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INDRA DHOJ KSHETRI

Road closed

Wandering aimlessly across Nepal without a destination

A convoy of buses, trucks and tankers waits for an escort on the Mugling-Naryanghat highway on Sunday.

to Birganj by nightfall. The next day we headed north towards Bharatpur, the road was clear but there were checkpoints every step of the way. At Lothar there was another convoy of vehicles headed in the opposite direction. An army Alouette hovered overhead. We wanted to turn off and go back to Kathmandu but the road was blocked at Krishna Bhir. What to do?

We headed west, past heavy army patrols and convoys and several long-distance rickshaws carrying cargo from Narayanghat to Butwal, a distance of 100 km. Rotten tomatoes had been dumped by the roadside by farmers who couldn't take them to market.

At Kawasoti, a roadside resident was sick of it all: "At night the Maoists force us to pile rocks on the road, by day the soldiers come and tell us to clear them."

Editorial p2
Right here, right now

From Butwal we could go no further, the road to Lamahi and Pokhara were both blocked.

A highway allows you to get to get your destination, it is not by itself a destination. If you are a traveler on Nepal's roads these days, having a destination you can reach is a luxury. ●

KISHORE NEPAL all over NEPAL

On 16 February we left Kathmandu for our destination: Tehrathum in eastern Nepal. After six days, we were forced to backtrack 1,000 km across Nepal to Butwal. There, we stopped because finally we could go no further.

We avoided the Prithvi Highway by taking the unconventional route to Hetauda via Dakhsinkali. At Kulekhani, an army sentry told us we were the only car he'd seen that day. The Tribhuban Highway in Bhainse was empty. There

were some motorcycles in Hetauda but no cars.

The next morning, we passed a convoy of 50 tankers and trucks escorted by an army mine-protected vehicle. At Patlaiya junction, we were waved on at the checkpoint: only press and ambulances were being allowed unescorted.

We passed patrols clearing tree trunks from the road and saw only two passenger buses on the 50 km stretch to Nijgad. Joined by a tractor full of merry marriage-goers we reached a deserted Chandra Nighapur in time for lunch. A

landmine on the Kamala Bridge had just been defused, we pressed on towards Lahan and didn't see a single vehicle till Itahari.

Turning north we got into Dharan. A journey that would normally have taken 12 hours had already lasted two full days. The next morning we heard that the Dhankuta road was blocked by booby-trapped power pylons, but we drove up to Bhedetar thinking we could still make it to Tehrathum. Not possible, so we headed back towards Jhapa. East of Itahari, there were only bicycles, and

at Belbari locals told us there was "some action" up ahead and the road was closed, so we returned to Itahari.

By now we had no destination, we were wandering aimlessly around Nepal. Continuing westwards the next morning we passed a long line of trucks, buses and taxis near Lalbandi all moving at the same speed. It looked like a long train being pulled by an armoured personnel carrier.

We talked our way past checkpoints, defied warnings and risked going

Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 173

Q. Do blockades hurt or benefit the Maoist cause?

Total votes: 1072

Weekly Internet Poll # 174. To vote go to: www.nepalimes.com

Q. Does this internet poll generally reflect prevalent public opinion about Nepali issues?

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Learning to live with sensors

In case you hadn't noticed, may we draw your kind attention, in the spirit of the times, to the electrodes and sensors sticking out of the sides of my head. But, seriously, how do you explain the astounding fact that things left undone for 15 years have suddenly been completed in three weeks?

I am speaking, of course, about the garbage that has without warning been relocated from the sidewalks in the past weeks. Potholes have abruptly been turned into small mounds, streetlights are

UNDER MY HAT Kunda Dixit



working again in the daytime, roadside tree-trunks are being painted

even as we speak, and Loyal Nepal Airlines is taking off three days ahead of schedule just like the good old days.

Some questions immediately spring to mind: why couldn't all this have been accomplished in the 1990s? Why did we need to be threatened with corporal punishment to agree with everything? Did we really need to be wheeled off, sirens blaring, for an emergency lobotomy so street centerlines could be painted overnight? The answer to all three questions are: yes, yes and (guess what?) yes.

With 12 radio stations simultaneously beaming us music instead of chatter on the hour every hour, we have now become one of the most heavily entertained nation on earth. Music is literally coming out of our ears. That's not to say we're not being kept abreast of important happenings around the country. Important tidbits are still getting through Mr Scissorhands. For example, newspapers now carry op-eds by astrologers predicting that everything will turn out all right after 10 March. They must know something we don't.



I am confident that the current carrot-and-stick approach will soon allow us to locate the mool and futao it. And before long, we will have attained Asian standards and won't even know it. But no one is saying it's going to be easy: there is a huge backlog of competing demands that need to be addressed so the need of the hour is to itemise, prioritise and realise. So we will not tolerate any pussy-footing as we take on these jobs on a war-footing. Having canvassed the opinion of some friends and colleagues, here is our list of must-do items in reverse order of urgency:

1. All billboards to be taken down by Shivaratri, except the ones that exhort us in broad daylight to 'Go Get the Balls' and a booze ad that categorically states 'There Is Nothing As Satisfying As a Virgin'. These two have become important tourist attractions at Bagmati Bridge and should be left intact.
2. Speaking of the Bagmati, as the mercury climbs the aroma wafting up from the river is now a fine bouquet that reminds us of socks in an advanced stage of fermentation. We must leave the Bagmati alone because it drowns out other localised urban odours.
3. It is difficult to get out to Dhorpatan these days, so we should once and for all turn Koteswor Triangle into a wildlife sanctuary and declare it the Royal Tin Kune National Park. Chitwan rhinos can then be translocated right inside the Ring Road.
4. At the rate we are going, the municipality will soon run out of streets to span with overhead pedestrian crossings, so in response to popular demand from Thimi residents an overhead bridge will be built over the airport runway to make it easier for commuters.
5. The special commission could offer bribes to selected officials so they won't be corrupt anymore.

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Golfing dreams

With the Himalayan Bank Cup it won't be long before we have our own champions

I used to envy those who lived in rich countries because over there, sports flourished with the heavy support of the community, the government and big businesses. I have always dreamt of having the sport I love, which I'm fortunate enough to also have as my profession, develop in my country. I wanted to see our sportsmen participating in international events and finding success. Now I know it won't be long.

None of us can expect success overnight. A multitude of slow and steady developments are what lead to reaching one goal after another. So what is happening in our golf world to inspire such optimism.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



Has it been a year since I wrote about a new golf tournament which seemed to indicate a greater understanding of how large corporations can use sports to promote their business while developing sporting skills in the country? Looks like it has!

This week we will witness what was a one-day golfing event last year expand into a full five-day extravaganza, providing casual golfers not just the opportunity to test themselves but more importantly, to serious sportsmen as well. It is such an encouraging sign to see the event expand so quickly. The tournament sponsors, the Himalayan Bank Ltd have given golfers exactly what they need. The first four days are for professionals and top amateurs. The final fifth day, which is Saturday, 26 February, is for golf lovers and important corporate clients from across the country.

"The bank has committed to support and sponsor the talented amongst the best of our professional and amateurs of this game through the golf development fund," said Ashoke SJB Rana, senior general manager of the bank, at a press conference organised to present the tournament.



Deepak Acharya won the Himalayan Bank Cup with a score of 287 (one under par).

You may recall that along with last year's tournament, Himalayan Bank created a golf development fund, the first of its kind in Nepal. They have recently used it to support our new and upcoming amateur golfer Shiba Ram Shrestha for his training in India.

One gets to understand how important golf is in the corporate world when we look at the board of the sponsoring bank, which includes avid golfers such as Ashoke Rana, Prachanda B Shrestha, and Bijay B Shrestha. Together with other board members, they have realised the need to support excellence in a sport and have taken the initiative to combine sensible corporate strategy with doing something extra for the country. This addition of an extra four-day tournament for top amateurs and professionals goes a long way towards creating sustainable development of golf in Nepal.

Fellow Nepali professional golfers and I competed for a total purse of Rs 150,000. The winner bagged Rs 55,000 and the prize money was earned for all except the last two places. I won the game with a score of 287 (one under par), Ramesh Nagarkoti and Deepak Thapa Magar were runners-up respectively. On Saturday, the amateurs will once again compete for the coveted Himalayan Bank Cup in this Open Golf Championship. We look forward to other corporations joining the bandwagon for sports other than golf also. Now, if you'll excuse me, I don't want to miss my tee time. ●

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



An amateur rider follows her instructor at the Chandra Riding Centre.

KIRAN PANDAY

Kingdom for a horse

If you ever had a passion for riding, here's your chance

AARTI BASNYAT

Equestrian sports in Nepal used to be confined to the elite, the army and the police until Chandra Riding Centre opened in 2001. Rajib Shah came up with the idea when his wife Shivani, an excellent and avid rider, needed somewhere to practice.

Nepal had never seen a racecourse or been particularly keen on promoting equestrian interests—except once a year on Ghode Jatra. That is why Chandra was set up to instil a love for riding and horses. Rajib and Shishir Chandra Shah wanted to encourage fellow Nepalis to learn this new skill and add a bit more pizzazz to their lives.

The school started with only six thoroughbreds brought in from Jaipur and special instructors. This was an elaborate venture and required much investment of time, effort and money. After all, it wasn't easy to find proper instructors, maintain a full-fledged stable and have a vet on standby while promoting a pioneering riding school—all at the same time.

But the school, after a brief warm-up canter is off to a full gallop. The number of horses doubled to 12 and there are plenty of people willing to learn to ride. Even though Rajib dreamt of introducing the sport to Nepalis there were only a limited number of locals who came and most of his customers were

expatriates and their children. Shah later introduced the riding centre to local schools and children were brought in large groups for 40 minutes to an hour-long class. This proved to be of limited use since a class of 25-30 children within an hour resulted in the horses getting overworked and the children learning precious little.

Rajib Shah wishes that schools would send smaller groups and parents would take a special interest in their children's activities. "It is a beautiful and educational sport. Not only do children get exercise and learn proper posture but they also overcome their fear of animals. It also makes them more confident and responsible," he says. His own two-and-a-half years old daughter, Yashashwi, rides with an instructor or her parents.

Rajib blames the restricted attention span of Nepalis for the lack of passion in riding. Horse riding is a sport that requires rigorous training and commitment. Haphazard handling of horses can result in accidents.

