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p 8-9



Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 174

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



Total votes: 1072

Weekly Internet Poll # 175. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should mobile phone services now be restored?

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KUNDA DIXIT

Nepal's donors who have taken a strong line against King Gyanendra's February First move will meet soon to decide on future aid to Nepal.

Despite the sharp rhetoric, they appear torn between using the aid leverage to push the king to roll back February First while maintaining humanitarian and development assistance to Nepal's poorest and the army's counter-insurgency capability.

The government is putting on a brave face. First deputy chairman of the council of ministers, Tulsi Giri, told us: "If they don't understand, we're not going to go down on our hands and knees to grovel."

King Gyanendra hasn't yet met key ambassadors who returned after consultations in their capitals last week. But he did summon editors on 25 February to signal donors they should choose between "terrorism and democracy". The king added: "We need our friends to help us in word and deed, if fighting terrorism is not their agenda, they have to tell us what is."

British ambassador Keith Bloomfield flew back to Brussels to attend a high-level European Union meeting on Thursday that is charting a common line on the crisis. Nepal's main donors are meeting again in London on 15 March to harmonise their positions. Nepal's human rights record will also come under international spotlight later this month at the UN in Geneva.

China, Pakistan, Russia and other Asian governments have said it is an internal matter, but Nepal's main donors say the king's move will make it more difficult to resolve the insurgency. The question is what to do about it. Britain signaled its displeasure by suspending military aid but army sources pooh-poohed it saying hardware in the pipeline was not substantial.

Bilateral donors want to link future aid to release of political detainees, lifting the emergency and restoration of

Lifeblood

civil liberties. But they add taking hasty decisions may hurt those in need.

"There are lots of poor and excluded people...and nobody wants to put them under greater pressure or reduce the impact on poverty," Robert J Smith of the British aid group, DFID told us.

Other donors have suspended some projects and say they will channel money through civil society.

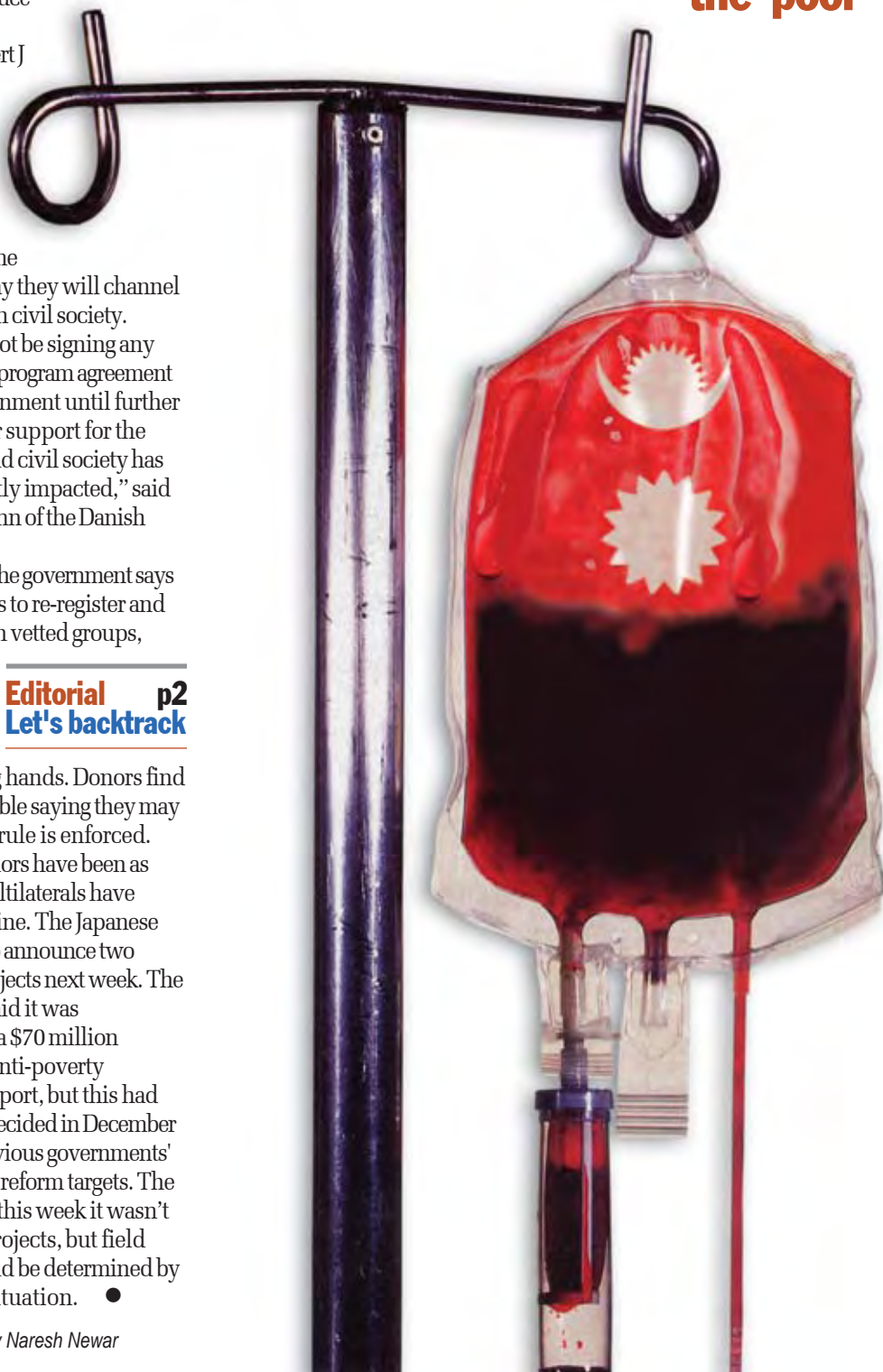

"We will not be signing any new project or program agreement with the government until further notice, but our support for the work NGOs and civil society has not been directly impacted," said Martin Hermann of the Danish Embassy.

However, the government says it wants INGOs to re-register and work only with vetted groups, saying funds need to be monitored so it doesn't get into the wrong hands. Donors find this unacceptable saying they may pull out if the rule is enforced.

Not all donors have been as tough, and multilaterals have taken a softer line. The Japanese are expected to announce two agriculture projects next week. The World Bank said it was "postponing" a \$70 million tranche of its anti-poverty budgetary support, but this had already been decided in December because of previous governments' failure to meet reform targets. The ADB clarified this week it wasn't stopping its projects, but field activities would be determined by the security situation. ●

Reporting also by Naresh Newar

Donors want to use the aid transfusion to push rollback on curbs, but are wary of hurting the poor

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BUMPER-TO-BUMPER: The monstrous traffic jam on the Mugling-Narayanghat highway on Saturday after a three-week rebel blockade was lifted.



