtures. Cut and paste, anyone?

So what do we need? The ability to look at the economic agenda beyond the budget. A budget is nothing in isolation. It's part of a larger budgetary control mechanism that maintains the state's fiscal discipline. Economic policies aren't about annual rituals, but constantly fine-tuned long-term and mid-term policies in tune with specific goals and objectives. To bridge the equity gap we must look at the larger issue of economic resilience and plan to bring about economic opportunity that will perhaps save Nepal from another phase of war. ●

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International Alert works in over 20 countries affected by or recovering from violent conflict. With the peace process underway in Nepal, IA is among the international bodies offering support to help the complicated demilitarisation, demobilisation and rehabilitation (DDR) process. IA Secretary General Dan Smith spoke to *Nepali Times*:

NARESH NEWAR

***Nepali Times*: Are we jumping the gun to start the DDR process when peace deals are not even complete?**

Dan Smith: The implementation has to come when the time is right but preparation should begin now. In fact, the process of discussing DDR can itself bring the sides together. That discussion is itself part of the peace process.

"Don't be too impatient about the peace process"

Several international DDR missions are coming to Nepal. What role will they play?

DDR is very interesting because on one hand, it is very technical—it's about collecting weapons and counting them and making them unusable. And it is also identifying who are combatants. On the other hand, it is also a political, social and economic process. Politically, it is based on agreements between the parties. Socially and economically, DDR is about reintegrating those who had been fighting or were in the army back into civilian life. There also need to be decisions taken by Nepal about, for example, how big its armed forces should be when peace is finally achieved. Because that number is likely to be smaller than the combined size of the current Nepali Army and Maoist forces. At the same time, there is lot of expertise and advice that can be given from outside. You will probably need international observers to monitor the process and certainly you need that for social and economic management of the process.

What is your assessment of the peace process to date?

It is at a very early stage now and two things are important. One is to maintain forward momentum to fulfil the points of the eight-point agreement. The second is to not be too impatient about the peace process. There will be many difficulties along the way. If you take any example internationally, you will find very uneven progress. So, people need patience and determination in equal measure. The two agreements which were reached do provide a good basis for a peace process as long as they are implemented.

But is disarming only the Maoists enough?

No. The question is what the role of the military is to be in a peaceful Nepal and how big a force is needed to fulfil that role. The size of the Nepali Army has increased during the

war and a large army is an economic burden for the country to carry. The whole issue of management of arms and DDR is one which applies on principle on both sides.

How long does the DDR process take?

In some circumstances, the disarmament phase is never really completed because people wrongly hang on to their weapons. Demobilisation can be over fairly quickly in many cases, in six to nine months. Reintegration is the more complicated part. The international community is only now learning that reintegration means more than training somebody with new skills. It means the ability of people to return to their towns and villages and find a decent job there. If you think of Ireland, Bosnia-Herzegovina, there are peace processes still going on, even nine and 11 years after the peace agreements were first signed.

What message are the Maoists trying to give by displaying their armed militia during the peace process?

I don't think it is dangerous. Whenever an organisation, whether it is the army or the Maoists, shows you something, it is to reveal the best side of themselves. I don't think in any sense it is dangerous or wrong of the Maoists to show that they are a well organised force.

Where are women and children in the DDR process?

There are women involved whether they are fighting or not. And sometimes the DDR process focuses purely on those who have guns and who actually fought. But those who did other tasks, not necessarily military, also have a stake in the process, they also need to be looked after and reintegrated. The issue of reintegration of child soldiers can be an enormous one because, depending on what age they were recruited at, they may have very little sense of life except in the military or with rebel forces.

Families wait

Himal Khabarpatrika, 17-31 July

While injured Maoists have been promised treatment and the government is actually talking about providing for the Maoist army, the families of Dambar Ekten, Tekbahadur Ekten and Govinda Acharya, killed by the state, are yet to hear from the government about compensation. Dambar, 44, of Ilam Maimai, was accused of being a Maoist and taken away by the army in February 2002. He was later shot to death. His wife Tika Kumari and their son, then five months old, do not have much to survive on and are being supported by their neighbours. Tika Kumari went to district headquarters to ask for compensation but was told that none is available for the families of those accused of being Maoists. She denies that her husband was a Maoist and adds, "When the government kills someone they have to do a proper investigation and make sure that the families are provided for. I am not asking for much, I just want to feed my son well and send him to a proper school." Maoist area worker Tek Bahadur Ekten, 28, was taken from his home and killed by the army. His two orphans and his wife Fulmaya are in the same situation as Dambar Ekten's wife and child.



Gobinda Acharya was forced to attend a Maoist function in Biratnagar in April 2003. On the way, their bus met with an accident and Acharya was seriously injured. When he asked for compensation he was told he would only be given money if he promised to join the party. Later that same year the Maoists came to Acharya and killed him. His youngest brother quit school to help support his family. The Maoists gave his father Khem Bahadur Acharya a piece of paper that they said declared Gobinda a martyr. There has been no response from the government. "No one understands what we are going through," Khem Bahadur says. More than 8,500 individuals throughout Nepal and 82 in Ilam alone have been killed by the state during the conflict. Their families have received no compensation from the government while those killed by Maoists have received some money. Tika Kumari's neighbour Til Bahadur Limbu was accused of being a spy by the Maoists and killed in 2004. His family was awarded Rs 200,000 in compensation. "The promised amount is yet to be given to us," said Til Bahadur's son Chitra Hang, adding, "Money can't buy my father back, he is gone."

Compromise

Editorial in Kantipur, 16 July

It took nearly a month for the interim constitution drafting committee to add more members. But it still has not been given full shape, for example, a seat has just been reserved for a Dalit representative. This only proves that the government-Maoist talks process lacks homework, consultation and transparency. Soon after the eight-point agreement was signed at the prime minister's residence on 16 June, the six-member committee was formed. That was the same day Maoist chairman Prachanda appeared in public. But the drafting committee immediately became the subject of controversy. Apparently it was formed in a hurry and no members were given directives. Would the government and the Maoists prepare the initial framework of the interim statute and direct the committee which, after extensive consultation, would propose a statute to the political parties? Or would it function like a task force, which would pave the constitutional way to alternative provisions? The committee is composed of legal experts, so the technical aspect of the interim constitution should be good, but the political parties themselves should first be clear about the political roadmap. Also, the time given to the committee is insufficient to

prepare a draft of a completely independent statute. Neither the government nor the Maoists has cited a reason for expanding the committee to 16 and they did not think it necessary to publicly introduce the new members. This shows that they assume that whatever they decide will be accepted by the people. This is not a good sign. In fact, the selection criterion was not equal representation among different groups or potential members' specialisations but an equal share of the cake among the parties. The focus has been to impose decisions reached in a secret room rather than consulting with various sectors of society and ensuring fair representation of all national interests and sentiments. It is not easy to manage the transitional period after the people's democratic movement. Both sides must continue talking to create an atmosphere of trust. The disputes to date have been over process not ideology. Compromise can always be reached on such differences.