Shah plans to introduce new schemes to attract potential riders like the carriage facility so locals can book for weddings as well as other events and add grandeur to functions. A new and reduced price scheme is being



Rajib Shah poses with one of his horses.

introduced. He plans to promote sightseeing on horses in the early morning hours. The sightseeing trip is for people who want a feel of old Nepal as they, like kings, astride their horses canter through the courtyards of Patan or Kathmandu. Patan and Kathmandu By Night is targeted at those who wish to have a romantic dinner and then drive around the city in a carriage with their loved ones. Shah also plans to promote trail riding during weekends to break the monotony of just riding around the arena for riders with a little more experience. So bring out the cowboy in you, put on your spurs and tally-ho. ●

Chandra Horse Riding Centre
Man Mandir, Thapathali
4244072, 5524222

SURYA NEPAL
GOLF



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RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW

It's now getting on to 25 days since the royal proclamation. Far be it for us to say how things have been in that period. Even if we knew, we couldn't tell you. There will be those entrusted with the duty of providing security and ensuring development who are much more clued in.

Our correspondent who roved the highways from east to west (see p1) this week describes an immobilised nation. Tens of thousands of people are stranded for weeks in highway towns, villagers are forced to walk ancient disused trails across the mountains, pedal rickshaws are plying cross-country along empty highways.

It is clear that the rebels have now gone beyond caring about public opinion. Their actions point to total indifference to what the people think about them and their revolution: setting fire to ambulances, opening fire on bus passengers and snipers shooting at anything that moves. Turning into what they consider the last lap, they are choking off the towns to spread panic and frustration so as to prove things aren't better for the people post-February First.

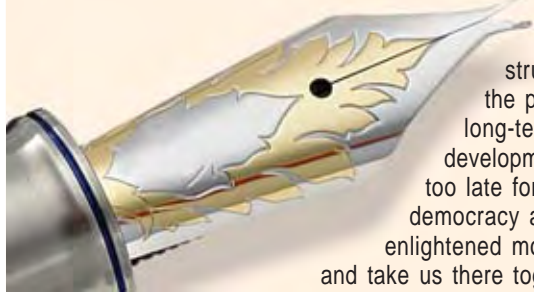
But the next uprising may very well be against them. Dailekh in December and Kapilbastu last week showed what can happen by neglecting public opinion and perpetrating atrocities. The people always know who their tormentors are, sooner or later they will not be able to stand it any longer and will rise up.

For now, the Maoist leadership is sitting back and watching Kathmandu stew. And they pat themselves on their backs reading the international reaction to the king's move and the British announcement of an arms embargo. Things are going pretty much according to plan for them.

We will have to wait and see how long the patience of Nepal's urban dwellers will hold out. But we expect the comrades are astute enough to realise that there is no military solution to this conflict and it could drag on for years, if not decades. Are they willing, can they hold on, till then? Will the internal dynamics of the party keep it cohesive for that long? And if what we see and hear today is the reaction to a return to authoritarianism, imagine the international outrage that will greet totalitarianism.

Improbable as it may seem, February First has actually given the rebels an opportunity to join the political mainstream. In his reaction, Prachanda himself called for solidarity with the political parties and civil society. But he should know it won't happen until his party renounces violence. The political parties may have messed things up, but they are still the only entities that don't owe their survival to the barrel of a gun. This is the time for all forces that want social change

to unitedly address the structural problems in the polity to ensure long-term peace and development. It's still not too late for parliamentary democracy and a progressive, enlightened monarchy to co-exist and take us there together.



"There was another road map"

Interview with Indian Ambassador, Shiv Shankar Mukherjee

Nepali Times: It has been reported in the Indian media that you returned from Delhi this week carrying a message for His Majesty the King from Indian leaders. What is the gist of it?

Shiv Shankar Mukherjee: I'm not physically carrying a message. In New Delhi, I met the prime minister, external affairs minister, foreign secretary. I was basically told to reinforce the message that was already given in our very first statement, which is that we continue to see this as a setback to democracy, we continue to ask for the release of the leaders of the political parties, resumption of the democratic process, removal of the curbs on civil liberties including the freedom of the press, and to build a broad national consensus to get back to the major challenges facing Nepal which is the insurgency and development. That continues to be our position.

His Majesty said in his royal proclamation he was forced to act because of the inability of the political parties to unite among themselves and against the Maoists.

Our government has very carefully considered the situation here, including the royal proclamation of 1 February. My government disagrees with the position that by taking the stand that we have, we are strengthening the insurgency. Quite the contrary. The takeover on 1 February was in fact the act that removed the political parties which were the buffer between the constitutional forces and the Maoists. It has in fact emboldened the Maoists. The situation can be remedied even at this stage by a return to what we think is the correct condition for ending the insurgency with the help of the people: constitutional monarchy and multiparty

democracy.

Our prime minister has expressed in parliament more than once the concern of the spillover of the insurgency into India, and the nexus that has formed between the insurgency here and the leftwing extremists in India. So the developments here are a matter of direct concern to the people and government of India. Our reaction is based on that reality as well as on principles.

But His Majesty said on February First that constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy are also what he wants.

We think there was another road map available which was to continue to work with the political parties, prepare a unified stance and a unified agenda for dealing with the insurgency for beginning a peace process with the constitutional monarchy and the political parties helping each other and supporting each other. We think that is the way it should have gone.

Have you decided to suspend military assistance to the Royal Nepali Army?

The issue of military supplies is under constant review by the Government of India, taking into account the evolving situation in Nepal. In view of the current disturbed situation in Nepal it is a fact that no military supplies have been delivered since 1 February, 2005.

But wouldn't that undermine your own stated objective to strengthen the RNA's capacity to fight the Maoists and bring them to the negotiating table?

It is a choice we have to make.

As one of Nepal's friends, as one whose interests are involved here, as a democracy, it's a choice we have to make. It's not something permanent. Our credentials as far as desiring to assist Nepal in these difficult times is total. What has happened has made it difficult for us to continue with that assistance for now.

What kind of pressure can you bring to bear to get the parties on board?

I feel very uncomfortable with the word pressure. We express our



MIN BAJRACHARYA

LETTERS

HANGING IN THERE

I am glad the American ambassador James Moriarty asks Nepalis to "hang in there, to unite, to face the insurgency and also to rebuild democratic institutions". ('Hang in there', #235) He is balanced, realistic and his expectations from the king are not in any sense very different from that of the Nepali people. But it is funny when serious diplomats like Moriarty and his British colleague, Keith Bloomfield, speak of working closely with India in the interest of Nepal's democracy and peace. Does this mean the US and UK are submitting to the regional security perception of India? If that is the case, we can't accept it. India has never been for democracy in Nepal, whatever it may say. Even in 1990, Nepal resumed the democratic process, because faced with an Indian blockade King Birendra opted to surrender power to his subjects rather than submit to India, which wanted Nepal to accept the status of a protectorate as the price of supporting monarchy against the mass movement for the restoration of democracy. Even now, India is taking the issue of King Gyanendra's seizure of power not because it is in love with democracy but because its cronies in the political parties are in the wilderness and the intelligence budget it spent in Nepal over the last nine years and giving the Maoists sanctuary have been wasted. American policy towards Nepal has always been generous, Britain has a soft spot for Nepal. But India is a different kettle of fish. Western concern about Nepal's democracy is understandable, but if the west is not helpful to the desire of a people to live an independent and dignified life, and is going to demean itself by supporting Indian pettiness and chicanery, is there any alternative left for Nepal? If the king does not

live up to his promises on February First the Nepali people will take it up with him, but who will help us from the jealousy of an arrogant neighbour?

Dibya B Gurung, New York

● I couldn't agree more with the thrust of your editorial 'Been there, done that' (#235) in which you point out the failure of the western sanctions on Burma and the Indian blockade of Nepal in 1988-90. Where you miss the point is that India has presently enforced another blockade of Nepal, only this time they've got the Maoists to do it for them.

Ganesh Gauchan, Pokhara

● You make a forceful argument in your editorial in the last issue to protect international development assistance to Nepal. I don't agree. It is time for the new royal government to seriously think about an aid moratorium. Have we ever sat down to seriously calculate how much of the assistance Nepal receives actually goes back as salaries and fees for its own nationals? And the less said about the millions poured into the NGO industry that has leaked out to the Maoists the better. Foreign aid has never benefited the poor in Nepal, and terminating it won't spread any misery. Instead, it will put a stop to preachy, grandstanding foreigners with double standards who want to tell us how to run our lives. And it may actually force us as a nation to stand on our own two feet.

Gyan Subba, email

● Just one question to you on your editorial: How much of the foreign aid through out the last 15 years have ended up in the pockets of the former governments? Why not bring this problem into the news?

Katrin Petersen, email

● Nepal is in a make-or-break situation. Since the king is now the presiding CEO, there are a few more measures he should take: a) The commission he has formed to look into corruption should give individuals chance to voluntarily return their ill-gotten wealth, and the commission should act fast and not get bogged down in lengthy court battles which could totally undermine its credibility. b) All elected officials from the past 20 years should be banned from running for public office, the people should realize that we are where we are because of them, and if they are smart they should change their profession, they had their chance and they blew it, and c) Representation in future governments should be from all regions of the country, and no one should feel left out

N Lane, email

● Saubhagya Shah's guest column ('At the helm', #235) is a powerful antidote to textbook democrats in India, America and elsewhere who keep on harping the democracy tune without taking contemporary Nepali reality into account. The critics of the king's move ought to realise that February First was not only desired but required to clean up the mess that Nepal is in. The sheer hypocrisy and double standard of the west in promoting democracy and showing their concerns over regimes based on their own strategic and other interests is a well known and established among observers of international politics. They

need to realise that sometimes their version of democracy is not a good fix for local problems, and third world countries should be left alone to act in their countries' best interests. I couldn't agree more with Saubhagya Shah: thank you west and the, but let us solve our problems ourselves now.