SUN AND MOON: Pancha Kanyas take part in a peace rally in Kathmandu on Wednesday organised by the Nagarik Mul Samaroha 2061.



THE WORLD'S A STAGE: *Jat Sodhnu Jogi Ko* a play directed by Anup Baral performed at the Sama Theatre, Gurukul on Sunday.



DUET DUELS: A dohari competition at Bhrikuti Mandap organised by the Nepal Lok Dohari Byabasahi Sangh on Monday.



NOT ACCIDENTAL TOURISTS: PATA Chairman Ram Kohli, CEO Peter De Jong and General Manager of Soaltee Crown Plaza, Rajiv Malla, making rounds of the hotel during De Jong's official visit to Kathmandu this week.

Happily ever after

CHIANG MAI—Fifty-five newly-married couples from all over the world came together in a northern Thai town this week to tie the knot or renew their vows in mass nuptials.

Our own Vivek and Ayushma (circled, below) were also there, riding elephants, dressing up in traditional Thai wedding gowns and re-marrying in the traditional Lanna style. "It was everything we expected and more," gushed an ecstatic Ayushma, 25, as she was whisked from one venue to another on hubby Vivek's arms.

Vivek is the sales manager of Yeti Travels looking after Royal Orchid Holidays, so it was fitting that Thai International should invite him for this legendary Chiang Mai Wedding extravaganza. "Thai called and asked if we

wanted to be one of the 55 couples. We had just got married so we jumped at the chance," says Vivek. There were 55 couples because this year is also the 55th wedding anniversary of Thailand's king and queen.

The wedding was elaborate: it spanned three days starting with traditional dancing on the tarmac as they stepped off the plane in Chiang Mai. There were ceremonial fireworks, elephant rides, special silk costumes and sight-seeing.

Ayushma is an intern at ICIMOD and asked what the most special thing about the wedding was, she thinks for a moment and replies: "It was all so grand. I guess the fireworks display on the last night was the most overwhelming."

Aarti Basnyat



AARTI BASNYAT





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Could this be the end of Laloodom?

Uniting all sections of people safeguards democratic freedoms

J SRI RAMAN

Technically, of course, Laloo Prasad Yadav has not yet lost. He is still trying to form a government in Bihar with wife Rabri Devi as the chief minister.

There is little doubt, however, that the voters' verdict in the recent elections to the state assembly has gone against the leader who held unchallenged sway for the past 15 years. What needs to be debated is the main cause of this political metamorphosis in a region that has riveted media attention ever since his advent upon the scene.

A fake and futile debate has followed the verdict. Some, in effect, say Laloo Prasad has been defeated but not disgraced. Others argue that he has been disgraced but not defeated. It is a defective debate on two counts. It makes personality politics appear the main point at issue and it interprets the election outcome in immediate terms alone.

Laloo Prasad's RJD won only 74 seats in a house of 243. This is bad enough for a party that hoped to return to power on its own. What makes the result worse for is the poor showing of its only significant ally, the Congress that ended with a princely tally of nine. It is none the worse for the 29 seats bagged by the LJP of Dalit

leader Ram Bilas Paswan, who makes no common cause with the RJD. And it is all the worse for the performance of the pre-poll alliance of the far-right BJP and the JDU, which has won a surprising 93 seats.

The elections have produced a hung assembly. In vain does Laloo ask his supporters not to lose heart. The RJD may have ended up the single largest party but there is no way the fact of the party's failure to retain its earlier electoral support, spelling an easy majority, can be wished away. The fact is of more far-reaching significance than many a media analysis of the results may suggest.

Laloo is a larger-than-state personality. The decline of his political strength, therefore, has a larger-than-state significance.

Nothing reveals this better than the glee in the BJP-led camp, even if the party itself may seem to have slender chance of capturing power in Bihar. Laloo has been a thorn in the BJP- and parivar-side for over a decade. The anti-fascist capacity of this constituency was inherently limited as demonstrated by the election results in popular Indian political parlance of

'Mandal' against 'kamandal'. Mandal is the platform of social justice to be achieved through caste-based reservations in employment and education. Kamandal is the symbol for the communal-fascist camp.

Mandal proved an inadequate counter to kamandal for various reasons. Though it consolidates the beneficiary castes, the Mandal process inevitably leads to cracks in the constituency. The Bihar results lend

credence to the belief that such cracks have developed in the Laloo constituency as well. Fascism can be fought only by uniting all sections of the people against it as a threat to all democratic freedoms. This is the broader lesson of the Bihar results. ●

The writer is a journalist and peace activist based in Chennai.



RANJAN RAHI

Line of passport control

Now the buses are running, why not make visas easier for Indians and Pakistanis?

"Pakistanis, this way! Make a line here!" A straggling line duly forms at Mumbai's airport counter where Pakistanis entering India must register themselves. With passports, disembarkation forms and duplicate copies of the registry form to be stamped here, the travellers resign themselves to a long wait.

The end of the line is formed by a large, high-spirited group of musicians and their guitars: Fuzon and the Mekaal Hasan Band headed for Kolkata to play at a fund-raising concert for tsunami victims. They are

**PERSONAL
POLITICAL**

Beena Sarwar



accompanied by their managers, law student Erum Sattar and actress Sania Saeed, possibly the first female managers of any music band in South Asia.

Several people recognise Sania, including a Bangalore-bound gent. There is camaraderie and good humour, a bond shared by being in this tedious, unnecessary line. "At least this time they're being polite," says Nausheen Wasi, a young lecturer from Karachi University, headed to Goa for a South Asian conference on democratisation, peace and regional cooperation.

Fuzon's restless lanky lead guitarist Shallum, wandering up and down the line, stops to ask if he could be fitted in a bag and taken to Goa. This is his second time in India. Last June, Fuzon participated in an event called

'Sarhadon ki Jugalbandi' at Pragati Maidan in Delhi, where they jammed with Indian Ocean. It was a memorable concert, also featuring Kailash Khair and Rahat Fateh Ali Khan.

The Mekaal Hasan Band (MHB) made its debut in India more recently, at a show called 'Sufi on the Rocks', organised by Etc, a TV network partially owned by Zee. Apparently, it was Aakar Patel, the influential Editor of *Mid-Day* who prevailed upon Etc to launch the MHB in India, after having heard them rehearsing at their studio in Lahore, where he had come for a lecture at Kinnaird College. At their concert before the Mumbai press fraternity on 7 January, MHB played to what was by all accounts an amazing reception. At one point, as the band members stood aside during a break, Kailash Khair approached them and said how much he was enjoying the music.