Conflict's profit

Somat Ghimire in Samaya, 13 July

Some intellectuals think that before the Maoists launched their armed rebellion there was peace in society. However, at that time Dalits were not allowed to enter temples, they faced violence when filling water vessels at public taps, women were accused

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of witchcraft or tricked into the sex trade. So we cannot say that Nepali society was peaceful. The Maoist rebellion definitely accelerated and changed the nature of the conflict.

With the insurgency, NGOs that call themselves civil society got the opportunity to make money in the name of conflict resolution. For them it was like Dasain. Seminars and dinners were held in five-star hotels, those who received certificates establishing their status as intelligentsia, went on foreign tours, journals were published but never distributed, candles were lit. They even sponsored goat-raising and vegetable-growing for peace. The argument was that if people were kept busy, the rebellion would weaken. How much money was spent on such programs? Which class of society profited? Did such programs benefit the peace process at all and if so where? One sector clearly reaped dollars in the name of establishing peace.

The current issue of the constituent assembly is another great opportunity for NGOs to make dollars. The same people who said the king's move would help curb corruption and argued that the monarch was more inclusive than the parties in the hope of being appointed minister, have already started trying to secure projects from DFID to prepare the Dalit agenda for the constituent assembly. Big NGOs that previously had no link with weaker sections of society are today preparing an agenda to uplift the oppressed. Donors in Nepal have a deep-rooted desire to demonstrate that they are involved in the ongoing movement.

When the civil society movement led by Devendra Raj Panday and Krishna Pahadi was at its peak, donors wanted to prove that they were playing a role and NGOs were busy preparing projects in the movement's name. Donors wanted to buy the movement but due to Panday's courage they had to return embarrassed after being told off by him. Big donors and NGOs will and have already started getting involved in today's politics in order to show how gracious they are.

Tarai terror

Samaya, 14 July

RAJBIRAJ—The Janatantrik Terai Liberation Front (JTLF), a Maoist splinter group, has been increasingly involved in killings,

abductions and extortion, which is spreading terror in the tarai. JTLF activists, who consider the Pahadis (hill migrants living in the terai) their main enemy, have even started to target Madhesis. Bijay Jha and Mahendra P Yadab were shot dead in cold blood on 5 July in Chinnamasta VDC while returning from a village party. Now, locals and Maoists have joined hands to avenge the killings. The next day, the two groups protested in Saptari with the corpses of the two youths and hundreds of people participated. Maoist acting district secretary Bimal and people's government chief Umesh Kumar Yadab called the victims their activists and declared them martyrs. They accused the JTLF of intensifying violent activities with the support of the administration and vowed that they would avenge the killings. JTLF eastern commander Jwala Singh said by phone that the youths were killed trying to escape JTLF activists who had accused them of spying on their activities. He claimed that the JTLF seized two homemade pistols, ammunition and a khukuri from the Maoists. But local residents denied that. They said the youths had been feuding with JTLF district coordinator Ranabir Singh, who lives in Chinnamasta VDC, and had a dispute with the leader of a temple committee over the use of temple funds.

The JTLF is already showing signs of internal unrest. Some members are unhappy over the killings and statements made by Singh. District level worker Bibek, whose group is actively involved in abduction and extortion, claimed that the party didn't carry out the killings, which were merely the result of a personal feud. Only a few months ago, central co-ordinator Jaya Krishna Goit took action against district in-charge DN Singh, coordinator Lal and area secretary Harishchandar. The Madhesi intelligentsia largely supports the JTLF's activities, which have continued in Siraha despite the ongoing peace process. But the president of the Nepal Janawadi Morcha, senior pro-republican leader Ramraja Prasad Singh, said that the JTLF will not be able to liberate the Madhesi people if they continue their violent ways. He appealed for an end to criminal activities done in the name of liberating the tarai people. Local rights activists say the JTLF's activities have only served to aggravate communal tensions.



KIRAN PANDAY

Maoists mobilise

Nepal Samacharpatra, 15 July

CHITWAN—Life for villagers in this district has not changed. Despite the ceasefire, they live in constant fear. They are forced to provide food and shelter to the Maoist militia, which has been mobilising its armed soldiers and working to expand its force. More than 100 Maoist soldiers in combat dress live in Padampur VDC where they have been actively holding indoctrination programs. This is happening despite the code of conduct of 26 May in which the Maoists and government agreed to not mobilise their armies or display arms to avoid spreading terror among civilians. The code also stresses that neither the Maoist nor the government army should appear in uniform with weapons at political events, mass assemblies and meetings. But the Maoists in

Padampur even organised a program inside the premises of Bhimodya Primary School with their uniforms and weapons. The interaction programs are held by the 'C' company of the 11th battalion of Basu Memorial Brigade, which is headed by Pradip. The Maoists say they are merely following the directive of their leaders to mingle with locals and share their ideology. Platoon joint commander Nischal denies that the people are afraid of Maoists with arms and uniforms. But Tika Thapa, a local villager, has a different opinion. "We have to feed them and provide shelter whether out of fear or not." The Jana Sarkar's Tanka Regmi, who goes by the name Gorkhali, says that the party has divided the Chitwan area into three sections: base area, expansion area and struggle area and that there is a battalion of 450 Maoists mobilised there.



Probe Committee
Krishna Jung and Pyar Jung

क्रिष्ण र प्यारा
Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 17-31 July

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“During such a time when a new Nepal is being built, parties and organisations sensitive towards the Madhesi problem should unite. Spreading communal hatred and violence would not benefit anyone.”

President of the Nepal Janawadi Morcha Ramraja Prasad Singh in Samaya, 14 July

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Man and beast



TUSK TUSK: Bishnu Chaudhary with his elephant Erawat Gaj. Laxmi Kali, having just given birth to a male calf, which we nicknamed 'Mangal Prasad' as he was born on Tuesday, the day of Mars and Ganesh, and hence the most auspicious day for an elephant to be born. Elephants don't receive their official names until they are a year old. Cutting Narayani Kali's toenails. A perfect illustration of the intimate care the elephants receive from their handlers.