Name withheld, email

● Your editorial ('Been there, done that', #235) cautioned the international community and donors not to punish the Nepali people by withholding aid, putting sanctions and embargoes. Your well heeded call has not been heard by India, UK, Denmark and Switzerland even as we speak. Unfortunately, these acts now only push Nepal's current government towards China. India and the west want Nepal to have a constitutional monarchy and a multiparty democracy which is a noble goal. However, democracy cannot be forced upon the people of Nepal. It has to be home grown from the grassroots. It seems like the



opinion, we express it as clearly and as unambiguously as we can, we make it abundantly clear that India's assistance will be available in full measure, as will be that from the other players in the international community here, provided the democratic process is brought back on track. We have no favourites in terms of methodology, we note the objectives we want and it is up to the Nepali constitutional forces and civil society to decide exactly how to go about it. All I can say is that if the political parties get together on a unified agenda, which will presuppose the release of their top leaders who are under house arrest or imprisonment, and if that process gets back on track I think the entire international community will welcome it.

Are you still opposed to UN mediation in resolving the insurgency?

A third party brings in more complications, my government does not see at the moment the need to muddy the water further. Certainly, an insurgency should be talked to, they have grievances that should be addressed, but the methods they use must be resisted and they must be encouraged to come to the table.

How much coordination is there between you and Nepal's other neighbours?

I think the international community, certainly those that are seen as being involved in Nepal's development, have shown an impressive unity in their response to developments here, and there has certainly been frequent coordination. We've had consultations with China also on this situation.

Is there agreement with China?

There is an agreement certainly to coordinate and share information.

The envoys are back after consultations. The dust is settling in Kathmandu.

Everyone, including donors, are waiting and watching. The parachutists have come and gone. In cyberspace, international activist and rights groups have been in combative mood and it is there that once more there is alarmist talk of Nepal turning into a 'failed state'.

STATE OF THE STATE CK Lal



Again we are obliged to use this space to debunk the myth of the failed state. Proponents of the status quo insist that the centre can't hold if it isn't propped up pronto from outside. Those opposed insist that patting it will push the state towards the precipice. In the confusion, the inherent contradiction in the expression 'failed state' is lost entirely: whatever has failed isn't a state anymore. A 'failed state' is an oxymoron.

A state begins to flail when it loses its capacity to provide the second stage, its ability to enforce the rule of law is weakened. Further deterioration leads non-state actors (insurgents, extremists or the mafia depending on which country you're in) to become too powerful to be subdued by the coercive arm of the state. Direct or indirect intervention by the international community then becomes inevitable as the conflict threatens to spill over.

If groups challenging the state have cross-border links, as the Maoists undoubtedly do, they imperil regional stability. Like it

A flailing state

We may be writhing in agony but we're not about to become a failed state

or not Nepal is now a global headache, and hence the to-ing and fro-ing of ambassadors. We have very little control over the response of our neighbours and friends. But we need not worry too much about the intensity of their interference. Foreign governments are guided and restrained by their own self-interest. In all likelihood, their interests will be limited to waiting and watching us flail.

Humanitarian assistance and human rights issues will most probably remain the central concern of every donor. They are answerable not to us but to their constituencies back home who don't yet understand the nature of the conflict in some boon-dock. Such assistance has to be cautiously welcomed.

Chances of intervention measures succeeding are often the second most important consideration. No government or international agency wants to bloody its nose in confronting belligerents like the Taliban, Tigers or Maoists. No country wants an Afghanistan, Sri Lanka or Somalia type quagmire.

The third factor influencing the decision to act is the capacity of oppositional forces inside the country itself. None of the velvet and orange revolutions in eastern Europe or central Asia would have succeeded if effort hadn't gone into building competing political forces. Unfortunately, other than the state the political forces capable of



SURESH RAJ NEUPANE

meeting the Maoist challenge here are now almost absent. Unless the NC, UML or others succeed in persuading the rebels to come above ground it is unlikely that any of them will get enduring international support.

If experiences of other failing states are anything to go by, the time may come when meddling embassies may be asked to close shop. And if things get any worse, most of them will be only too happy to oblige. But the ones that remain will probably want to be heard. Similarly, leaders of political parties cooling their heels at home are daydreaming if they are relying on international pressure.

Diplomacy has many

dimensions, but democracy promotion in a war-racked is not one of them. Whether we like it or not, the international community is much more worried about Comrade Prachanda's next move than Comrade Madhab's health.

In a world gone global, Nepal cannot claim unrestrained sovereignty to writhe in agony but we need not fear undue outside interference either. All hopes of quick relief courtesy donors, loaners, and sundry do-gooders bear no relation to ground realities.

The good news is that the state is unlikely to fail. The bad news is that we will continue to flail as long as we don't realise the futility of looking outside to fix the rot within. ●

envoys of these countries seem to have missed the pulse of Nepalis. What do the Nepali people want at this juncture? They want peace, security and stability. Without stability there will be neither a political process nor economic growth required to provide employment to the people. People are willing to sacrifice certain fundamental rights for security. Only a handful of tainted politicians, yellow journalists and SUV-riding NGOs bemoan the loss of democracy. They are the ones for whom 'For the People, By the People, Of the People' actually meant 'For the Politician, By the Party, Of the Cadres' for the last 14 years. They have lost the faith and the mandate of the people. If the political parties could not even forge unity at a critical juncture to tackle the Maoist insurgency, then, they lost their right to represent the people. Mr Ambassadors, the political parties and their leaders do not represent the people of Nepal. They only represent their own egotistical political leanings and their greed. Just go down to the streets and villages and speak to the people. Nepalis are as fed up of them as they are of the rebels. The Americans had their Patriot Act, they supported Gen Musharraf. Britain did what it had to quell terrorism in Northern Ireland. India had to act on Kashmir. These nations who dare lecture us on the merits of democracy only need to look at themselves in the mirror. There seems to be a double standard when judging poor helpless nations like Nepal. Those who are true friends of the Nepali people will give us some time and support.

SN Singh, email

● It is surprising that even CK Lal ('First, the good news', #235) is now writing about the need to get back to the grassroots development journalism. Couldn't agree more. You should take his advice and highlight stories like the uprising of the Dailekh

mothers on the front page instead of relegating it to a small brief on page 5 ('Dailekh defiance', #235). The need of the day is to bring back peace and prosperity, hence democracy at the earliest possible time. If the people do not pull up their socks and help the authorities to achieve this like the Dailekhis did even 500,000 troops will not be able to succeed.

Amar Simha, e-mail

● I served in the RNA and quit in 1998 to pursue a career as a Global Security Consultant. My stay in Nepal is very infrequent and I try to be there on my holidays. The million dollar question is: are you a RAW agent? Why are you so anti-Nepali?

Hemendra Khadka, Jordan

● It is obvious that CK Lal and others like him can't write as they think but your Shah columnists clearly can. Last week we had 'Reason over reaction' by Dipta Shah (#234) and his juxtaposition of a choice between 'near' authoritarian rule, but only for 'the interim', and Maoist totalitarianism. This is a false choice but there is the clearest possible evidence over the last few years of clever manipulation behind the scenes to ensure that just such a perception would be created as a prelude to February First. How 'near' is 'near'? You might not have seen anything yet! There is a real danger that as the foolishness and ineffectiveness becomes more apparent, the screws will be tightened. Besides, what is the basis for believing as Dipta Shah does that this is 'for the interim'? All signs, including the composition of the office-bearers point to the other direction. Then this week we have Saubhagya Shah ('At the helm', #235) giving us the line that there was no choice: the king had to act as he did because 'the peril of not doing anything was greater'. These two guys are, of course,

entitled to their views but they are being given a free run to peddle what is, however cleverly dressed up, the official line.

Shyam Karna, email

GOOD JOURNALISM

The story on biogas by Naresh Newar was refreshing ('Nepal's future is in the dung heap', #234). It is beaming with hope and possibilities of better times. All Nepalis should actively engage in exploring such positivism in these hard times. We can only keep it alive by not forgetting.

Dhiraj Sharma, Lafayette University, USA

● Shrinkhala Sharma's Nepali Pan column ('23 weeks to go', #234) has written about the very essentials of objective, holistic and no-nonsense journalism that I have been trying to inculcate in young reporters for years. She literally took the words off my mouth. Her write-up should be the introductory as well as concluding part of any journalism curriculum and training/workshop and also the follow-up manual for editors.

Peter J Karthak, The Kathmandu Post/City Post

● Been meaning to congratulate you on the excellent post-censorship issues of the *Nepali Times*. The Nepali media may have lost its freedom, but it hasn't lost any of its bite. Your past two editorials (#233, 234) have been bold and beautiful, especially considering they were written while under the censor's sword.

Nira Poudel, email

● The piece by Manisha Aryal ('Radio activity' #235) on your online edition touched my heart. It also made me feel proud, again, about being Nepali. On one hand, one cannot deny that technology has

helped our rural folks to some extent in getting their words across (even words of sorrow). On the other, Nepalis are still the same caring and generous people, who, despite all odds and differences, come to help in times of need.

Dhruba Khanal, email

● What a heartwarming story on the power of rural radio by Manisha Aryal. Anyone who wants to see the absurdity of the ban on rural FM should read this piece. It proves that by stopping news and information by radio the government is not just hurting the people but also harming its own counter-insurgency strategy because the information gap is being filled by negative rumours and rebel propaganda.

Name withheld, email

POEM

In 1992 it was my pleasure to visit your country and travel extensively. Whilst staying in Pokhara, I trekked around the Ghorepani circuit. That trek and, indeed, my entire stay in Nepal is emblazoned in my memory. In Pokhara I read a poem which I can't perfectly recall. What I remember is that it was about a mountain, a very moving summation of 'what a mountain is all about'. It was all about the 'knowledge' one can have of a mountain: 'to know its size, you must see it from afar/to appreciate its height you have to be close' or words to that effect. The verse also explained that one cannot 'know' a mountain unless it has been seen in all seasons. I will forever associate a photograph I have of Machhapuchhare with that poem. Try as I might I can't race this poem anywhere. Can anyone help? It might inspire my wife and three sons to visit Nepal.

Gary Benn, gary.benn@homecall.co.uk

Trees, roots and grass

What do conflict resolution experts do now?

What do you do now? You've been fired more times than an American IT-worker and your job has just been outsourced except the outsourced job is in your own country.

Boss: We have to talk.

Outsourced guy: Oh no, not again.

Boss: I'm afraid so.

Outsourced guy: Listen, it's not me this time. That chain-smoker and shorty just don't want to come on board. They want my job and my favourite portfolios.

Boss: Sorry to hear that.

Outsourced guy: Ok, but this time can you ease up on words like 'incompetent' in your speech.

Boss: Ok, deal.