"He asked if he could join us, and we said sure, so after the break, he played with us. It was great," says Mekaal. The event was hugely hyped in Mumbai, complete with billboards at Juhu Beach, though one didn't hear too much about it in Pakistan—another indication of the Great Divide. A personal email from a senior journalist at the time mentioned how popular the event had been and how much people had enjoyed it.

Pakistani bands playing in India invariably get a great reception and particularly

appreciate the music-knowledgeable audiences they find there. Obviously, there are spoilsports everywhere. They are encouraged in their cussedness by the needless restrictions that the Indian and Pakistani governments place on each other's citizens, whom they treat quite differently from visitors of other countries. At this point, officially there are few ways to visit each other's countries. The governments sometimes allow visiting Indian and Pakistani musicians and artistes to perform on the other side and sometimes not.

Last May, the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi denied the Indian dancer Sharmista Mukherjee a visa at the last minute, even though she had obtained the necessary clearance from the Interior Ministry. But when embassy officials in Delhi learnt that she planned to participate in a classical dance performance, they said she needed special permission. The event in Karachi and Lahore, organised by Sheema Kermani, had to take place without her.

Breakthroughs like the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus service are important. But what's needed to really normalise relations is to make cross-border visits easier. There is no reason why Pakistanis should have to stand in special lines to register their arrival at the Indian port of entry or why Indians should report their arrival and departure to the Pakistani police (except the fortunate few

MHB's Mekaal Hasan performing at a concert in India in January.



who are granted exemptions based on connections) and vice-versa. There is no reason why visas should be valid only for cities rather than the country, and/or the stipulated points of entry and departure shouldn't be changed if the traveller wants. These basic bureaucratic hurdles can and must be removed.

Fuzon and the MHB performed at the Grand Hyatt in

Mumbai on Sunday at another fund-raiser for the tsunami victims. They could have made a spontaneous detour and performed at the Pakistan India Peoples Forum for Peace and Democracy Convention but their visa was not valid for New Delhi. ●

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Some unsolicited advice

In hindsight, everyone should have done everything differently

We Nepalis are great at dispensing advice as long as we don't have to follow it ourselves. Following this grand tradition, here is my own two-cent's worth:

GUEST COLUMN
Alok Bohara

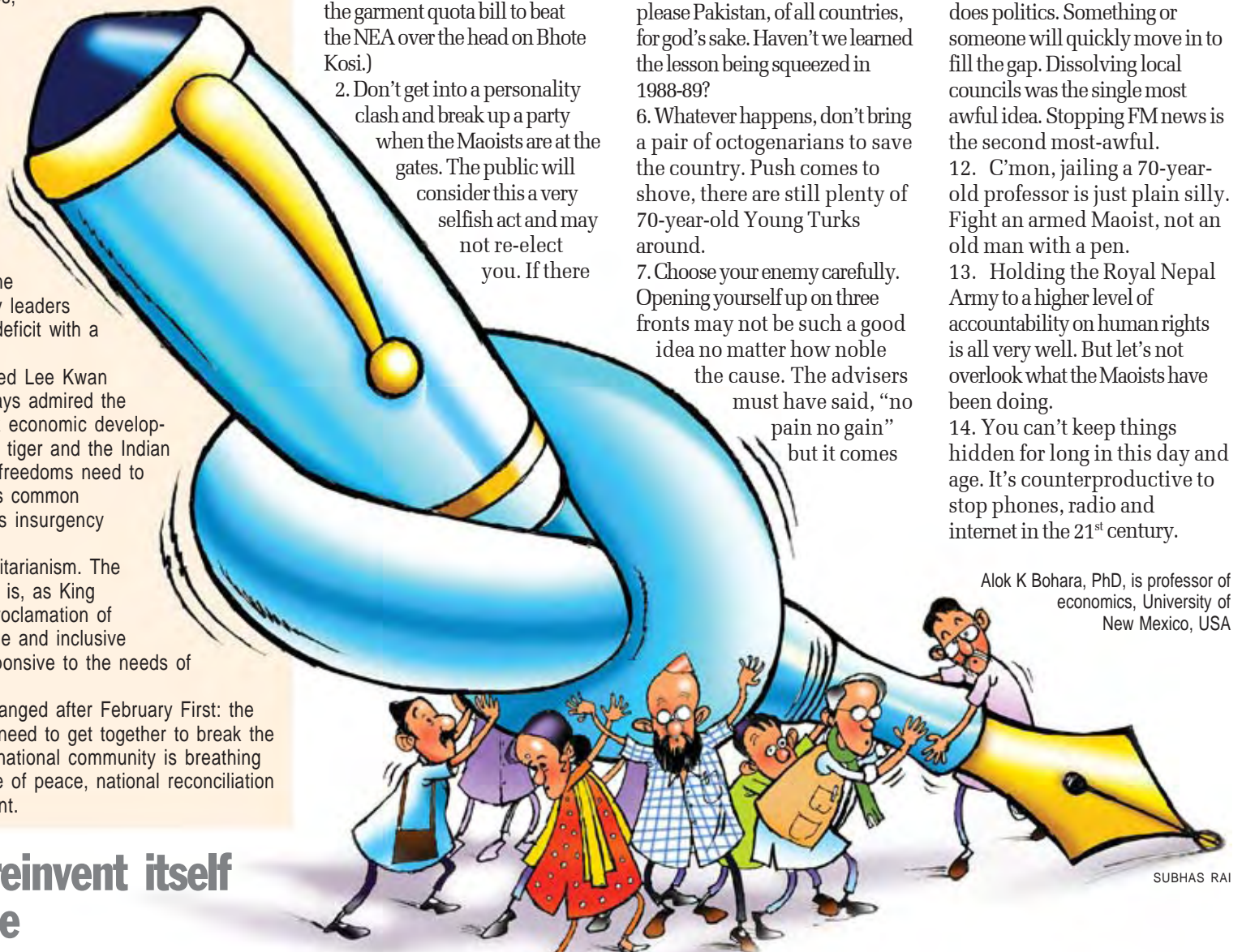


1. Don't anger a Tibet-loving US senator by arresting a few meditating Tibetans, especially when there is a trade bill or a garment bill sponsored by the senator on the floor of the US Congress. (And don't try to use the garment quota bill to beat the NEA over the head on Bhote Kosi.)
2. Don't get into a personality clash and break up a party when the Maoists are at the gates. The public will consider this a very selfish act and may not re-elect you. If there