Nepal can be proud of its Tharu elephant handlers

PIERS LOCKE in CHITWAN

In the past, the Tharu people of the tarai had a monopoly on the capture, training and care of elephants, which they managed on behalf of the Shahs and the Ranas, who utilised their captive elephant resources to engage in lavish hunts.

In the 19th century, Nepal even pioneered its own method of hunting: the 'ring', which entailed as many as 300 elephants encircling tracked prey such as tiger and rhino. Once trapped within the

ring, the Maharaja and any visiting dignitaries would enter upon elephant back, from where they could then shoot the prey. During this era, Nepal even hosted the British monarchy, including King George V in 1908 and the future Queen Elizabeth II in 1950.

Although the days of hunting are now long gone, the traditional elephant handling skills that were fostered in that time live on. In Chitwan today, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), the King Mahendra

Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), and safari resorts and hotels all employ elephant handlers.

Without the skills of these still mainly Tharu men, it would not be possible to manage the national park, conduct conservation research or take tourists on elephant-back safaris to view the wildlife of Chitwan. The ring method of hunting has even been adapted to play a crucial role in the capture and translocation of rhinos, one of Nepal's conservation success stories that has enabled Bardia National Park and Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve to be repopulated with rhinos from the recovered Chitwan population.

During 2003 and 2004 I lived with, and learnt from the elephant handlers (or *hattisare*) of the Khorsor Elephant Breeding Centre in Chitwan. My friend and colleague Mark Dugas also joined me to shoot a documentary film called *Servants of Ganesh* (see <http://www.oneworldfilms.com>).

Our film documents the training of a juvenile elephant called Paras Gaj and the experience of his trainer. *Servants of Ganesh* reveals the traditional prohibitions the trainer must adhere to, the rituals that must be performed to ensure success, as well as the dedication and respect of all the handlers for this animal, which is both a life companion and the sacred embodiment of the Hindu elephant-headed god Ganesh.

In the international world of captive elephant management Nepal has until now been under-represented. This is a great shame, because although Nepal's captive elephant population is small compared to that of India, Burma and Thailand, its facilities, most especially those of the DNPWC and the KMTNC are a paragon of good practice. Good elephant management practices persist precisely because authorities like the DNPWC permit the continuation of the traditional rituals that reinforce the sacred value of the elephant and enable junior handlers to acquire respectful attitudes in addition to requisite skills.

Despite a lack of resources, Nepal has every reason to be proud of its elephant stables and the professionalism of its handlers. Indeed, perhaps there are even lessons for others. I was privileged to witness healthy, happy elephants with regular access to their natural jungle habitat, and to meet handlers, who although poor, were the skilful and committed beneficiaries of an unbroken tradition of apprenticeship. I remain indebted to their hospitality and am now compelled to champion the cause of Nepali captive elephant management. ●

Piers Locke is with the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kent in the UK



Chitwan youth fight back to protect rhinos and tigers



PRERANA MARASINI

Youth against poachers

PRERANA MARASINI in CHITWAN

The numbers tell a sad story. Chitwan National Park's population of one-horned rhinos has dropped from 544 in 2000 to only 372 today.

The 2005 rhino count found that 94 animals were lost to poaching while 66 died of natural causes such as fighting, predation, and age. "One of the major reasons why the number declined sharply is the state of the country," says Dr Shant Raj Jnawali, chief of monitoring evaluation and planning at the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC).

For example, the number of anti-poaching posts in Chitwan fell from 32 to eight during the conflict. "Maoist attacks on the army posts moved the soldiers to headquarters instead, which gave poachers a good opportunity to be active," adds Jnawali.

But there may be good news on the endangered animal front. According to the count, conducted jointly by Worldwide Fund for Nature Nepal (WWF), the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and KMTNC, the number of tigers has remained stable.

"Our latest data taken six months back shows that there are about 370 tigers in Nepal," says DNPWC Conservation

Education Officer Laxmi Manandhar. This figure is up from 350 tigers three years ago and coincides with the tally of WWF Nepal, says Kanchan Thapa of the organisation's Terai Arc Landscape Program. Of that total number, 123 are breeding tigers, adds Thapa.

"There is very little evidence of tiger poaching in Nepal," said Thapa via email. "Overall the tiger population has been growing at the same time that habitat outside protected areas is also becoming favourable for tigers."

But experts caution that the tiger count, unlike that for rhinos, produces a very rough tally. "There's a nominal chance of missing out rhinos, it can happen only when they go to the inner part of the jungle, tigers are much more difficult to count," says Jnawali.

A team riding on the backs of about 30 elephants for about one month conducts the census, identifying individual animals. "We note down their inclination of the horn, arrangement of neck folds, nodes on the armour, length of tail, body scars, etc, to make sure that actual identification is done," Jnawali adds.

Such accuracy is impossible for the highly secretive, nocturnal tiger, whose numbers in fewer than a half-dozen habitats in the country are estimated using camera traps and paw marks, explains

Manandhar. But the tiger count can be costly as each infrared camera can cost up to Rs 80,000, adds Jnawali. "In 2001, 16 such cameras were stolen," he added.

Today, conservationists have another ally. The young people of Chitwan's buffer zones have voluntarily banded together to protect the world-famous park's animals and forests.

At Mriga Kunja in the park's buffer zone, a group of youngsters has established the impressively named Banyan Jantu Chori Sikar Niyantaran Yuwa Jagaran Abhiyan. All have received training on anti-poaching techniques from park personnel and a network of informants recently helped arrest 77 poachers and their accomplices.

"We give out forms to veterinary stores so that they can record who has bought poisons," explains Birendra Mahato of the campaign to monitor the use of products used to poison rhinos. The group has already helped arrest a dozen poachers.

In New Padampur, 17 young villagers formed their own Youth for Anti-Poaching Campaign and the very next day caught a gang of 40 people illegally felling trees. "We seized three quintals of wood, 11 cycles and four axes from them," said Durga Prasad Acharya proudly. "We now plan to trace animal poachers."

Chitwan National Park's Kamal Jung

Kunwar says: "If anti-poaching operations are to be strengthened, some form of incentive has to be given to informants and the army should resume patrolling."

Besides rhinos, poachers also kill tigers for their skin and bones and deer and wild boar for meat. At the army camp in Tikauli, Capt Dhana Bahadur Thapa says intelligence from villagers is crucial in apprehending poachers. Some 150 poachers have been caught since 2002.

Kunwar says poachers send the tiger skins and rhino horns to Kathmandu from where they are smuggled across the border into Tibet. Smuggling is driven by the huge price differential: 100g of rhino horn fetches \$1,000 when it ends up in China, which explains why so many people are willing to risk capture and punishment. The China smuggling route is expected to be easier with the arrival of the railway to Lhasa and better trans-Himalayan access.