You are one of the founding fathers of Nepali democracy (and I use that term very, very loosely with due apologies to George Washington, Jefferson etc) and your own house is a prison. But you're not worried. You might not really know how to govern or have any connectivity to your constituency but you know how to do this prison thing well. You're back in your element.

NEPALI PAN
Pravin Rana



You are the Nepali media. You thought you could editorialise the insurgency away. Hell, you've written so many great editorials and offered lucid solutions but no one calling the shots read them. They've been chugging Johnny Walker Blue and now you're using trees, roots and grass as metaphors and what makes you think they're going to get that? I feel for you.

You are the man and you are a hands-on kind of guy with difficulties smiling. You can't understand why the politicians keep dilly-dallying while the house is burning. You ask them to join you in a coalition. They say they don't know the definition of a coalition. You fire them. You bring them back. Yet, they still don't understand what a coalition is. They've never had to cooperate except for about five minutes in 1990. You fire them again and roll the dice. You're in everyone's crosshairs now but hey, you showed them that you can make a decision and you too, can give a really, really long speech. It seems to be working.

You are the Indian media. You really don't understand Nepal but who is asking? You find yourself scratching your head sometimes wondering how the Nepali immigration authorities can keep track of all those people when everyone's name is Bahadur. (This just in from the BBC: tigers are being de-listed from the endangered species list based on the TOI article describing Ms Koirala's harrowing escape riding pillion through tiger-infested tarai.) Question to the Sports Council: can pillion-riding while fighting off tigers replace dandi beu as Nepal's national sport? Sounds cooler and gives us a tougher image.

You are the FNCCI and you don't know if you should order some flowers.

You are the average Nepali. You've gone through 85,000 bandas. You've seen Nepalis destroy your store because some terrorist killed Nepalis in Iraq or some actor allegedly said something bad about Nepal. You've heard incessantly from politicians that there are some holes in the constitution and they must be fixed before you have true democracy.

You hear from the Maoists that everything must start from scratch before the revolution is complete and you've never really understood what a constituent assembly is. You hear from the media that the whole thing is tied to this neocon movement, has parallels to Iraq and Afghanistan, and *The Economist* has the real solution. You have no idea what they are talking about.

You've gone through 25,000 school closures. You marvel at how teachers can squeeze a whole year's worth of schoolwork in the 20 days that schools are open. Your salary is less than Rs 50 a day. Yet, you've got these guys asking you to give up two months of pay and your first born for the 'people's war'.

You're tired. You don't really care anymore. You just want your life back and they can call the system whatever they want.

You're a conflict resolution expert and a professional mediator. It is time to take that long vacation. ●



Trekking to a trickle

The current crisis couldn't have come at a worse time for tourism



KUNDA DIXIT

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

The timing of the present crisis couldn't have been worse. February First happened just as bookings for the spring trekking season were firming up and the travel trade was looking forward to recouping losses of the past years.

Although there was a 12 percent increase in tourist arrivals last year with 380,000 visitors, it was still way below the 1998 peak of 500,000. Now, things are gloomy again.

There have been mass cancellations after news of the king's move and the subsequent Maoist blockade of highways. January had already shown a 16 percent drop compared to January 2004 and February's figures are expected to be worse.

After the emergency was declared, Kathmandu-based embassies have upgraded their travel advisories. Even the French, who have been the most laissez-faire about advisories on Nepal have posted warnings, mainly because of communication difficulties after 1 February.

"We have given up hope for this spring season," says Trekking Agents' Association Nepal (TAAN) President Deepak Mahat, "Now all we can do is hope for the best for the autumn season." Trekking agents have received mass cancellations by groups

booked for the March-May season and the only people still coming are individual travellers who in any case are not deterred by advisories.

Worst hit have been Indian tourists because of the saturation coverage of the Nepal crisis in the Indian media. Even Indian gamblers who used to throng Kathmandu's casinos are thin on the ground. People coming overland from India has plummeted to zero. "The army is ready to take the tourist vehicles in convoys," said an NTB official, "But tourists normally don't agree to move like that."

The tourism multiplier benefited everyone from taxi drivers in Kathmandu to Nepal's national parks, porters, tea shop owners along trails and even Maoists who taxed hikers. Now, with trekkers down to a trickle, everyone is hit. The only ones who have come out unscathed are domestic private airlines which are compensating for dollar-paying tourists with a record numbers of passengers because of blocked highways.

But international airlines have suffered. Qatar Airways brought only five passengers from Malaysia on a flight this week, although its Doha flights are full. Cosmic Air flew only 12 passengers to Dhaka on the same day. Sahara Air suspended flights

and is due to resume only on 15 March. Austrian Airlines has suspended flights for March. Airlines that used to depend on tourists are turning now to ferrying Nepali migrant workers to the Gulf. Phuket Air, scheduled to begin Bangkok-Kathmandu-Dubai flights next month is doing just that.

Although the Sagarmatha, Manang and Mustang regions are trouble-free, tour operators are finding it hard to convince visitors that trips will not be disrupted. Among those still braving it are tourists from other conflict zones like Israel who don't pay attention to advisories anyway. In 2004, Nepal had 108 percent more Israeli tourists compared to the previous year.

The only hope for tour operators now is Tibet. There is heavy booking for spring into the monsoon for Lhasa-bound Kathmandu stopovers. "Tibet is looking good," says NATTA Vice President Dhruva Narayan Shrestha, "The fact that Kathmandu is ok is spreading through word-of-mouth. We are going to amplify this good news through a travel mart here."

Even so, the Maoist blockade of the Arniko Highway since 1 February has hurt overlanders and many have had to be ferried to and from Tatopani by helicopter. ●

Pokhara takes a direct hit

RAMESH POUDEL in POKHARA

The tourism slump has hit Pokhara badly. Last year it was Maoist activity on the Annapurna trek circuit, then it was the bandas, now it's the post-February First blockade which has affected especially Indian tourists to what used to be a favourite honeymoon destination.

A dozen hotels along Pokhara's once-bustling lakefront have closed shop in the past month. Others have been locked out by the banks. Chautari Hotel has been closed by down by Nabil Bank because it couldn't pay back Rs 10.3 million it borrowed. "We had no choice," said Nabil's Saroj Pyakurel.

Even the five-star Fulbari Resort has been getting frequent summons from its bankers. Electricity and telephone lines have already been cut, yet the hotel remains open. "The bankers would love to close down my hotel, too," says a defiant Piyush Amatya of Fulbari, "but they can't touch me, after all if there were three good seasons, I could pay back all my loans."

However, there is no sign of the tourists returning any time soon. Pokhara depends mostly on trekking traffic and there have been heavy group cancellations for the spring season. Dejected, the owners of Tragopan, Thorang-La, Saino, Pumori, Mandala and Begnas resort have all closed down.

Altogether, banks have invested Rs 20 billion in some 300 Pokhara hotel properties. Hoteliers say while they have been ruined, the banks are doing very well for themselves.

"Just because some hoteliers are willful defaulters, banks should not be closing down all hotels," says hotelier Sundar Kumar Shrestha, "The situation affects everyone and the day will come when the banks will also go bankrupt." As hotels close, downstream businesses like poultry farmers, vegetable vendors, dairy farmers and transporters are all hit. "Even store owners have lost faith in us," says Hari Gurung of the Hotel Association of Nepal.

Pilgrims at Boudha

A chartered Druk Air Airbus A319 arrived in Kathmandu on Tuesday carrying 114 Bhutani pilgrims attending a sacred ceremony held once in 12 years at Boudha on Wednesday night (pic right). The



KIRAN PANDAY

passengers joined an estimated 1,000 pilgrims who are in Nepal to witness the relic of Ma Jazima, an incarnate of Abalokiteswar, displayed at Boudha on Thursday. Pilgrims who could not fly travelled by road through India despite security problems. The statue of Ma Jazima, encased in the stupa is taken out for display every Tibetan rooster year. It is believed that the stupa has the power to fulfil all wishes made there. Ours is for peace.

Mind management

A three-day mind management workshop was organised for the employees of the Karmachari Sanchay Kosh. It was conducted by Acharya Shree Dhrub, who has also been holding this workshop for prisoners and police personnel in Nepal.

Hotel preferences

Qatar Airways has entered into the Preferred Hotel Program with Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu for 2005. It will help produce more than 300 additional room nights every month.

BKK-KTM-DXB

The Thai private operator, Phuket Air, is to launch a Bangkok-Kathmandu-Dubai turnaround from 9 March. The airline will use 757s flown by Nepali pilots, also, for its thrice-weekly flights. Phuket has fifth-freedom rights to pick up Nepali passengers on the Kathmandu-Dubai sector and will compete directly with, Royal Nepal Airlines, the only other airline flying that route.



NEW PRODUCTS



MAZDA 3: Padma Shree Group has launched Mazda 3 in Nepal. Designed as a C-segment car with 1600 CC, safety measures have been produced in cooperation with Volvo. All through this month, the car has a promo price tag.

SMALL OUTSIDE, BIG INSIDE: Daihatsu announced the second generation of its Sirion Multi Purpose Compact. Developed with parent company Toyota, which sells its own version in Japan, this new car has plenty space in its compact dimensions.



Crisis management

Managing business in times of insurgency

Peter Drucker in *Managing in Turbulent Times* written 20 years ago couldn't have foreseen Nepal today. But he gives us enough dope on how to deal with the unknown.

The Harvard Business Review compendium *Managing in the New Economy* lists the challenges ahead in the 21st century. While

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed



not much has been written about crisis management of businesses in Togo, Congo or Swaziland, some interesting works are available on how businesses survived in Peru and Colombia during times of insurgency. So Nepali management fraternity, there is much reading to do apart from holding annual elections.

Businesses are here to stay and profitable in all forms of environment. In a monetised economy, businesses will never cease to exist. Only the method in which it is conducted will be different.