- is ever an election, that is.
3. Try to remain united and sensible when the king is touring his dom advocating an active monarchy. Learn to take the hint. Have you forgotten a simple childhood story: it is easier to break one stick than a bundle of seven?
4. Once in a while it does not hurt for the political leadership to oppose the Maoists and their atrocities at Ratna Park. The public may actually be convinced that it is all about something bigger than just ministerial portfolios.
5. Let's not p... off India to please Pakistan, of all countries, for god's sake. Haven't we learned the lesson being squeezed in 1988-89?
6. Whatever happens, don't bring a pair of octogenarians to save the country. Push comes to shove, there are still plenty of 70-year-old Young Turks around.
7. Choose your enemy carefully. Opening yourself up on three fronts may not be such a good idea no matter how noble the cause. The advisers must have said, "no pain no gain" but it comes

- with too high a risk.
8. Political daughters should have realised that taking a rikshaw to Jogbani then a train to New Delhi would have been much safer than riding an Enfield Bullet across the tarai for five days braving tigers.
9. A "can't we all get along" speech may be imprudent when a bunch of old friends of your daddy are in detention, including your uncle.
10. If we practiced what we preached we could have embarked on a path to liberal democracy a long time ago.
11. Nature abhors a vacuum, so does politics. Something or someone will quickly move in to fill the gap. Dissolving local councils was the single most awful idea. Stopping FM news is the second most-awful.
12. C'mon, jailing a 70-year-old professor is just plain silly. Fight an armed Maoist, not an old man with a pen.
13. Holding the Royal Nepal Army to a higher level of accountability on human rights is all very well. But let's not overlook what the Maoists have been doing.
14. You can't keep things hidden for long in this day and age. It's counterproductive to stop phones, radio and internet in the 21st century.

Alok K Bohara, PhD, is professor of economics, University of New Mexico, USA



SUBHAS RAI

LET'S BACKTRACK

Democracy isn't in great shape. Not just in Nepal, but around the world there is a stench of democratic decay. In western liberal democracies there is voter apathy and ballot fatigue. Terrorism has triggered measures like the American Patriot Act that is an unprecedented erosion of civil liberty. Across Latin America, there is a swing to the left as the past 15 years have convinced the disenfranchised that democracy had become an ideology of domination rather than liberation. And in states of the world's largest democracy across our southern border, control of vote banks at election time is now an art form that has little to do with the exercise of political choice.

Just preserving an electoral process while ignoring equity and inclusion is not sustainable. If mainstream groups just perpetuate their privileges and entitlements through the ballot box and use polls to hold on to power, democracy turns into a sham. The most stable societies are those where democracy has leveled the playing field, distributed resources, devolved power and given the majority a share of prosperity. Regimes that provide only the facade of democracy without the substance may look healthy from the outside but are actually rotting inside because those left out are driven to desperation.

You don't necessarily need periodic elections to ensure accountability of rulers. Besides, how many of our countries had the good fortune of electing visionary leaders who compensate for democratic deficit with a surplus of statesmanship?

These trends have emboldened Lee Kwan Yewists among us who have always admired the strongman approach to fast-track economic development. They compare the Chinese tiger and the Indian elephant as proof that individual freedoms need to be initially curtailed for a society's common progress. Proponents say Nepal's insurgency needed this shock therapy too.

The goal of the rebels is totalitarianism. The antidote is not authoritarianism. It is, as King Gyanendra argued in his royal proclamation of February First, a return to genuine and inclusive constitutional process that is responsive to the needs of the people.

In that sense, nothing has changed after February First: the king and the political parties still need to get together to break the stalemate. Not because the international community is breathing down their necks but for the sake of peace, national reconciliation and Nepal's longterm development.

The UML must reinvent itself as a middle force

Forward march to the past

A month after February First, the nation seems to be hunkering down for the long haul. The highways have reopened, the panic is postponed. The capital Valley is once again in a bubble.

STATE OF THE STATE
CK Lal



The surest sign of ordinariness in Kathmandu's party circuit is a return to party-bashing. After-dinner conversations bemoan the perennial leadership crisis in the kingdom. The comfortable classes forget that they perhaps wouldn't have been as comfortable if the politicians had been slightly more honest. Every sinner has a future, it seems, but saints sometimes have horrible pasts.

True, better leaders would have been produced if political parties were more vibrant. But

parties do not grow in a socio-cultural vacuum. The objective conditions of society make them what they are. The UML, to take the most illustrative example, grew as a design of the Panchayat in the late-1960s to appropriate the proscribed NC's turf. Like the Maoists in the mid-1990s were considered by a section of hyper-nationalists to be 'patriotic', UML cadres thrived on silent support of the Kathmandu elite. Even during the 1990 elections, UML candidates rode the willing shoulders of remnants of the *ancien regime* to victory.

By ceaselessly trying to topple fragile governments during the 1990s, the UML was digging its own hole. A parliamentary system just couldn't survive when the main opposition party was hell-bent on exposing its rival from within and lambasting it from outside. Even Laloo Prasad Yadav and his arch-rival Ram Bilas Paswan in Bihar state elections

last week showed more courtesy for each other.

With the country's two leading parties showing so little respect for one another, both became victims of the 'grand design'. The dénouement came in May 2002 when parliament was dissolved even though the situation demanded that its term needed to be extended beyond the normal five years.

It has been downhill ever since for the UML. Since 4 October 2002, its policy drift got worse and the party couldn't decide whether it stood for parliamentary democracy or just wanted to get into Singha Darbar by hook or by crook. When it chose the latter, it alienated the cadre.

The UML realised soon enough that it had been squandering political capital for a few crumbs from the high table of state power. Promulgation of a revised TADA through ordinance

proved that the claims of 'half-corrected regression' were even more hollow than it sounded. But such are the trappings of office that none of Madhab Nepal's nominees in the cabinet showed the courage to step down on matters of principle.

In desperation, Comrade Nepal thundered: "UML isn't going to run away from responsibilities with its tail between its legs." But he was already sounding like a tiger going meow. In what must be one of the worst pathologies of power in any parliamentary democracy, UML ministers kept loyally wagging their tails till the last moment before being booted out of office.

Now, with Nepal and other leaders under house arrest and second-rung apparatchiks in hiding, the UML's HQ at Balkhu wears a desolate look. The same forces that put the UML on a pedestal brought it tumbling

down.

As long as citizens are seen as immature, undisciplined, untrained, and hence ill-suited for statecraft, there is no way this leadership crisis will be resolved. If politicians claw at each other and can never see beyond the next curve, they will continue to be used by those who think it is their manifest destiny to decide what is good for the country.

In times of crisis and instability, right-wing populism has more powerful appeal than left-wing populism. The marginalisation of the UML is therefore natural. But its relevance in the coming days will depend upon the course chosen by its 'acting' general secretary Jhala Nath Khanal. The traditional elite can never be the longterm ally of a party that calls itself 'Marxist' and 'Leninist'.