Delegates from Nepal, China and India met in Beijing on 22 June to discuss measures to curb the growing cross-boundary wildlife trade. Their major concern was the trade in rhinos, elephants, Tibetan antelope and, particularly, tiger parts, which are reported to have the highest value. Traditional Chinese medicine markets were cited as a key market for the products in all three countries. ●

IN THE WILD: Protecting the wild animals (clockwise): Three tiger cubs posing for a picture, seized tiger and leopard skins at the Armed Forest Guard Training Centre in Tikauli, Captain Dhana Bahadur Thapa pointing at a stack of rhino skulls and skins captured from poachers, a one-horned rhino walking in Chitwan National Park.



PRERANA MARASINI



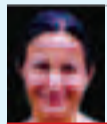
UNICEF

Death as a right denied

Ever since abortion was legalised in March 2002, rights groups have wondered how long it will take for the legislation to actually have an impact on Nepal's maternal mortality rate.

Groups fought long and hard to get the law passed, and they don't want to believe that we may have to wait as long as 20 years to see its impact on the health of Nepali mothers. Four years after legalisation we still see headlines like 'Vet performs abortion, mother dies', 'Hetauda mother, seven months pregnant, dies after abortion'.

There are thousands of other sad stories that never make it to the media, of women who suffer and die quietly because of unsafe abortion every day. During a visit to a Valley maternity hospital recently, a senior gynaecologist related the case of a patient from Bhaktapur who had an unsafe abortion. Her uterus was



COMMENT
Aruna Uprey

perforated and a part of her kidney was damaged. "It was a real struggle to save her," the doctor told us. "Imagine what would happen to her if it was in a village."

The doctors in Hetauda who performed an abortion on a woman seven months pregnant had undergone training but ended up killing both the mother and child. In a situation where doctors don't even follow the simple guideline not to abort in advanced stages of pregnancy, legalisation of abortion may be a futile exercise.

There are also deficiencies in the legal system. In the four years since the law was passed, 19 women have been arrested for abortion and been sentenced to between three and 20 years in prison.

Don't expect the legalisation of abortion to have impact on maternal mortality any time soon

Advocate Sapana Pradhan Malla has been defending a 35-year-old mother of four from Dhankuta who gave birth to a stillborn baby after being raped by a neighbour while her husband was away in India. She was afraid to tell anyone, and after the baby was born dead wrapped it in plastic and disposed of it in the forest. Police arrested her, accusing her of killing the baby. No postmortem was conducted, which could have proved that the baby was born dead. The woman is now in prison, and her four children are living like orphans.

Advocate Malla has pleaded with the court that the woman was a victim of state neglect. The court verdict could go either way for the woman from Dhankuta, but if cases like these are still happening then Nepali women have a long way to go despite progressive legislation.

It is easy for us in Kathmandu to blame the victim, to ask why women visit quacks and why they don't go to the police if they are raped, or get legal advice when illegally arrested. But such arguments ignore the reality of medical services, law enforcement and the status of women in rural Nepal.

Anyone who has visited western Nepal knows how difficult it is to go the police or state machinery with a complaint of rape, how complicated it is to get abortion services and how difficult it can be for a mother to leave home even for a few days.

In fact, it may take over 20 years for the abortion legislation to have an impact on maternal mortality and morbidity in Nepal. It's not just a medical or legal issue, it is socio-economic and cultural, and these things take generations to change. ●

Not seeing is believing

Some people can't see but others just don't want to see



PICS: RUBEN MEIJERINK

RUBEN MEIJERINK in JUMLA

High on a green hill in Jumla's Sinja valley, I close my eyes and hear the roar of rapids far below. The wind is whispering through the trees and from across the valley there is the happy sound of singing from paddy planters.

When I open my eyes I see two blind students are sitting next to me. Surprising, they noticed me before I noticed them. They are among 19 blind students who stay in a hostel in Narakot for blind students that is supported by the Dutch-Nepali charity, Icfon. Like me, they had to walk for days to get here.

The hostel itself is dark, but that doesn't matter to the students. The closest place with electricity is Jumla Bajar, two days walk away. I pass two students inside their room, it is pitch black inside and they are

studying together in braille. Icfon runs similar programs for blind students in Palpa and Baglung with the Nepal Association for the Welfare of the Blind that itself works in 74 schools all over Nepal.

The school is nearby on the same hill. These students play with their sighted classmates. The blind students excel in music, but they are behind the others in maths and other subjects.

Besides having to deal with not being able to see, the blind students also share all the problems that the people of this remote corner of Nepal have to deal with every day: food scarcity, the terrible cold, acute respiratory infections, displacement due to the conflict. Many villagers in Sinja have already moved down to India. Although some are coming back because of the ceasefire for the

planting season, they still have to migrate because there is no work for young people here.

The winters are bitterly cold here with Sinja snowbound for four months. Families huddle indoors and the pinewood smoke from kitchen fires makes chest infection endemic among children. Three years ago a blind student froze to death. Some families move south for the winter, but the blind students have to huddle and keep themselves warm. The main reasons for blindness here are cataract, vitamin A deficiency and untreated infections.

Then there are the Maoists, who keep coming through to indoctrinate them with Marxist ideology. The rebels don't bother the blind students much because of their handicap but they do harass the charity groups trying to help the students. There are other questions, too: why should this hostel for blind students be dependent on a foreign charity and not on the government? There are a lot more questions than there are answers.

The hostel itself is dilapidated and needs urgent renovation if it is to survive the next winter. As I leave the beautiful green valley of the ancient kingdom of Sinja, it occurs to me that some people can't see but others just don't want to see. ●

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Time running out

Still chasing the development dream

The history of development planning in Nepal makes for depressing reading. The idea of planned development was introduced in 1956 with the first of many five-year plans.

It assumed that the state was unitary, development was a problem with a technical solution and the growth model was best suited to us. So, we set about decimating our forests and invested in physical infrastructure emphasising the primacy of the state in economic decision-making. When King Mahendra staged his coup in 1960, he declared that he would deliver in a decade what other countries had taken centuries to achieve. He wanted to create an all-new civilisation with the crown at the top. With his edifice complex, he created towns by diktat and sought to populate them with hardcore loyalists. He supervised the mass transmigration from the hills to the plains. Within 20 years, the thick hardwood forests of the Charkose Jhadi were nearly gone and the newly malaria free inner tarai was filled with new hill settlers.

King Birendra introduced the element of space in national economic planning. With the help of geographer Harka Gurung, unitary control over the far-flung areas of Nepal was consolidated through regional centres. This approach was slightly modified during the post-referendum reformation exercises and 'Growth Corridors' tried to encourage



UMID BHGCHAND

private investment.