Frequent disruption of the supply chain means more investment in inventories. Managing longer credit periods and the probability of smaller businesses going bust will be a challenge, as squeezing vendor credit becomes the name of the game. Technology oriented banks and travel companies will have to learn to function without communication links. IT related businesses will be hit the hardest during these times due to connectivity problems and people not being able to commute to work. So if there are companies trying to get into the call centre and other business process

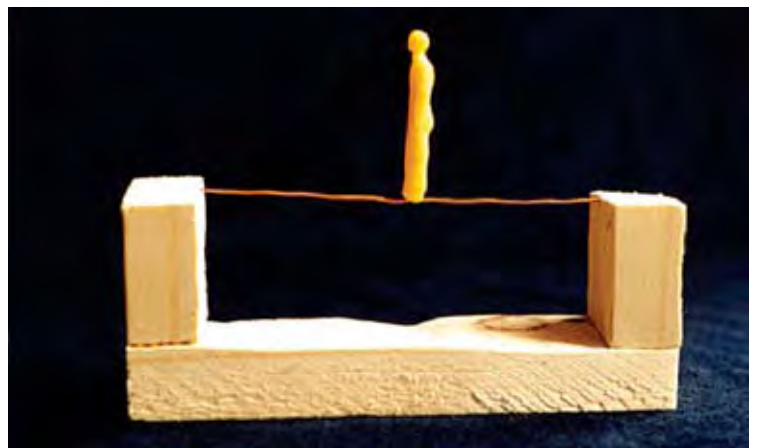
outsourcing trade—beware.

Nepal's small manufacturing base will erode further with the supply chain and distribution disruptions as well as labour-security related issues. New opportunities in trading will emerge as security spending increases. With the government as a major procurement entity, new vistas will open up. The need to understand the corridors of power and its linkages will be even more important than before.

Spending on recreation will increase as the cash-rich youth try to escape the depressing reality. The movement of the rural population to urban areas and the urban to migration will keep manpower agencies busy. New markets like eastern Europe and

managers will be sucked into the whirlpool of *khattam-cha* myopia. Innovations will emerge be in terms of selling products or transporting them. Dairy farmers will start processing cheese as milk can't be taken to markets and tomato growers will contemplate diversification into sauce and puree. The firms that understand their consumer best will rule as the consumer psychograph will change rapidly and shift in perceptions continue. Any product or scheme associated with hope will do well, therefore instant noodles, beer and alcohol manufacturers need not worry.

The biggest problem for the country will be managing its image. Apart from the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the



the CIS countries will be perceived to have lesser security threats than their homeland. The uncertainty in the taxation regime will make profits unpredictable as security taxes of all kinds increase.

Crisis champions in companies will emerge and change managerial hierarchies. These go-getting well-connected individuals will drive companies to growth while the conventional

conquest of Mount Everest, Nepal is yet to be associated with good news. Parachute journalists will continue to justify their daily allowances by churning out stories and resident stringers will continue to export stories of gore and violence flavoured with rumours and speculation. The greatest challenge will be to disassociate Nepal as a brand associated with problems. ● www.arthabeed.com

Lawrence flies from SQ to Cosmic



KIRAN PANDAY

Lawrence Liew served as station manager for Singapore Airlines in Kathmandu. He has now returned as general manager of Cosmic Air. Nepali Times spoke to him about why he came back and which way Cosmic is headed.

Nepali Times: Why did you choose to return to Nepal and work with Cosmic Air?

Lawrence KC Liew: I thought I could retire from Singapore Airlines and age gracefully but then I missed the thrill of being in the airlines business. When Cosmic called, I decided it was better than sitting home and watching tv. After all I have been here before so I know what the situation is despite negative reports. I knew it was safe so I wasn't worried.

Why did Singapore Airlines pull out of Nepal?

Security was a major concern. Shortly after 11 September, there were a few arrests made in Singapore of a Muslim fundamentalist group, which is a branch of the al Qaeda. There was specific threat that they were going to hijack an SQ plane and ram it into one of the high-rise buildings of Singapore. The company felt it had to pull out of Kathmandu.

What are Cosmic's future plans?

Even as we speak now our third Fokker 100 is doing its test flights in Amsterdam. We should have the plane here by Sunday or Monday.

Are poor ground handling and small domestic terminals a problem for your jets?

Those are the limitations we face at this point. Our Fokker 100 will be due for checks and we don't have a hangar big enough to conduct it thoroughly. With permission from the Royal Nepal Airlines, we have borrowed their hangar to check one aircraft at a time. Our next project will be to build a hangar of our own. Other limitations are parking. When our fourth Fokker 100 arrives, we wonder where we're going to

park it at night.

How about runway length in Nepalganj, Bhairawa and Biratnagar?

We have tried and proven that the runway can accept our aircraft. There is no shortage of runway space otherwise we would not be operating there. Safety has always been our top priority. That's why we did a test flight to Pokhara last week. When we get permission, we will use only 60 percent of the aircraft payload.

Are you filling seats?

Tourist traffic has dipped but Indian tourists are coming back. We need serious promotional campaigns to get people to believe in the safety and relative security of Nepal. My job is to identify the potential for which tourists would want to come to Kathmandu. With blockades, more and more people have been forced to fly. It isn't just Nepalis, even tourists prefer flying to travelling by land.

Is undercutting on fares hurting?

We have advance purchases where a limited number of seats are given at discounts to people certain about their travel plans. This is not unusual, other airlines do it too. We had a buy one-get-one-free campaign on our Delhi flight and it was so popular, we extended it till the end of February.

Is crew a problem?

We have our own French and Indonesian engineers and pilots. We took a Civil Aviation official to Holland to train him in flight safety inspections of Fokker 100s.

A decade of hope, violence and uncertainty

Yubaraj Ghimire in *Samaya*, 18-24 February

समय

The Maoist insurgency is entering its 10th year. When they first started fighting corrupt politics, they offered hope even though they resorted to violence. It is easy to sell revolutionary dreams however utopian in a society with our inequities. But where has this revolution got us? How safe do the people feel from the rebels? And how much of its political character does the movement still have left? It is imperative for the Maoists to examine these questions.

The Maoists were ultimately responsible for the royal step of February First. Whether by disregarding the political parties in the second round of the peace talks or by declaring that they would talk only to the king, the Maoists have steadily weakened the political parties and the multi-party government. Political trust in any party or association ends when its strategy and principles cease to be relevant and are contradictory. Having declared that they would talk only to the king, the Maoists will lose the trust of the people if they

emerge as a political entity. The UN and human rights organisations have condemned the Maoists for abducting school children and recruiting child soldiers, so it doesn't look likely that the UN can be a mediator as the Maoists want.

The international community is watching with keen interest. They disapprove of the growing distance between the king and the parties. They say they will continue with economic and military support for Nepal only if the political parties are granted freedom under constitutional monarchy. The parties must be allowed the environment to pursue their political activity in cooperation with the king. Though the

international community by and large doesn't agree with the February First declaration, it has not changed its stance on the insurgents. For the Maoists to assume that the international community now supports them would be wrong.

But if the Maoists do not renounce violence and fight for individual freedom, human rights and people's authority or peaceful politics, they may be swept away by history. The last 10 years have made clear that politics at gunpoint doesn't work. The public support will be short-lived. Even those who had looked upon the Maoists as a possible political alternative now question their political character and solidarity. The political parties have consistently said they can work with the Maoists if they give up violence and work for multiparty democracy.

A rift within the Maoists has become apparent. In these difficult times, if the Maoists stand firm in their statement and come forward for talks with political integrity, character and solidarity, they might be forgiven for the 11,000 lives they have taken. For a nation sinking into a vortex of violence and uncertainty, that would prove to be an immense relief.



Unite

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 12-26 February

हिमाल

Maoist supremo Prachanda has proposed a united movement of all democratic forces, including parties and civil society. Such an effort on his part to attract the parties while they are facing a political crisis is no surprise. But before jumping to such an occasion, the parties and others should not forget that the Maoists believe in violence. A union between a force that believes in violence and one that doesn't is unnatural. The Nepali Congress has reminded the Maoists time and again that political unity with them is only possible if they renounce violence. The UML and other parties in mainstream politics should take the same line. All parties will be better off if they distance themselves from the policy of violence and destruction. After February First, the Maoists have stated that they will intensify their war against the state. But we have seen ordinary Nepalis suffer the most from armed conflict. This is the best opportunity for the Maoists to give up arms and work hand-in-hand with the Nepali people, political parties to build a democratic society. Any kind of revolution or political change is possible only when there is unity between the political and democratic forces. There is no doubt about this.



SAMAYA

Home work

Kantipur, 19 February

कान्तिपुर

DOTI—Dambari Sarki is so determined to continue her studies that she will do anything to earn enough money to pay her school fees and buy textbooks. Dambari, 10, works as a porter so she can only go to school 10 days in a month. Still, she manages to catch up with her class. "We have no land so the children help in whatever way they can," says her 45-year-old mother. Most dalit children in Latamandu, like Dambari, are underpaid for the hard work they do. They get less than Rs 50 a day for carrying 30-45 kg of resin. Most are malnourished and often too exhausted to pay attention to their studies. Many cannot continue with their classes because the little they earn is spent on food. There are around 60-65 dalit families in this village and not one of them has passed SLC.

Political solutions

Sundar Mani Dixit in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 20 February

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

In his royal proclamation on February First, King Gyanendra expressed his commitment to the restoration of multiparty democracy and called for the Maoists to join mainstream politics peacefully. If we are to take the royal proclamation as the road map to complete democracy and get international cooperation, the following steps would be effective:

1. Political leaders, journalists, lawyers, student leaders and human rights activists who have been arrested need to be released immediately without preconditions. Their political and other activities should not be restricted. It will not be possible to restore multiparty democracy if they are unable to work independently.
2. The government should restore most of the fundamental rights of the citizens. This will help achieve the goals of the royal proclamation and ensure that foreign aid and diplomatic support remains intact.
3. An environment should be created to allow politicians and the parties to practice politics in a clean and transparent manner. This will aid the king's commitment to restore multiparty democracy within three years. There is no such situation today and this will not be possible without initiating peace talks with the Maoists. Previous governments made a lot of noise but did nothing. The nation can't move forward without efforts at creating peace to end the conflict. All it takes is a few days outside Kathmandu to see the country's reality.

Donor threats

Editorial in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 20 February

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

For an impoverished country like Nepal, foreign aid is important for

health, education, infrastructure and poverty alleviation. Military aid to Nepal has saved a large chunk of the national treasury from being spent on arms and ammunition. But since the king took control, donor agencies have threatened to pull out. They have laid down conditions for the state to fulfil in order to receive continued support. Some of these friends of Nepal have made up their minds without understanding the reality. The situation in the country is quite different from what they suspect or from the speculative reporting of the international media. Unfortunately, the government has not been able to set the record straight.