The UML must reinvent itself as a force of the middle path. Survival there depends on accommodation rather than acrimony with other political parties. ●

LETTERS

HELMSMEN

For weeks now Nepalis have had no option but to submit to the International community's inhospitable interpretation of the developments in Nepal. But thanks to Saubhagya Shah ('At the helm', #235) we are reminded of the shortcomings of the international community. Thanks to Shah for making his point with such finesse and eloquence. One hopes, though, that such eloquence will be put to good use in reminding all those at the helm, particularly the leopards who may not have changed their spots (Letters, #236) that the infamous 30-year winter has definitely come to an end. In keeping with global climate changes there can be no return to such harsh winters again, and therefore all leopards would be well-advised to change their spots. Conservation efforts in Nepal can only be successful through sincere efforts to improve the habitats of all flora and fauna and not only that of those at the top of the food chain. Shah's metaphor of a 'show of hands' will be complete when all parties reveal their stance, in words and in action, not only vis-à-vis terrorism but also democracy.

Abhishek Basnyat, Washington DC

● Since February First I have read *Nepali Times* with great interest and must applaud you and your staff for continuing to function journalistically despite trying circumstances. What a quagmire. As an outsider, I can't grasp the intricacies of the problem but it would appear that I'm in good company. While constitutional democracy increased expectations, its inability to improve the lives of the average Nepali and effectively defuse the Maoist situation simply made it that much rougher. Carnage in the countryside, little control outside the capital, bandas and blockades. It was only a matter of time before something snapped and snap it did. His Majesty has grabbed the game board, knocked off all the pieces and changed the rules. But how to proceed? A military solution to the Maoist problem isn't likely at hand. Even if His Majesty managed successfully to follow the path of Alberto Fujimori, who freed Peru of the Shining Path by a crushing military defeat, the problems of poverty and economic stagnation will remain. For a roadmap, examine the past 50 years in Israel, Singapore and Thailand. While Israel chose a socialist parliamentary democracy of the finest European traditions to guide its path, Singapore succeeded with more autocratic hand to guide it to prosperity and then greater democracy. Thailand, with a cultural heritage similar to Nepal, travelled the road to prosperity under constitutional monarchy guided by a king in not all that different a place than King Gyanendra finds himself in at the present. Despite their different approaches, what the three countries all have in common is a focus on human capital development through economic reform to allow the free flow of capital, education and political restructuring that supported these changes. Nepal, too, can make the transformation. King Gyanendra has the unique opportunity to break the logjam and put in place the institutional reforms and mechanisms needed for Nepal to make a breakthrough.

Joshua Gitlitz, New York

● The Nepali people are suffering because the authorities running the government lack proper education. They couldn't care less whether anyone is affected by the current situation because they are busy amassing wealth. Why not get rid of these parasites and bring in new blood: honest, disciplined and well-educated ex-Gurkhas? Just look at how they transformed Dharan. They could replicate that in the rest of Nepal. Good education, a culture of accountability and commitment to nation-building are all that's needed.

G Saran, email



KIRAN PANDAY

● Let me first tell you how much I appreciate your paper, even if I get it about one week late. The content compensates (Editorial 'Been there, done that', #235). Nepal's donors are trying to decide what to do about their aid. I understand that the projects they execute are meant generally for the poor, handicapped and needy. Why then do they want to stop it? If they decide to stop, then the aid is political and not humanitarian.

Annemarie Spahr, Turbenthal, Switzerland

● As a traveller who considers herself a dear friend of Nepal, I have been upset about the February First royal move. This is a tremendous step backwards for the people of Nepal. The frustration is great because of the lack of information even though it is good to see the online edition of *Nepali Times*. But the story of the blockade ('Road closed', #236) is sad and made me angry. How can the Maoists think they can maintain this level of blockade and the monarchists think they can suspend civil liberties? In this day and age, it is virtually impossible for activities in Nepal to be hidden.

Pehrson Cazadero, California, USA

● Indian ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee's interview ('There was another road map', #236) was a clear reflection of how the Indian government perceives the current Nepali political scenario. However, in very cold words, Mukherjee seems to undermine the fact that Nepal has always been a monarchy. The 'other road map' as guided by the ambassador, has led to no destination in the past political journeys. His remark on ceasing military aid to Nepal is vague compared to reports in the Indian media, which makes derogatory and patronising remarks quoting Indian 'experts' about Nepal. India should come clean with its public and unstated stance towards Nepal. New Delhi may be in touch with Beijing on Nepal as the ambassador points out but at least China doesn't poke its nose into Nepal's affairs.

Anup Kafle, email

A majority of foreign journalists and international crisis think tanks have portrayed a very bleak future for Nepal under the current administration. These very institutions predicted there was no hope for Peru in the early 1990s. When President Alberto Fujimori took office in Peru, the country was fighting against the Shining Path (aka Maoist) guerrillas. Internal bickering within Peru's parliament had allowed the Shining Path to grow into a powerful militant group and control most of Peru's hinterland. On 5 April 1992, Fujimori mounted a self-coup against his own government. One of his key goals was the total annihilation of rebels which he accomplished within three years. Although some have recently

criticised Fujimori's methods, a majority of Peruvians are grateful to him for his leadership. Similar to Nepal, the international reaction to the coup in Peru was initially very negative. International financial organisations delayed planned or projected loans, the US suspended all aid except humanitarian, current EU members Spain and Germany cut off all ties with Peru. Unlike Peru, Nepal does not have a very well equipped military and needs more than just humanitarian aid to help the brave men and women in the army fight the rebels. It is time the US and the EU learnt from their mistakes and used Peru as a model and helped Nepal.

Manish Priyadarshi, Maharajanj

ROAD CLOSED

Thank you Kishore Nepal for such a tragic travelogue of a blockaded Nepal ('Road closed', #236). As a frequent traveller between Kathmandu and Dharan, your article brought tears to my eyes and I was overcome by sorrow for what we have lost as a nation. But what have the Maoists achieved by destroying our motherland? What kind of liberation are they fighting for? Who are they fighting for if it is the ordinary people who are being punished?

Sri Rai, Jawalakhel

Kishore Nepal paints a depressing picture of a country that has ground to a halt. Three weeks after February First, the people are still waiting to see what price we have to pay for the curtailment of our freedoms. But are the terrorists going to heed the advice you give them in your editorial ('Right here, right now')? Doesn't look like it. If anything, not only have we lost our civil liberties but it also looks like the war is going to intensify.

Name withheld, email

● In your last issue with the front page article 'Road closed' you had three advertisements for cars. Was that a spoof or what?