The 1990 People's Movement changed the politics but didn't question the development paradigm. In 1991, 46.7 percent of Nepal's population lived in the tarai, by 2001 the proportion was 48.4 percent. Planning dogmas are hard to discard. Whenever regional imbalance is discussed in Nepal, almost no attention is paid to the deliberate and unplanned transmigration of people from the hills to the tarai. Even less attention was paid to the expansion of urban centres and they spread like malignant growths.

Jibgar Joshi has been involved in the

physical planning of towns in Nepal for nearly three decades. Trained as an engineer, he later specialised in economics and urban planning. He has been a part of its remarkable successes (huge expansion in infrastructure and services) and spectacular failures (marginal change in national income, very little improvement in social justice and ineffective poverty reduction strategies) and is in a position to suggest corrective measures now that he has taken voluntary retirement from the government. Unfortunately, he does no such thing. He seems to be quite happy chronicling the events and recording

trends in regional strategies and sustainable development.

The book lacks a central thesis. It doesn't question any of the fundamental beliefs of development planning in Nepal (the unitary model of infrastructure planning, growth model of economic development, development as a technocratic issue, the desirability of foreign aid and the centrality of the state) and suggests minor changes in detail to improve their effectiveness.

We need a fresh approach to make the politics and economics of this country more responsive to its real needs. If this book serves a purpose, it is to raise more questions than it tried to answer. Last week, Nepal's population crossed 27 million and it will double in the next 25 years.

Just that projection alone should send shivers down the spines of planners. How are we going to plan for this: the jobs needed, the food to be grown, the towns accommodated, the hospitals, schools and homes built? Who will control the rage of the disadvantaged? If nothing else, this book reminds us that time is running out. ● CK Lal

Regional Strategies for Sustainable Development in Nepal

Jibgar Joshi
ISBN: 99933-945-0-5
Pages: 156+viii
Price: Rs 400

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India's illiterate revolution

India is becoming divided over affirmative action. The emerging system of 'reserved places' is aimed at redressing centuries of caste discrimination. But India's good intentions are misguided.

The underlying question is whether merit as a criterion for advancement is doomed when legacies of racial and caste discrimination exist. Are those who agitate for affirmative action fighting for something that is more a quack remedy than a real solution?



COMMENT
Arindam
Chaudhuri

In fact, India's reserved places scheme operates as a deliberate smokescreen, for it allows the government cleverly to mask the real issue, which is access to primary education for India's disadvantaged. Were adequate primary education available to India's poor there would be no need for reserved places in higher education and elsewhere.

Indeed, Indians able to read this article should consider themselves lucky, because India's politicians have



succeeded in keeping a majority of the country's population thoroughly illiterate (as well as poor and unhealthy). Instead of providing quality elementary education for all, our policymakers are more concerned with enacting caste-based measures aimed at short-term political gains.

Since India gained independence 58 years ago, billions of rupees have been

doled out in numerous educational policies, but general primary education remains abysmal. Some 8.1 percent of primary schools in India have no classrooms, while 17.5 percent have only one teacher. In addition, 76.2 percent of schools do not have clean drinking water, while 14.6 percent lack electricity. Less than 4 percent of all primary schools have computers.

The affirmative action debate sidelines the real issue: the gap in education

Nearly half of India's 200 million children between 6-14 years of age are not in school at all. Of the remaining 120 million, only 20 million are expected to reach the tenth year of school, with the rest dropping out along the way.

The government has pledged in its National Common Minimum Program to raise public expenditure on education to 6 percent of GDP. However, recent years have witnessed a steady decline in educational spending, from 4 percent of GDP in 2001 to 3.5 percent in 2005.

Quality education is the single greatest asset that a nation can give to its people. It also happens to be the least expensive and most cost-effective support that government can provide. But Indian politicians' interests appear to lie elsewhere. After all, with the rate of functional

literacy at only 37.5 percent, they can easily manipulate the votes of uneducated people with alcohol, pop slogans, and intimidation.

So the protests by highly educated Indians against reserved places is not only wrongheaded, but dangerous as well. Unless India's highly educated stand up for better schools for all, protests against caste preferences will only succeed in heightening tensions and selling newspapers, rather than improving the lives of India's destitute.

The government is probably happy with these protests, for they divert attention from the real issue: the authorities' utter failure to address the fundamental problem. ● *Project Syndicate*

Arindam Chaudhuri is Honorary Dean at the Indian Institute of Planning and Management (IIPM) and most recent books are *Count Your Chickens Before They Hatch* and *The Great Indian Dream*.

The ungreening of the world



CHARLES HAVILAND

JOAN MALOOF

Everyone I meet claims to love trees—I mean *really* love trees—yet collectively the human race behaves as if it abhors green things. If you take a step back from whatever biome you are in at the moment and look at the entire Earth and its forests through recorded history, you will see that the relationship between humans and trees looks *Strangely Like War* (the title of a recent book on forests by Derrick Jensen and George Draffan).

The exact extent of the damage is difficult to discern, because for many years records were not kept, but the estimates are that 75 percent of the world's original forests have been logged or burned by humans. Some of them have grown back of course, or have been replanted, but it is thought that we now have only half of the

amount of forestland we once had on this planet.

In some places, particularly the drier places of the globe, the deforestation was so severe, and was followed by such intense grazing, that forests have not been able to grow back. The landscape has been permanently altered.

When you imagine Greece, Italy and Iraq, it is likely that you imagine dry landscapes with open views, the way they look today. Historical records indicate, however, that these places were once covered by dense forests. The forests fell as civilizations flourished, so the earlier a place became "civilised" the sooner it became deforested.

This march of so-called progress resulting in the loss of forests was documented by John Perlin in his 1989 book *A Forest Journey*.

So today we sit on a planet with only 50 percent of its forest cover remaining. And here's the part that should bring tears to your eyes: we continue to lose more forest cover every year.

The more recent losses are well documented. Every five years the United Nations produces a summary report called the Global Forest Resource Assessment; the team in charge of assembling the assessment relies on internet reporting and satellite surveillance to come up with the figures. According to the most recent report, between 2000 and 2005, we lost forest acreage equivalent to the land mass of Panama—more than 77 thousand square kilometres of forest gone, some of it never to return.

The next report is due to be released in 2010. I will not be surprised when it is released and I read that the global forest area has continued to shrink.

If this happens when we claim to love trees, I shudder to think what would happen if we were ambivalent. Or thought we could live without them.