Several ambassadors have returned to their countries for consultations. Nepal's main donors such as the US, UK, India and the EU have threatened to stop both military and other aid if the government fails to restore fundamental rights. Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey had summoned Kathmandu-based ambassadors to explain the royal proclamation and the political developments. But judging by the comments diplomats made it doesn't seem to have worked. The king said the state of emergency would not last long, that such a step was necessary to create an environment for the multiparty system to thrive in. Several leaders under house arrest and detention are being released. There are signs that the state is gradually loosening censorship on the media. After February First, some positive things have been taking place but this information doesn't seem to be getting out to the outside world.

Will this ever stop?

Jana Astha, 23 February

आस्था

OKHALDHUNGA—Rajan Dhamala, a poor farmer, does not understand why he has become the target of Maoist wrath. All he did was travel to the district headquarters to sell fruits. When he returned to his village, Katunje, the rebels had announced a penalty for him: 65 days of hard labour. Like Dhamala, all other villagers face similar punishment if they go to the district headquarters. Faced with this new edict, the villagers have suffered as they are unable to work, shop, sell or trade. Dhamala was accused of defying the new rebel rules introduced on 12 February by Risiram Dahal, Maoist leader of Kuntadebi VDC. Dhamala will have to dig bunkers for the militants for two months. Rebel leader Dahal has also been forcing the villagers to join protest rallies and shout slogans against the government. Notices saying that only medical emergencies are allowed to travel with one person accompanying the sick have been pasted all over the village. These notices threaten severe punishment to anyone disobeying. "I was stopped while returning home and they released me only after a thorough interrogation," said a student from Kathmandu who visited Katunje to attend the funeral of a relative. A group of 10 armed rebels stand guard at every village to interrogate travellers. The whole district is affected by the blockade. The security forces, meanwhile have



Placard: Democracy Day
Layman: Democracy of which era? 1950, 1990 or now?

समय *Samaya*, 24 February

QUOTES OF THE WEEK



Donors should not be involved in politics. The international community should respect Nepal's sovereignty.

Finance Minister Madhukar Shamsher Rana in *Rajdhani*, 22 February



KIRAN PANDAY

Soldiers rescue a bus passenger wounded when Maoists opened fire on a passenger bus on the Prithvi Highway at Beni Ghat on Sunday. The man was later flown to the army hospital in Chhauni by helicopter.

whole district is affected by the blockade. The security forces, meanwhile have been forcing transporters to operate services.

Posted back

Annapurna Post, 23 February

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

VDC secretaries of Baglung who had abandoned their posts are now returning to their duties on orders of the CDO. Two years ago, 88 out of 89 VDC offices were bombed and important documents destroyed. All VDC secretaries of Baglung Municipality fled after the ward office was completely destroyed. Secretaries in 46 VDCs have resumed their posts in Tanahu. The secretaries have received strict orders from CDOs to base themselves in the villages. They will be stripped of their allowances if found working from the district headquarters.

Unhealthy blockade

Rajdhani, 21 February

राजधानी

Medical supplies have not reached dozens of villages in the eastern part of the country due to the Maoist blockade. The regional medical store of Biratnagar reported large stocks of medicines donated by the German development bank, KfW rotting in stores. "We haven't been able to transport the medicines anywhere," said Dhirananda Jha, chief of the medical store at Biratnagar. The medicines are packed and ready for distribution

to eight eastern hill districts and three districts in the mountains where essential drugs are in short supply. Only some districts in the tarai such as Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Saptari and Siraha have received medical supplies. Every year, KfW has been helping with medical supplies worth nearly Rs 150,000 to primary health centres, health posts and sub-health posts of various districts in the tarai, hills and mountains.

"We want party reunification"

Interview with Arjun Narsingh KC, NC spokesman
Deshantar, 20 February

देशान्तर संवादकर्ता

How has the Nepali Congress reacted to the royal proclamation of February First?

Before you ask me questions, tell me if you can or can't publish my answers. If you can, this is the opinion of the Nepali Congress: we do not agree with the royal step.

You have announced a movement.

Our movement will be a powerful, non-violent satyagraha. We have asked all those who want democracy to come to the streets and all democratic forces to unite and work for this movement.

Is the NC ready to cooperate with the Maoists?

Until they renounce violence and give up arms, we can't work with them.

How are you trying to involve the NC-D?

We don't want just a working solidarity, we want party unification. The Congress must work as one. All democratic forces need to join hands, putting aside their differences. Only then can we solve the national crisis.

Will the people join you on the streets?

The Nepali people want democracy. If they don't come to the streets today, they will come tomorrow. They will not compromise on their rights to constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy.



KIRAN PANDAY



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Brick by brick by brick

These bricks build more than just a house, they cement a heritage

AARTI BASNYAT



The elaborate use of dachi-appas at the Dwarika's Hotel

As Kathmandu's concrete jungle spreads, some of its inhabitants are going back to their roots and using building materials that reflect their cultural heritage. Examples of this terra cotta renaissance can be seen in various aspects of life but none as visibly as in the bricks used to build houses.

Almost two decades ago, Tirtha Lal Maharjan decided to produce traditional *dachi-appa* bricks (literally: bricks beaten into size). It was a big gamble and in those days, it felt like Maharjan was decades ahead of his time. But Maharjan was patient and the market steadily picked up.

Dachi-appas are an essential part of Nepal's heritage and Maharjan has transformed them into a more ornamental style with carvings and figures that were found only on stone and wood. Initially, the market for these bricks was limited and Maharjan would have suffered major loss if it hadn't been for Dwarika Das Shrestha, who bought all his unsold bricks to build the award-winning heritage hotel, Dwarika, in Battisputali.

Dwarika's wife, Ambika Shrestha supported his move and gave Maharjan the exposure and reputation he needed to

get more orders and run a viable business. Dachi-appas are mostly used for decorative purposes and Maharjan has almost 400 different designs and styles to choose from. He also produces bricks according to client specifications and has special designers such as Narayan Bahadur Maharjan and Rabi Bahadur Jonchhe.

Each brick has its specific use such as *nagol* or *kasima* for base and the *jashi* for the middle. The *jashi* uses the nag belt or flower patterns, which also strengthens the house against earthquakes. The borders of doors and windows have layers of animals, birds or eyebrow patterns.

Using these bricks as ornaments means understanding the style of the house. As architect Sarosh Pradhan says, "It is important to feel the spirit of the place and know the purpose of the building, then balance it with the right aesthetics."

These designs are more than just decorative. According to Nepali mythology, when a house is completed, a special puja with tantric rituals are held to give the inanimate designs a spirit. It is believed that in times of need, these animals will come to life and protect the house and its inhabitants.

The son of a farmer, Tirtha

The welcome gate to Patan built with dachi-appas.





Jashi border used at Kantipur Temple House.

Lal Maharjan made bricks in a factory. His family faced many hardships before his mentor Ramesh J Thapa helped him get a job at the national metal crafts museum in the Lalitpur. Here he became a mukhiya and realised the potential need for traditional ornamental bricks. He noticed that foreign guests who visited heritage sites inspected old architecture.

Renovation works were being done in a haphazard manner without proper material. Maharjan came to the conclusion that opening a traditional brick factory would not only be a commercial enterprise, it would also help protect Nepali culture and heritage.

Dachhi-appas was one way of doing this and as architect

Pradhan says, "With the advancement of new materials, technology and environmental concerns, we must explore new solutions in architecture and design."

Maharjan has opened the first brick showroom in Nepal at Baneshwor. He has launched a trend among urban dwellers of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan making traditional glamorous. This means when an old house is torn down these days, it is not replaced by a soulless concrete and glass box but a modern building with a traditional brick façade that is in harmony with its surroundings.

Luckily, Kathmandu is full of copycats and this return to traditional architecture is spreading along the Valley's gallis and bahals. ●

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ANTOINE DANCHIN

Being alive, we tend to think life is easy to grasp. In the accepted classification of sciences, mathematics is thought to be the queen and the most difficult to grasp, followed by physics, chemistry and finally, biology. But this scientific hierarchy is false: we now know

that biology contains more mathematics than imagined.

When molecules entered the scientific understanding of life with the discovery of DNA, biology climbed one step up the scale to chemistry. Then, with recognition of the abstract schemes dictating how genes are expressed, biology climbed even closer to mathematics. Today's

The software of life

There is more of maths in life than you imagined

buzzword in the study of life is 'systems' biology. For a long time, those who studied the nature of life and heredity were divided into two camps: epigeneticists, who emphasised environmental influences on living organisms and preformists, who stressed the similarities between parents and progeny. The epigeneticist view was clearly wrong, because something stable had to be transmitted across generations. But the preformist view that the entity transmitted across generations was the whole organism was contradicted by the impossibility of segmenting objects infinitely.

What had to be transmitted was not the final organism but the recipe to make it. Consider the old metaphysical puzzle: is a wooden boat whose planks are gradually replaced as they decay the same boat after all the planks have been changed? 'Systems' biology is biology that recognises that what remains the same is the design of the boat—that which determines the relationships

between the planks.

This thought paved the way for the concept of a 'genetic program', akin to a computer program—a metaphor that became almost self-evident when the structure of DNA was discovered because DNA could be visualised as a linear string of symbols, which is exactly what computers read as a program. Like a computer program, DNA does not preserve the final state of what it codes for, rather it embeds in a symbolic but concrete way (it is a real 'text') the relationships between all the objects and agents that it specifies and controls.

When it became possible to manipulate DNA in vitro, the metaphor of a 'genetic program' appeared even more precise: scientists could construct experiments that corresponded to the reprogramming of cells merely by working on symbols in silicon.

The metaphor comes from the famous mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing, who, along with John von Neumann and other theoreticians, uncovered the link between the mathematics of whole numbers and logic. Turing proposed that all computations and logical

operations could be performed by a simple machine, which he called the Universal Turing Machine, reading and modifying a linear sequence of symbols. This required only the physical separation of the symbols (visualised as a tape) handled by the machine and the machine itself.

Genetic engineering rests on the manipulation of DNA molecules in order to reprogram foreign cells. As a result, many bacteria today produce human proteins. But this represents only a small part of the genetic program. Transfer of genes between organisms is widespread. Nuclear cloning, illustrated by the sheep Dolly, has made the Universal Turing Machine a highly revealing, if not all explaining, model of the cell.