Ravi Maharjan, email



ALOOF VALLEY

It is sad that Kanak Mani Dixit in his Southasia Beat column ('An aloof valley', #236) tries to alienate the Kathmandu Valley from the rest of the country based on the economic standard of the people. It seems that the writer wants to see panic on the faces of the people of Kathmandu. He tries to indicate that the people of Kathmandu should succumb to the blockade imposed by the Maoist. But the people of Kathmandu are from all over the country and will defy any forceful blockade. Yes, there is a gap between Kathmandu and the hinterland but that doesn't mean the people of Kathmandu should go around panicking like the whole country. In fact the people of Kathmandu have sent a clear message to the Maoists that the rule of gun will not last long. Vehicles not plying on the highways don't indicate support for the Maoists but a fear reflex. Kathmandu has shown unity and solidarity, the whole country should follow suit.

Lily Thapa, Kathmandu

DIASPORA

It is interesting how Nepalis outside of Nepal get all politically aware and socially sensitive after stepping out of our little safe hole, Nepali Pan contribution by Jemima Sherpa ('Further from home, closer we are', #235). Having experienced these feelings myself after leaving Nepal five years ago, I cannot help but wonder why we (especially the youth) are so oblivious to social issues. Residing in countries that preach freedom and equality, we realise the lack thereof in our own. But why do we have to leave Nepal to understand its class structures and ethnic boundaries?

Nisha Onta, email

FULBARI RESORT

On behalf of Fulbari Resort & Spa and our executive chairman, Piyush B Amatya, allow me to correct the article 'Pokhara takes a direct hit' (#236) by Ramesh Poudel. The reporter has totally misquoted Mr Amatya and also falsely reported that the resort's telephone lines and electricity have been cut off. There is no such problem at the resort. In fact, we have been fully operational despite the adverse situation in the country. What has been reported is totally baseless and a figment of the reporter's imagination. Such reports are highly damaging to our earnest efforts and our hard-earned reputation.

**Rupak Shrestha,
The Fulbari Resort & Spa, Pokhara**

CORRECTION

In 'Little heroes' (#234), the cost of treatment for aplastic anaemia and leukaemia in India was inadvertently put at Rs 700. The treatment costs Rs 700,000.

Third Fokker 100



Cosmic Air added a third Fokker 100 to its fleet. The new jet aircraft will begin operations from 15 March in the domestic market and will expand to Bhadrapur. Cosmic will also begin flying to Pokhara soon as it waits for its fourth Fokker 100.

Golf winnings



Prem Sachdev, chairman of Gokarna Forest Golf Resort won the Himalayan Bank Cup Open Golf Championship. Dhiraj Rai of Nirvana Country Club, Dharan finished second. There were other various category prizes also. Winner of the professional game Deepak Acharya and runners-up Ramesh Nagarkoti and Deepak Thapa

Magar were awarded cash prizes. Winners of the amateur event Rabi Khadka, runner-up Tashi Tsering and nett winner Surya Sharma were also awarded.

Star endorsement

Sleepwell has endorsed Baichung Bhutia, star Indian footballer, as its brand ambassador. There are more than 50 dealers of Sleepwell in Nepal.



Insuring heritage



National Life and General Insurance Company is the first to issue an insurance policy covering the risks for historical buildings of Nepal. It has issued a policy

covering the risks on Dharara at Sundhara. Sidewalkers Traders reopened Dharara on a contract basis.

NEW PRODUCTS

INSTABUY:
Standard Chartered Bank Nepal currently issues

Visa and MasterCard branded Credit Cards to its customers. It has now launched InstaBuy, a sub-product of the Credit Card. InstaBuy allows Credit Card customers to repay their purchases of goods and services of Rs 5,000 and above through instalments ranging from 6 to 18 months at a lower service charge of 0.833 percent per month.



Moving on to Peru

We looked at Chile, now let's turn to Peru

One uncomfortable fact of recent global history is that fresh political openness in a formerly non-democratic nation appears to be just the catalyst to propel that newly democratic country down the path of a protracted civil war.

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari



In Turkey, the Kurdish insurgency emerged not long after a civilian government came to power in 1981. In Europe, no sooner had the states of the former Yugoslavia held elections, wars broke out along ethnic lines. In Rwanda, four years after the government accepted the principle of multiparty democracy, the Hutus carried out genocide against long-time enemy, the Tutsi minority. Insurgencies have been rampant in the newly minted electoral democracies of Iraq and Afghanistan. And in Peru, the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) asserted its murderous viciousness right around the time the country's military rule of 12 years gave away to a freely elected civilian government in 1980.

To interpret this juxtaposition that some new democracies share with internal wars, conflict scholars are increasingly using the kind of economic reasoning that is familiar to business theorists. In a paper on Peru (*Journal of Peace Research*, vol 38, no 5, 2001), sociologist James Ron of Canada's McGill University attempts to answer two questions: How did political openness in Peru add to the rise

of the Senderistas? And why did Sendero kill 300-odd union leaders, community organisers, politicians and municipal authorities instead of pursuing a broader intra-left alliance?

The military rule in Peru provided various leftist groups with a common cause to fight against. But after its end, most of these groups sought to advance concerns related to social justice as legal participants in multiparty democracy. As such, during times of openness, they had fewer things to protest against. As legitimate leftists moved to the public stage to fulfil electoral promises, their marginal cousin Sendero ended up being pushed further into a corner, where it had to either find a niche to survive or perish altogether.

But loyalty to its inherently violent radicalism made Senderistas fight back. Protesting the actions of its leftist brethren as a sell-out to bourgeois democracy, Comrade Abimael Guzman (*see pic*) used the open political context to announce an armed struggle against the state.



In doing so, he aimed to differentiate the purity of his ideological 'product' from that of other strains of reform-oriented leftists. Instead of acting as a deterrent against violence, an open political environment ironically created conditions for the Senderistas to play up its violence-prone radicalism to show how different it was from others.

But sticking to violent radicalism came at a cost. Sendero Luminoso had to continuously attract recruits to replenish its depleting ranks. And that led to direct competition with other left parties who drew resources 'from the same pool'. Because it did not violate what it stood for, Sendero found it strategically palatable to deal with the competition by unleashing violence against its ideological cousins, even if that meant killing their leaders and activists. In the long run though, the brutal tactics meant that the Senderos never generated any international sympathy, much less support.

Still, Ron's conclusion is that the Peruvian example is not meant to be an argument against democracy. It is to suggest that at times despite political openness, 'democratisation can have adverse outcomes'. But as subsequent events in Peru show, those adverse outcomes do not necessarily get corrected when the country resorts to military rule to defang the radicals.

Eight years after the suspension of political openness, Peru's military rulers fled the country in 2000, thereby allowing the Senderos, this time in tandem with another radical group, the MRTA, to become active and notch up a death toll of 25,000. ●

A united development approach

Matthew Kahane is the United Nations resident coordinator in Kathmandu. He spoke to Nepali Times last week about the February First changes and what it means for development.