In the United States, deforestation began as soon as the colonies were settled. Before long, the colonies were exporting wood to the many nations that no longer had the timber they needed for ships, casks, shingles, and other construction materials. Trees were also cut to clear cropland and provide heat and the fledgling nation was using up its forests to build its own ironworks and railroads as well.

By 1920, more than three-quarters of the US's original forests had been cut. Similar to the global figures, today the US has only half the forest cover that it had in 1600. And we continue to destroy forestland.

At the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro it was agreed that "efforts should be undertaken towards the greening of the world." The UN recognises that "forests are essential to economic development and all forms of life." But the UN Charter also reads: "states have the sovereign right to exploit their own resources." And so we do.

Although the UN and my country recognize the value of forests, both ecologically and economically, such recommendations are not strong enough to stop my local council from voting "yes" to deforestation. Last week, I went to a zoning meeting in the town where I live. A real estate housing project developer wanted to cut many acres of trees so he could build houses. That forestland will be lost, probably forever, and a few more numbers will be added to the global deforestation total next year.

Why do local politicians, tree lovers all, allow yet more forest destruction? Why do humans all claim to love trees, but their actions deny their claim? I think it has to do with fear. When a would-be exploiter of trees stands before a politician and requests, or demands, the right to clear a forest, the politician, out of fear, complies. But we do not fear trees. We do not fear their retaliation.

Trees stand mute despite our betrayal. Perhaps that is one of the reasons we really love them. But if we want to do more than love them, if we want to save them, we must become fearless. ●

Project Syndicate

Joan Maloof is the author of *Teaching the Trees: Lessons from the Forest*. She teaches biology and environmental issues at Salisbury University in Maryland, USA.

Alps topple Tour leader

Floyd Landis won't succeed fellow American Lance Armstrong

LA TOUSSUIRE, France—A Tour de France that began with giddy talk of possibly two or three Americans on the podium took a stunning turn on Wednesday afternoon on the steeps of an Alp called La Toissure.

One moment, Floyd Landis was pedalling up the six-percent grade of the Toissure with a hard-earned, two-minute lead over his closest competitor. The next he was a soup sandwich, cast into a world of hurt by an acceleration he could not come close to matching.

The guy who had not shown a moment's weakness in 17 days of racing became the picture of weakness, sweating profusely, his face losing colour, his cadence laboured. "Hey, people have bad days in this sport," said Robbie Ventura, Landis's coach, afterward.

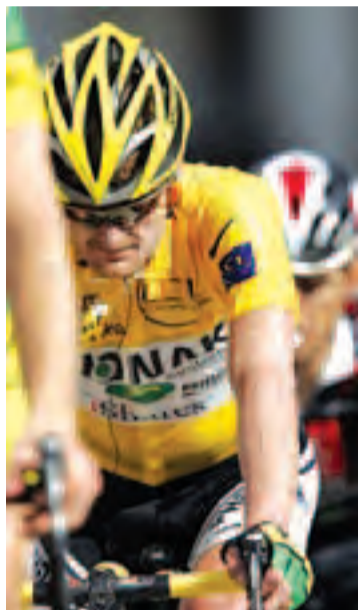
"There are days when you crack but on those days, you lose one, maybe two minutes. This wasn't a crack, it was a detonation."

That blow-up dramatically rearranged the general classification. In finishing more than 10 minutes behind stage winner Mickael Rasmussen, Landis dropped to 11th overall, 8:08 minutes behind his former teammate Oscar Pereiro, who now races for Caisse-Epargne.

Carlos Sastre, who never looked back after dropping the hammer on Floyd early on La

Toissure, simply tore up the rest of the climb, closing on but failing to overtake Rasmussen, who'd broken away much earlier in the day. With his second-place finish, the Spaniard only trails Pereiro by 1:50.

Thirty-nine seconds behind him is Andreas Kloden, the German who must have been shocked to see Landis crack. The



Phonak leader had sat on his wheel looking almost bored for the duration of the previous day's climb up the Alpe d'Huez.

Now, as his chest heaved and his face lost colour and he laboured to turn over his pedals, he appeared to be going backwards. The fissure Sastre had opened became a rift became a

gulf became a chasm, and in 10 minutes time—a seemingly insignificant blip in a three-week race—Landis had lost the Tour.

Rider after rider cruised past, some registering surprise, some too absorbed in managing their own agony to acknowledge the broken figure before them. In one of the race's more poignant moments so far, Discovery's classy Jose Azevedo slowed to ride beside his ex-teammate, offering moral support and, it appeared, condolences.

"I had a bad day on the wrong day," Landis told reporters at a hastily called press conference outside the Phonak team hotel, a half-mile from the finish line. "I suffered from the beginning. I tried to hide it, but in the end I couldn't go."

This stage, the most difficult of the Tour, packed in 17,000 feet of climbing, beginning with an ascent of the legendary hors categorie Col du Galibier, and never let up. "There was never 15 minutes of flat (roads)," Landis recalled, "so I never recovered."

Asked if his compromised right hip had been bothering him—the hip he will soon have replaced—Landis said no. Asked by this reporter if he would tell us if his hip had been bothering him, Landis said no.

"I don't expect to win the Tour now," he went on, gamely facing reality. "But I'll keep fighting." ●



Nine tips

A winning singles strategy

Early on in my playing career, the only strategy I knew was to run as fast I could and get the ball back over the net and wait for my opponents to make an error. As I moved on to play better players, I needed to add new strategies to be successful. Here are nine tips that will help you be a winner on the court.

1 PLAY HIGH PERCENTAGE TENNIS

Reduce the number of points lost by unforced errors and increase the number of points by forcing your opponents into error.



GAME POINT
Sujay Lama

Unforced errors are mistakes made with no applied pressure from your opponent.

Forced errors are the loss of point from applied pressure from your opponent.

2 KNOW THE ZONES

Use the traffic light analogy to understand the three zones on the court.

Red Zone: Baseline

Play safe and be consistent (Ground strokes with lots of spin and height)

Yellow Zone: Midcourt

Proceed through with caution (Approach shot)

Green Zone: Frontcourt

Go for it (Volleys and overheads)

3 KNOW YOUR TWO TARGET AREAS

Four quadrants: The closer you are to the net the greater the potential angle you have (130 degrees from the baseline as opposed to only 19.6 degrees two feet from the net)

Height = Depth minus Aim at a 3-6 feet window over the net for depth.

4 BE CAUTIOUS WITH DIRECTION CHANGE

The difference between down the line shot and a crosscourt shot is 19.1 degrees. You have more chances for error while changing direction off a deep ball. Make sure you are well set up to pull the trigger up the line.