The outcome of some computer programs is at once entirely deterministic, innovative and unpredictable. Life is inherently creative. However, the metaphor is limited by a simple fact: computers do not make computers. The challenge for the new biology is to understand how they would. ● *Project Syndicate*

Antoine Danchin is Professor and Director of Genetics of Bacterial Genomes at the Institut Pasteur in Paris.

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श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग

What Nepal should do

A Sri Lankan terrorism expert dispenses advice on how to handle Nepal's insurgency



Maoists opened fire on this convoy of trucks at Charaudi on the Prithvi Highway on Sunday, one Indian driver and two Nepalis were wounded.

KIRAN PANDAY

When King Gyanendra suspended Nepal's democracy, he incurred the wrath of the United Nations, India and several other countries. But most democracies, from the

NEPAL IN THE FOREIGN PRESS

Rohan Gunaratna



Philippines to Colombia, have failed to quell domestic rebellions democratically.

With much of Nepal now controlled or dominated by

Maoists insurgents, strong and centralised leadership is a stark necessity, although King Gyanendra will need to somehow forge a national consensus to contain and ultimately end the insurgency.

While the situation appears grim, there is still hope. First, there is no foreign country backing the insurgents. New Delhi, for example, is worried that the insurgency will embolden Indian revolutionaries in the states of Bihar, Madhya

Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, whenever the insurgents in Nepal are referred to as Maoists, Beijing is offended.

Second, the international community is willing to help. Because of human rights violations by Nepal, US and Europe were reluctant to provide assistance. The Maoists are on Washington's list of designated terrorist groups and both the US and European governments are giving assistance in the form of military training and weaponry,

which I expect will continue.

Maoists worldwide, including those of Nepal, believe that nothing can be changed without the use of guns. Past peace talks have been failures: on each occasion, the insurgents have infiltrated government-controlled areas and established their presence there even as they were negotiating. The government should remain open to dialogue but incessantly carry out counterinsurgency operations till the enemy is substantially

degraded. Here are key measures needed to overcome the Maoist threat:

- The government must decapitate the rebel leadership, a task that will require investment in high-quality intelligence with attractive rewards for information leading to the arrest or death of insurgents and detection of camps, safe house and weaponry. The police and army should also be rewarded with bonuses and promotions for hunting down the Maoists. The military should recruit members of families that have suffered from the insurgency.
- The government must win citizens' trust by launching a sustained publicity campaign that exposes the brutality of the insurgents. No insurgency has succeeded without media and public support.
- The king must offer an amnesty to insurgents who renounce the rebellion.
- The security forces must move aggressively to regain control over towns and villages near Kathmandu, a key step towards reclaiming control of the country.
- Most crucial, the government must promise its suffering people what the insurgents are unwilling or unable to offer: jobs and security. Good governance, with an emphasis on efficiency and combating corruption, is required to secure public support and neutralise the Maoists' appeal. If the king can unite his country in the fight against the insurgency, it is not too late for Nepal yet. ●

Rohan Gunaratna is head of the International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research at the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies in Singapore. This piece first appeared in Time magazine.

Kathmandu Valley, by now largely urbanised, lives in detachment from the rest of the country. Since the royal takeover of February First, the countryside has seen blockades by the Maoists but the capital pretends hard not to notice.

Whole regions have been locked up, transportation is a memory, supplies have dried up, industries are closed, vegetables and milk can't make it to market. People walk like in the old days, in some places trek 100 km from the Indian border to

SOUTHASIA BEAT

Kanak Mani Dixit



reach home. Elsewhere, people are hunkered down without news. Either the press and FM radio stations are shuttered or the transportation is not there to bring the papers.

But the word so far in Kathmandu Valley's supermarket checkouts and cafes is that things are fine, the buses are running. Only inside the Ring Road, but that is all that matters. When perishables disappear and gas stations and LPG depots run dry, the fickle middle class will decide things have indeed got serious. But that will not be because of any sensitivity for the national population.

This disconnect of the capital Valley from the rest of Nepal has been part of a process that is about three decades old but now the separation seems complete. There used to be a time when other than local Kathmandu residents, everyone else laid claim to origins from one district or another. The standard greetings used to be to ask the acquaintance's point of origin, "Tapainko tham kahan?" The question has evaporated together with Kathmandu's

links to the hinterland.

Walk up any of the hills that encircle this Valley in the early morning, and you can look out across the expanse of the clear blue midhills and the Himalayan snows. The Valley below is socked in and invisible under a lethal haze, its million plus inhabitants breathing a brew of diesel fumes, brick kiln and cremation pyre smoke. The pollution comes as part of Kathmandu's unplanned, dangerous expansion but the rest of the country out there is as bright and clear as it is innocent and exploited.

Kathmandu's voracious appetite wants everything for itself to the exclusion of the districts that house 23 million Nepalis. The services are all concentrated here and now the Valley suddenly wants a second 'outer ring road'. The Valley is mandated a two-day weekend while the rest of the country has just Saturday off. Kathmandu also wants to be a sanctuary by itself, and so more than half of the country's security forces are concentrated here.

This all-pervading Kathmandu-centricism has played a role in distorting the national political process and even derailing democratic evolution. The Valley's middle and upper classes have for years denigrated the political parties as well as the parliamentary practice that they embody. Only now is it becoming clear why the political parties were detested to such a degree, far out of proportion to the sins they did commit. For the first time in 250 years, political power was being distributed outside the Valley and this proved unacceptable to Kathmandu Valley's designated classes.

Capital egocentricism is seen around

An aloof Valley

Capital egocentricism is seen around the region, but Kathmandu takes the cake



RUPA JOSHI

Southasia, in Dhaka, New Delhi and Islamabad. But Kathmandu stands out because Nepal remains a one-city country. The Valley has the power and it will take the first bite out of the public exchequer and donor largesse. There was a hope that the rampant and unplanned urban expansion would at least be controlled naturally by a lack of water supply. But trust Kathmandu's planners and politicians to propose a \$ 120 million project to bring the most expensive water ever to feed the Valley's future thirst and expansion.

And now, when the rest of the country is socked in and brutalised by Maoist insurgents, the Valley's comfortable classes continue with their ability to disfigure priorities and derail political evolution. We still think the country is doing all right by February First because for us the country is the Valley.

As and when a new Nepal does evolve that is democratic, inclusive and empathetic, its touchstone will be whether it serves all Nepalis or coddles the population of this unreflective, disdainful place. ●

Rotarians celebrate their centenary with a rally from Patan Darbar Square to Kathmandu Darbar Square on Wednesday.



KUNDA DIXIT

Rotary comes a full circle

As Rotarians around the world celebrate 100 years this week, Nepali clubs push for their own district

AARTI BASNYAT

It has always felt like a cross between a high-school Student Council and a Boy Scouts for adults. With its goody-goody 'Service over Self' motto and gear-wheel logo, the Rotary Club has been described as a worldwide club of Reader's Digest

subscribers.

But ever since it was established on 23 February 1905 in Chicago by the young idealistic lawyer, Paul P Harris, Rotary Clubs have spread across the world with a message of friendship, understanding and cooperation. The network is operated along the same

principles as a multinational franchise: a local Rotary Club is registered as a non-profit, activities planned and members swear adherence to four principles of business ethics.

If it was set up today, Rotary Clubs would be called a chain of business groups that believe in corporate social

responsibility. It is only in hindsight that it all appears a bit quaint: the table thumping (clapping is not allowed), the national anthem singing and strict attendance monitoring.

As the Rotary network expanded into other continents, its mission expanded beyond serving professional and social interests of club members. Members began pooling resources and contributing to serving communities in need.

The Rotary has strict rules that its member clubs must follow: dues must be paid on time, each club must have a minimum of 20 members of which not more than three belong to the same profession and attendance is required in meetings. The dedication of Rotarians is applied through its 'Four-way Test': Is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

In Nepal, the first Rotary Club was established in 1959 under Rotary's Calcutta District, which is the oldest club in mainland Asia. Back then, it was considered a club for rich old men and therefore inaccessible. Only since 1998 did these myths break down. Now, Rotary has grown to 66 clubs in Nepal with 34 of them within Kathmandu Valley.

The 66 clubs in Nepal are still under Calcutta and there is now a move for the Nepali clubs to declare independence from India and have their own district. Rotarian Rajesh Thapa of Mt Everest Rotary Club tells us: "We are very close to becoming a district of our own. Hopefully, by next Rotary year we will be an autonomous unit."

Once Nepal has established its own district, Nepali Rotaries can work towards giving more to society by working under one district governor to approve activities. It will be in direct contact with Rotary International and be able to apply for grants and funds directly instead of sharing funds allocated to the Rotaries in India. This will provide Nepali Rotarians with more leadership opportunities,

exposure and the chance to represent Kathmandu at global platforms, says Thapa.

Rotary clubs in Nepal work towards giving as much to society as possible. They have launched the Polio Plus program with the larger scheme of Rotary International's plan to eradicate polio by 2005. Last September, clubs got together for a walkathon and raised Rs 2,500,000 for cancer patients. One of Rotary's biggest contributions was when five clubs came together to fund Rs 30 million worth of equipment for Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital. Now, the hospital has a Cobalt 60 radiotherapy machine. It is mandatory for every club to adopt a village in Nepal and work towards its development, especially the health care of its inhabitants.

The Rotary spirit is spreading in Nepal but being a club is not easy. Diwarkar Rajkamikar of Bagmati Rotary Club says, "Rotary International demands complete transparency of funds and the working of member clubs. This requires an immense amount of paperwork from each club, which is one of our biggest weaknesses. We are constantly behind on paperwork. We won't be given any grants till the paperwork is cleared."

There is still a shortage of women members. Bagmati Rotary Club has the highest number of women members with only eight. Is Rotary still a rich man's club, then? "Yes and no," says Rajkamikar, "Not everyone can afford the Rs 10,000 membership fee and other financial obligations. The fact that membership is only through invitation makes it even more exclusive. But it is open to everyone who wants to help society."

Thapa, too, thinks Rotary has overcome its elite image: "After all, Rs 5,000 for six months isn't that much and people spend so much more on temples and other things. This is all for a humanitarian cause."