Nepali Times: What is the UN's response to the royal action of February First?

Matthew Kahane: Secretary General Kofi Annan has made it clear that he considers the dismissal of the government and suspension of basic civil rights as a step backwards for the nation. We believe that a unified approach between all institutions of governance, namely His Majesty, the political parties, the structures of government as well as civil society is necessary for a proper response to the Maoist insurgency.

How can the UN help achieve peace in the changed situation?

The secretary general has always said that his good offices remain at the disposal of Nepal in any way that they can be useful. This is not a matter of seeking a role. The essence of what the secretary general desires is that there be a united approach on the part of the constitutional forces and that both sides prepare to discuss openly the points in contention without excluding important issues. The secretary general's previous statements remain in effect and the only official statement made in the immediate past

has been the one issued by the secretary general's spokesperson on 1 February itself. The statements issued by the spokesperson in New York are the only official communications made on behalf of the secretary general.

What is your understanding of the status of the countryside?

Given the great difficulty in travelling in most parts of the country, development activities are of necessity halted. This is also because the project staff do not have reliable information on how, where and when it is safe to travel. Furthermore, the imposition of the state of emergency has affected, and in some cases, interrupted the normal flow of practical information required for planning, directing and monitoring our activities on the ground. This is definitely a crisis period for development delivery. We will have to wait and see where we go from here but essential steps would include restoration of the freedom of movement, the normal flow of information and lifting of all direct and indirect censorship of the media.

Has your relationship with the government as a development partner changed?

The absence of local elected bodies for two-and-a-half years has meant a steady erosion of the capacity of public officials of the local level to plan and monitor development services. At the local level, we have been adapting to the situation by working with local groups, non-governmental organisations and at times delivering services directly. At this

time, in the changed context, we are concerned about how these alternative mechanisms may work under the state of emergency.

Will development assistance be affected as a result of the royal proclamation of February First?

The greater proportion of the United Nations' development activities in Nepal is concentrated at the district and village levels. The target groups are the poorest and the most disadvantaged and we strive to support the basic level of services in health, education, water supply, sanitation and livelihoods. Where there are properly functioning institutions of local governments or community organisations, such activities build longterm capacity in addition to providing the actual services. Where such local organisations are weak or non-existent, it is the actual services delivered that are most important and such support is basically humanitarian. All donors wish to find ways in which such development and humanitarian activities can be continued at the community level.





JIGGY GATON

Kathmandu's finest

It was Valentine's Day and I was all packed up for a weekend with my girl at Godavari. I had chocolates, a long-stemmed rose and other Valentine's Day goodies in my bag. I was all set for a romantic weekend, packing my new digital camera, two new tennis rackets and even the bag was new— a Rs 1,000 Nike knockoff from Bluebird.

So I took off from Boudha on an Enfield to pick up my girl in Jawalakhel with a song in my heart and the wind in my hair. I arrived at our arranged rendezvous all amorous-like, until I looked behind my back and noticed that my weekend bag had vanished.

NEPALI PAN
Jiggy Gatton



Fallen off on the way somewhere perhaps on Butterfly Road or who knows where. Well, I met my date not with that look of love but of

absolute panic. My best Heroji outfit! My passport tucked away inside my Calvin Klein undies! My new camera! Imported tennis rackets and balls! *Lau kha!*

My girl and I got on the bike and retraced my tracks hoping to find the bag. We drove slowly and I kept hoping some street urchin would run out of a shop holding my bag high, looking to return it to the stupid white dude who had dropped it in traffic. But it became clear that the bag was lost. Who, in a city of over a million, with the economy the way it is, would not look upon an attractive bagful of over one lakh of merchandise?

The slow depressing ride back home was contemplative. As a Buddhist, I daydreamed about karma, the need to let go of worldly attachments and the circle of samsara. But my little worldly circle was bisected by cows eating garbage from the gutter next to the child playing in the trash next to the curbside street vendors of Chabahil selling cheap socks and tin cutlery.

Three cheers for the anonymous cop at the Gausala beat

And I felt the eyes of my girl burning into the back of my helmet: what a dunce! But she came up with the idea: why not ask those traffic cops over there if anyone has seen a lost bag?

Well, remembering my experiences with

police back in the west, where a cop is more likely to shoot you dead than help you when you are hysterically in need and also remembering the last time I had asked a traffic cop anything in Asia when I was totally lost in the Bihar, looking for a temple outside Patna on a motorbike, where I had pulled into the police stand hoping for directions. What did I get from that cop? An IRs 500 ticket (payable right away) for making a wrong turn into the station. So I was less than hopeful when we asked the traffic cop in Gausala Circle if he had seen a stray bag bouncing around the streets of KTM in the middle of morning rush hour.

With a truly concerned look, one of KTM's finest directed us to the station a block away for further inquiry and, lo and behold, there was my bag sitting unopened in the station office. It had been turned in by an off-duty cop from Chabahil who had picked it up and walked it over to the station. I tried very hard to give the finding officer a Rs 500 note. His refusal was simple and with a smile: "I am just doing my job."

Off we went, the Valentine vacation saved by the effort of one honest off-duty Kathmandu traffic cop who was just doing his job. I've forgotten his name but I would really like to thank him, his boss, the chief of police and the entire Nepali people.

Riding to work every day, I can't help but notice the blue-suited cops directing traffic, trying to keep things moving, making me think that perhaps my friends in the press and the bilaterals and INGOs who report on corruption in Nepal may have gotten it all wrong. Perhaps the majority of Nepalis in public service just want to help out where they can and simply "do their job". ●

Jiggy Gatton is the pen name for an unaffiliated aid worker in Nepal, who now ties his bags very securely to his motorbike and pays close attention to all directions given by KTM Traffic Cops (well, he tries to anyway).

Sending money home

The labour export industry has nearly recovered from 1 September but there is an urgent need to upgrade the skills of workers

NARESH NEWAR

For the last 15 years, Ganesh Lama has been working as a manager in Qatar. He can't believe how convenient it is to send money home. Until a few years back, Ganesh depended on friends to deliver cash to his wife and children in Kathmandu. He had to wait for months to find someone reliable.

Today, all Ganesh does is go to the Doha Bank in Qatar once a month to transfer the money to Nabil Bank in Kathmandu. "It's done in minutes," he says.

The process of money transfer to Nepal from abroad has not just become efficient but it is now possible to accurately measure how much money Nepalis abroad repatriate to their home country every year.

Even so, only 40 percent of Nepali workers overseas use remittance companies. The rest still rely on the hundi system, which takes up to two weeks, is unreliable and the operator takes a big cut.