5 UNDERSTAND ERRORS

The best error to make is long. The worst error is the net and a close second is the wide error. Centre the ball with height and that will reduce the angle for your opponent as well cut down your errors.

6 ATTACK THE SHORT BALL

Once you have depth on your ground strokes, you will get short balls. You have got to attack them and get to the net to apply pressure on your opponent. The key is to understand how many steps it will take you to get into a good volley position by the time your approach shot bounces. You want to approach to the weaker and also the side where your opponent will hit higher and longer.

7 AWARENESS OF DEFENSIVE, NEUTRAL AND OFFENSIVE POSITION

Defensive position is when you are a foot or more behind the baseline. From this position, your goal is to get plenty of height on the ball and play crosscourt most of the time.

Neutral position is when you are on top of the baseline. From this position you can play consistently as well as seek chances to be aggressive and look for the down the line shots.

Offensive position is when you are a foot or more inside the base line and looking to attack a short ball and transition to the net.

8 HAVE A PLAN

You have to be able to adapt and change tactics and rhythm when needed in a match. If Plan A is working that is great, but if it is not working go to Plan B or C. It might be adding more or less top spin or varying the speed on your ground strokes. It could also mean serving and volleying instead of staying back or attacking a weak second serve and charging the net. You could also affect the rhythm of your opponent by playing slower or faster or taking the ball earlier to give less time.

9 SMILE AND HAVE FUN

Don't take tennis too seriously. After all, it's just a game.

Danida HUGOU

Invitation for Expression of Interest for Project Evaluation Assignments

Danida's ongoing Human Rights and Good Governance Programme in Nepal aims at establishing a functional and inclusive democracy based on respect for human rights. Its objectives are: i) Human rights organisations ensure greater adherence to and respect for human rights; ii) State and civil society institutions increasingly fulfil their governance and rule of law roles; iii) Democratic and transparent political processes established; and iv) Empowerment, accountability and participation at local governance level enhanced.

The Danida Human Rights and Good Governance Advisory Unit (DanidaHUGOU) is supporting a number of projects, implemented by Nepali partners, within the above framework. As a project comes to an end, DanidaHUGOU commissions a final evaluation and for these purposes DanidaHUGOU would hereby like to try to express interest from qualified and competent firms, organisations or individuals to conduct evaluations of projects related to one or more of the following areas:

- Land rights campaign
- Dalit empowerment
- Access to justice
- Anti-corruption
- Media
- Peace building at local level

The expression of interest should include: i) copy of VAT registration; ii) copy of firm registration and renewed, in case of a firm or organisation; iii) recent CV of the individual(s) to be involved in the assignment; and iv) organisational profile (in case of a firm or organisation).

The relevant firm(s), organisation(s) or individual(s) will subsequently be approached to solicit technical and financial proposals to conduct the planned evaluations.

The last date for submission of the expression of interest is 10 August 2006. Please send your submission to DanidaHUGOU using one of the following means of communication:

DanidaHUGOU
P.O. Box 6332
c/o Embassy of Denmark
Kathmandu, Nepal
Fax no. 4431937
E-mail: hugou@hugou.org.np

"Saas Hunjel Aas" (Where there is Rice, there is Hope) - as translated by UNACOOTS, the United Nation's Association of Cartoonists - NEPAL - sanctioned safe for all ages.



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

1. Donate all valuables to the poor, no one will rob you after that.
2. Buy an expensive imported guard dog, but lock him out of sight or he will be stolen too.
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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Pillars of Hope** paintings by Gobinda Prasad Sah 'Azad' at Siddhartha Art Gallery till 20 July. 4218018
- ❖ **Innovative Art** by Sri Lankan painter Deneth at New Orleans Café, Thamel, till 20 July. 9803002631
- ❖ **Colours of Life** an exhibition by various Nepali artists at Hotel Glacier, Pokhara till 10 August.
- ❖ **Exhibition of Creation** an exhibition of paintings and installation art by Japanese artist Masanori Yoneda at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 23 July- 10 August. 4218048
- ❖ **Impressions of Manang**, 10-28 September, Nepal Tourism Board.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Liberalisation** with Professor Bishwombhar Pyakurel, 22 July at Martin Chautari. 4780522
- ❖ **Mani Kamal Chettri** at Paleti, 28 July at Nepa-laya 'r' sala. 5.30 PM.
- ❖ **Bowl for a Cause** charity event, 29 July. 661666
- ❖ **Constitutionalism** with Professor Krishna Khanal, 29 July at Martin Chautari.
- ❖ **Sunsilk Nepal Fashion Week** at Hotel Hyatt Regency 10-14 August
- ❖ **Changa Chait-2063** battle in the sky at Club Himalaya 9,16, 23 September.
- ❖ **Alcoholics Anonymous** problems with alcohol? 9851016079

MUSIC

- ❖ **Kutumba** featuring Raman, Sunit and Mica at Singh Art Gallery, Lagankhel. 22 July, 5 PM, Rs 100. 9851065064
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant. 4422613
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM at Upstairs.
- ❖ **Live Music** at New Orleans Café. 4700311
- ❖ **Uncork the good times** with Ciney and Par-e-jat playing every Friday from 7PM at Fusion bar at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479448
- ❖ **Jatra Friday Nights**, live music by Siron. 4256622
- ❖ **Unplugged** sessions with Strings, Jatra Saturday nights. 4256622



DINING

- ❖ **Masterpiece menu** at The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La Hotel. 4412999
- ❖ **Mezza and Margarita** at Dwarika's Fusion-The bar every Wednesday, Rs 555. 4479448
- ❖ **Eden Lounge Bar** happy hour 3-7PM, buy one get one free cocktails. 6th floor, Kathmandu Mall, Sundhara.
- ❖ **Monsoon Madness Wine Festival** enjoy wines from four continents at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440
- ❖ **Shaken & Stirred** every Friday BBQ, 7PM at Fusion-The bar, Dwarika's Hotel. Ciney and Par-e-jat perform. 4479448
- ❖ **Mango Masti** at all restaurants in Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Traditional cuisines** at Patan Museum Café. 5526271
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** at Dwarika's Hotel. 6-22 course ceremonial meals open for lunch and dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **Earth Watch Restaurant** breakfast with birds, lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fireplace at Park Village Hotel. 4375280.
- ❖ **Speical budget lunches** at Rum Doodle Bar and Restaurant. 4422613
- ❖ **Breakfast** at Singma Restaurant, 8.30-11AM daily. 5009092.
- ❖ **Wet and Wild Summer Splash** at Godavari Village Resort, special swimming and buffet lunch package, weekends. 5560675