This week, Rotary clubs marked their centenary with a rally from Patan Darbar Square to Kathmandu Darbar Square, a meeting at the Rotary hall in Thapathali and a celebration lunch at Satdobato Club with music and food for Rotarians. ●



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"Lata ko desh ma gaando tanderi." (In a land of fools, even a man with a bad goatee can be a hero.) - as translated by UNACO, the United Nation's Assn. of Cartoonists

THE ADVENTURES OF HEROJIG
By JIGME GATON

To solve all our problems, our HEROJIG stumbles upon an answer...
Why not invite the world's leading comic consultants to lend a hand?

HOMER SIMPSON on Energy issues
BIG BEN for Transportation advice
BLONDIE on how to improve the Media
ASTERIX on Military matters
DONALD DUCK to help with Indo-Relations

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Robin Williams (American Comic)

Next change: More comic characters are invited to help, do you have a favorite? - write Herojig - care of this paper.

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

#57 2061 by Jigme Gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Ceremony and Stillness** Photographs by Frances Klatzel at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited. Until 5 March. 4411122
- ❖ **Re-Collection** Paintings by Sarita Dongol at Buddha Gallery, Thamel. Till 4 March. 4441689
- ❖ **Odds and Ends** Etchings by Beverley Thompson at Park Gallery, Lajimpat. Until 4 March. 4419353
- ❖ **Shiba Ratri** on 8 March.
- ❖ **Nature and wildlife** Amateur photography exhibition at WCN office, Sanepa. Until 28 February. 5524202, www.wcn.org.np
- ❖ **Sama Theatre Festival** at Gurukul, Maitidebi, 4.30 PM onwards. Till 13 March. 4466956
- ❖ **Kathmandu & Kali Gandaki** Exhibition of photographs by Anagarika Sugata at GAA, Thamel, till 18 March. Proceeds go to the Chaira Gumba Restoration Fund. 4414785, gaa@gaa.org.np
- ❖ **Magic Pencil** Artworks by Britain's best children's illustrators at the British Council, Lainchor. Until 6 May. 4410798



EVENTS

- ❖ **End of the Month Quiz** What do you know about Nepal? Team entry Rs 300, 7PM on 25 February at Lajimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Slide Presentation** 30-year retrospective of Kevin Bubrski's photography on 2 March, 6.30 PM at Indigo Gallery. 4413580
- ❖ **Art workshop** for kids at Buddha Gallery. 4441689
- ❖ **Rugby Training** Every Saturday for both experienced and beginners. Contact Gopal Chhetri at 4435939, citygymktm@hotmail.com
- ❖ **Kathmandu Chorale Rehearsals**, 7.10 PM at The British School, Jhamsikhel. 5534737
- ❖ **Sanibaar Mela** Every Saturday at the Dharahara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.
- ❖ **The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley** Tuesdays at Hotel Vajra. 4271545

MUSIC

- ❖ **Indian BBQ Night** with Abhaya and the Steam Injuns at Dwarika's Hotel on 25 February. Tickets Rs 799, 4479488
- ❖ **Live Music** at Juneli Bar, Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **Good Time Blues Band** at Rum Doodle every Friday, 7PM onwards. 4701208, 4701107, rum_doodle@gohimalaya.com
- ❖ **Classical music**, 7PM onwards, every Friday at Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Jatra** Saturday nights with Looza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4256622
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** with Pooja Gurung and The Cloud Walkers every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday at Rox Bar. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat on Wednesday and Saturday, 7.45 PM.

FOOD

- ❖ **Arniko Special Lunch** at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Barbecue Dinner** Every Friday at the Summit Hotel. 5521810
- ❖ **Thai Food** at Rox, Hyatt on Fridays and Saturdays, 12.30 AM-3PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Seasons Special Luncheon** at Hotel Shangri-La for Rs 450. 4412999
- ❖ **Delicacies** Pastas and snacks at Roadhouse Café, Jawalakhel. 5521755
- ❖ **Sizzling Weekend Treat** at Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Genuine Thai** cuisine at Royal Lotus, Bakhundole. 5521231
- ❖ **Farm House Café** Delicious meals at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine under the giant Cinnamon tree at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vaijayantha, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Dwarika's Thali** Lunch at the Heritage courtyard. 4479488
- ❖ **The Tharu Kitchen** at Jungle Base Camp. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge** Celebrate spring. 4361500
- ❖ **Shivapuri Heights Cottage** on the edge of the Shivapuri National Park, don't miss the best time to be in Shivapuri. steve@escape2nepal.com
- ❖ **Chiso Chiso Hawama** Package for Rs 1,700 at Club Himalaya. 4411706
- ❖ **Jungle Base Camp Lodge**, Bardia, special package and prices. junglebasecamp@yahoo.com
- ❖ **Malaysia Dream Holidays** Packages starting from Rs 45,500 per person. 4247215 extn 013-14, malaysiaholidays_marco@polo.com.np
- ❖ **Getaway package** Night's stay at Godavari Village Resort, includes dinner and breakfast. 5560675
- ❖ **AAA Organic Farm and Guesthouse** Rs 950 with three meals. 6631734
- ❖ **Temple Tiger** One night package \$250. 4263480
- ❖ **Machan Wildlife Jungle Resort** special packages available. 4225001
- ❖ **Weekend Special** at Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha. 4375280
- ❖ **Jomsom Mountain Resort** Two nights-three days at Rs 5,999 for Nepalis, \$199 for expats including airfare and food. 4496110, salesjom@mail.com.np

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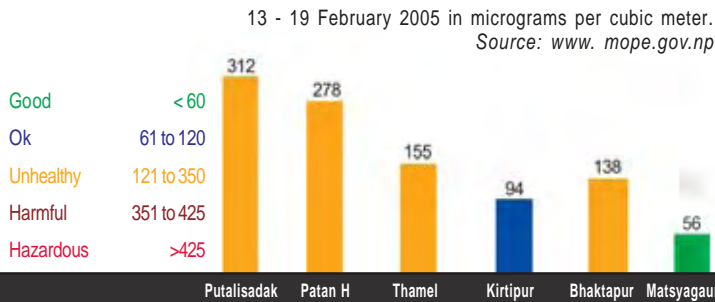
Michelle McNally (Rani Mukherjee) is special in more ways than one. She cannot see, hear or speak. She inhabits a world of infinite black, of a seamless, endless void where nothing reaches her and she reaches nothing. On the sheer will of her ferocious rage against destiny, Michelle struggles to stay afloat in the impenetrable whirlpool her life has become. Into this devastating isolation enters a battle weary teacher, Debraj Sahai (Amitabh Bachchan). With a single-minded obsession, Debraj takes up the challenge to lead this wild, uncontrollable child into the light of knowledge. Thus begins a journey of two headstrong individuals.

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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

Kathmandu's air pollution remained high last week with the monitoring stations along busy roads such as Putali Sadak and Patan Hospital recording PM10 concentrations that were more than twice the national standards. Residential areas in Bhaktapur and Thamel also had PM10 concentrations at harmful levels.



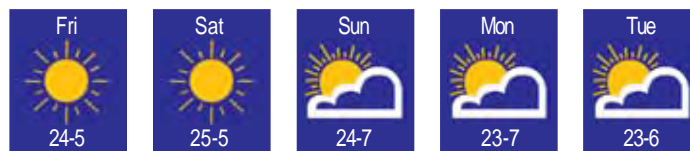
NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



As we predicted, the trend of above normal rainfall continued into the third consecutive month in January. A persistently strong westerly jet is feeding moisture to make our winter rather wet—and it's not just us Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kashmir have had unprecedented blizzards. It has also affected western and central Nepal, bringing heavy snow. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning is dominated by Antarctica's huge icy mass but also indicates bright sunshine in store for the weekend. Beyond the weekend, days will be partly cloudy with windy afternoons. Expect warmer days although the mornings will still be chilly and misty in the Valley with a daily temperature variation of 20 celsius.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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Walkathon Postponed

We wish to inform that the walkathon scheduled to be organised on **Feb 17, 2005** has been postponed for an indefinite period. We wish to thank all those friends, supporters and well-wishers for their goodwill gestures.

Radio Sagarmatha/Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ) Family



KIRAN PANDAY

PHAGUN SEVEN: King Gyanendra and Queen Komal gracing a program at Tundikhel to celebrate 55th Democracy Day, which was also the queen's 55th birthday.



KIRAN PANDAY

MASKING TIME: Children from the French School of Kathmandu participate in a carnival parade at Basantapur on Tuesday wearing masks they designed themselves.



KIRAN PANDAY

WONDER WOMEN: Winners of the VOW Top Ten College Women Award at the Radisson Hotel on Friday.



KIRAN PANDAY

HERE THEY COME: Abhya and the Steam Injuns at their debut album release at Rox Bar on Friday.



KIRAN PANDAY

MAGIC PENCIL: Visitors flip through books at an exhibition of artwork by Britain's best children's illustrators at the British Council in Lajimpat on Tuesday.

A classless place

Ever since Boris Lissanevitch settled down in Kathmandu in the 1950s, there has been a long tradition of expatriates who have made Nepal their home to launch restaurants.

Takeshi Okewara is just the latest. The only difference is that Takeshi doesn't consider himself an expat, he is a Nepali through and through. His parents came here over 30 years ago and decided to stay, Takeshi was born in Nepal and considers this his homeland. He went off to the University of Vermont in the United States and graduated in architecture but there was something pulling him back to Kathmandu.

When he started working as an architect, he realised that it wasn't quite what he wanted to do. "I realised that being an architect I would be hobnobbing with the rich, I wanted to do something that would bring me in

contact with the ordinary people," says Takeshi in remarkably colloquial Nepali.

Ever since Aka Restaurant opened up at the Sanchaya Kosh Building in Pulchok last year, it was an immediate hit. The prices are just right, it is spacious and clean, the atmosphere is casual and relaxed. (We should know, we all eat there.) Office workers from the nearby UN building, NGO-wallas, diplomats and journalists all hang out at Aka like us.

This is one restaurant that you could say doesn't have class and it wouldn't be an insult. "I want to turn this into a classless public place where everyone is welcome," says 32-year-old Takeshi. The experience gained working in Japanese and Italian restaurants in the United States has stood him in good stead.

Aka is not a Japanese restaurant, Takeshi hastens to point out, it is global cuisine with

American-style sandwiches, Nepali momos and Japanese full courses. Takeshi makes a modest income from the restaurant that allows him to live frugally in a country he has come to regard as home. "I feel very comfortable in Nepal, it is quite similar to Japan because it's easy to make friends," he explains. ●

Naresh Newar



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