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, relaxation and massages in Pokhara. 4361500
- ❖ **Junglewalks, rafting, elephant rides** all at Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Conferences and workshops** conference facilities at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resorts & Spa. 4375280
- ❖ **Escape Kathmandu** at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Dwarika's Overnight Package** a night of luxury at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Escape to Godavari Village Resort**, overnight stay package with breakfast and swimming. 5560675

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NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED

Thursday's satellite image shows a rare easterly arm emerging from the Bay of Bengal extending northwest along the Ganga plain up to Uttaranchal in India. The image also reveals the pattern of monsoon pulses which is responsible for the on and off heavy rains. Because the trough (the line connecting low pressure zones) lies beyond Nepal's southern border, we should expect only a small share of the monsoon rains from breakaway clouds unless the trough moves north. The south will get more rain than the northern hills as we saw early this week in Dhangadhi where a single storm brought 150 mm rainfall, while its neighboring station to the north, Dipayal, received only one-third of that. While the coming days in Kathmandu will be hot and humid, light showers will keep the nights cool.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

PUSHING AHEAD: Disabled activists demanding that their problems be addressed in the interim constitution are blocked by police as they move toward Singha Darbar's south gate on Thursday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

PUSHING BACK: Tharu Women's Society Secretary Gita Chaudhary blocks a police van carrying dozens of former kamaiyas arrested for protesting at Singha Darbar on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

TILL DEATH DO US PART: Comrade Baayou and Comrade Kamala of Maoist Number Six Barrack, Surkhet, in a 'revolutionary marriage' in Jahare last week.



KIRAN PANDAY

MAKING MUSIC: Yatiudra Ramanuj Das Lamichanne of Chura Makwanpur makes a living by playing flute with his nose.



KIRAN PANDAY

IT'S ROPAIN SEASON: Maoist cadres from Number Six Barrack, Surkhet, serenade locals planting paddy last week.



KUMAR SHRESTHA

Jeena's wings

For women like Jeena Lingden, parliament's decision to reserve 33 percent of government jobs for women was nothing new. Even without that legislation Nepali women have been making inroads into professions traditionally reserved for men. Indeed, civil aviation in Nepal is at the forefront of gender equality with five women air traffic controllers in Kathmandu and more than 10 pilots and co-pilots.

Jeena grew up in Panchthar in eastern Nepal and wanted to fly ever since she was a school girl. Assisted by a father who gave her moral support, Jeena never let go of her passion to be a pilot.

"I'm really proud of myself," Jeena tells us from the cockpit of the Yet Airlines Twin Otter that she

has just piloted into Kathmandu, "not just as a pilot, but because I know I am helping Nepal." When she is not ferrying tourists to Lukla and Phaplu, Jeena flies much-needed food supplies to dirt airstrips in Nepal's remote western regions.

Jeena Lingden represents a new generation of Nepali women: confident, passionate and imbued with a sense that her commitment to her country goes beyond just her job. And it is not just Jeena who has got over people who are shocked to find a woman in the flight deck, she says Nepali passengers are no longer as surprised as they used to be to see female pilots. "It's become quite common nowadays," she explains. Just like Jeena was inspired to

be a pilot after reading a newspaper article about Nepal's first woman pilot, Rakshya Rana, there is no saying how many other little girls across Nepal she is inspiring to become pilots, doctors, engineers or even politicians.

Watching Jeena, it is clear she doesn't consider herself just a pilot. She talks to passengers and sets them at ease, sometimes helping the cabin attendant as she does her walk-around pre-flight inspection. Jeena also sets aside a part of her income to help needy children go to school in her village in Panchthar. She says: "I want to give other girls like me the same opportunity I had so that they can realise their dreams. If I hadn't been a pilot, I'd have been a teacher." ●
Kumar Shrestha

Interim national anthem

It is a disgrace and embarrassment that two months after abolishing the national anthem we still don't have a new one. In fact, it's hard to figure out which is a greater shame: that we don't have a national anthem or that we don't have a national bird.

One of the aftershocks of the April Pheasant Revolution is that the danfe has been dethroned as Nepal's national bird, but because he refuses to step down we can't replace him yet. Several candidates



UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit

have put in applications for the position and the following have been shortlisted: the Red-Vented

Bulbul, the Rooster, the Greater Russet- Whiskered Himalayan Twit and the Griffon Vulture. But we won't know until after the Constituent Assembly is elected which of these feathered friends will be bestowed the honour of representing our proud nation on its coat of arms.

Keeping to the trend of eradicating all vestiges of our feudal past, the rhododendron has also been overthrown as our national flower because of its association with entities which were active in crushing the pro-democracy movement. It will be replaced with a flower that has more proletarian antecedents, and the Sub-Committee for Airbrushing the Regressive Royal Past has narrowed down the search to the Clover and the Sweet Pea.

But it is the absence of the national anathema that is paralysing the normal business of government. National days of various embassies in Kathmandu have been anthem-less. The departure of the prime minister for health checkups have been devoid of the pomp and ceremony they deserve. And without the anthem, Radio Nepal and Nepal Television

don't have a tune to conclude their daily programming every night, so they are forced to be on air 24 hours.

Forget the peace process, let's get a national anthem before the nation grinds to a halt due to our unanathemic state. OK, can we at least decide on an interim anthem?

To speed things up, we are using this week's column to allow readers to vote on the song that they think should be our interim anthem. (Pls grade each song on a scale of 0-10 and mail your rankings to: interimanthem@gone.gov)

- Resham phiriri, resham phiriri udera jaunki danda ma bhanjyang resham phiriri* (The most popular folk song in Nepal, sung gustily by foreigners and domestics alike especially when they are drunk, epitomises our current anarchic state.) Ranking: ..
- Wari jamuna pari jamuna jamuna ko phedaima Manakamana* (Will make a great anthem because of that stanza lower down where one has to wolf whistle.) Ranking: .
- Balaka baburo, dijasuka nama* (The famous poem *Pijara ko suga* as rendered by 1974 AD has the kind of symbolism needed in the serious anthem of a serious country which we can yell at the top of our lungs to go with its heavy metal accompaniment.) Ranking: ..
- Bheda ko oon jasto* (Not that I want to sway the voting process in any way, but this one is my personal favourites for national anthem, it'll have the whole nation dancing in the aisles.) Ranking: 10.
- Ho ho Male ho ho, ho ho A-Male ho ho* (Great song that exhorts Nepal's peasants to work harder to ensure greater productivity of paddy harvests, but unfortunately has to be disqualified for mentioning only the CPN-ML and CPN-UML and leaving out the other members of the SPA.) Ranking: 0.

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