Now, Western Union and 25 other recognised remittance companies help with transfers from all over the world to all over Nepal. "People are more confident about sending money home for a nominal service charge," says Arun Acharya from Annapurna Travel, which has been working on remittance banking for the last 10 years. Since 2001, the flow of remittance to the country has grown 15-20 percent every year and in 2004 money from overseas Nepalis crossed Rs 100 billion—making it a bigger source of foreign exchange than tourism

and all exports combined.

"It's remarkable, the contribution Nepal's overseas labour force is making to prop up the national economy," says Prajuman Pokhrel of Nabil Bank, which is the main agent here for Western Union. There are now an estimated 1.2 million Nepalis working in 40 countries, not counting India.

Three-quarters of all recruitment agencies were damaged in arson attacks during the 1 September riots last year after 12 Nepalis were killed by terrorists in Iraq. The industry

way to send money home," says Sanjay Thapa from Money Gram, one of the top remittance companies with 54 branches inside Nepal.

There is still a lot that needs to be done by the government to regulate manpower agencies, remove exploitation and cheating, and provide skills training so Nepali workers have a chance to earn more. "The government has not been able to support the manpower business, people pay so much to go abroad, there must be a way to promote high-value foreign employment,"



seems to have recovered from the setback. Except for Malaysia, where a three-month freeze on overseas workers was announced in January. The number of Nepalis going abroad is now back to mid-2004 levels. The three-week blockade after 1 February reduced the numbers since people couldn't travel to Kathmandu but it is picking up again.

"Remittance banking is developing in Nepal as destinations grow but many don't realise there is a safe and quick

says Chandra Tandan of International Money Exchange (IME).

Now that some destinations like Malaysia and Qatar are reaching saturation points for unskilled labour, Nepal has to upgrade the skills of its overseas workers. Says Hemant Singh Gurung of Pioneer Overseas who has sent 20,000 Nepalis to Malaysia in the last six years: "There is less certainty now, the demand from foreign countries is not the same anymore." ●

How (not so) poor are we?

With so many donor agencies operating in Nepal, getting hold of development statistics has never been a problem. But there are discrepancies on the most vital indicator: poverty incidence.

The latest figure was 38 percent, down from 42 percent in 1996. Now, the World Bank's Nepal Living Standard Survey conducted in 2003-04 seems to show that Nepal's poverty incidence has fallen to 30 percent. Which should mean that Nepalis are much less poorer than 10 years ago. Right? Maybe.

The survey does seem to show that overall poverty levels have dropped, but no one is sure by how much. At the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the National Planning Commission (NPC), officials confirm poverty incidence has dropped down but can't say by how much.

The World Bank expert team that conducted the survey is in Washington putting the average calorie intake of Nepalis through their computers before they come out with a definitive figure. The World Bank had supported the CBS in conducting the survey of 4,000 households all over the country last year. Indicators like access to services, literacy and education, health services reportedly show positive trends.

"We are waiting for the calorie consumption figure, only then can we come out with the definitive poverty figure," says Director General Tunga Shiromani Banstola of the CBS. World

Bank officials, however, said it was for the government agencies to determine the poverty figure. "The government agencies need to have backup documents to come up with a concrete poverty figure," said a World Bank official.

Poverty reduction has been the mantra of all governments in the past decade and the sole objective of the 10th five-year plan. The government has also come up with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) which is supported by almost all donors although the World Bank has pulled out a \$70 million tranche for this year because of the government's failure to meet its reform conditionalities.

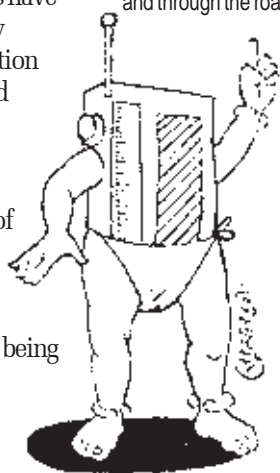
The real poverty figures hinge on the calorie figures but the World Bank says it is leaving it up to the government to announce the real poverty figures. In its four-year country assistance strategy that began last year, the World Bank has said that 40 percent of the country's population lived on less than \$1 a day as of 1995. "There is little evidence that poverty has declined since the 1980s and the absolute number of poor people has likely increased," the bank said in the paper.

Just like the poverty incidence, the other figure that looks fuzzy is the per capita income of Nepalis. Even though \$ 270 is the accepted figure, there are doubts if it is accurate. The Asian Development Bank has supported the CBS in conducting new surveys to come up with a more accurate figure. ●

Navin Singh Khadka



Employment Act 2000 and it will only allow Nepalis to work for more than \$150 a month overseas, representing a \$25 increase on the previous requirement. Malaysia will be the first destination to see a drastic decrease in the number of Nepali workers. Most Nepalis working in Malaysia get little more than Rs 9,000 a month. The amendment will also require recruitment agencies to provide an insurance of Rs 500,000 to workers. Till date, labourers have been insured for Rs 100,000 only. New provisions include: Operation prohibition of companies whose licenses have been annulled, mandatory graduation level qualification for recruitment offices and revision of license fees. Agencies will also be required to send workers overseas within one year of their selection. According to Labour Ministry's secretary, Narayan Prasad Silwal, "Amendments are being made to institutionalise developments in foreign employment."



National Panasonic

Purshottam Dahal in *Nepal Samacharpatra*, 1 March

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

My old National Panasonic shortwave radio had been gathering dust for many years. I didn't need it anymore because a small FM set costing Rs 150 was bringing me all the news I needed. In the last 15 years, you didn't need to rely on outside papers, magazines and radio, there was enough credible and relevant information from Nepali sources. Now, because of the curbs on domestic media, international media has received a new lease on life. That is why I cleaned up my old radio and am using it again. Those of us who took their freedom for granted have realised what it feels like to have it taken away. Our freedom had become an integral part of our culture and civilisation. In the past 15 years, our media broadened the scope of press freedom by maximum application. In the week during which email, Internet, mobiles and media were restricted, we were pushed back to medieval times. So today, we have to try to tune our shortwave radios to BBC Nepali, VOA or All India Radio and through the roar of static try to find out what is happening in our own country. The new regime stopped news and current affairs on FM radio with just one edict but it left 3,000 journalists out of work. All over Nepal, the information gap is being filled by the underground 'Radio People's Republic'. Will someone explain to me whether this replacement of licensed broadcast channels with illegal underground broadcasts is part of the plan? My pen is non-violent, it is for democracy and for a free press. It needs unrestricted information from Nepali sources, not from foreign radio stations. It needs information from our own vibrant FM stations, not from underground stations that propagate violence. In the 21st century my pen should stand against violence, totalitarianism and lawlessness. And it can only do that if it is free.

Incident at Charaundi

Letter to the Editor in *Kantipur*, 22 February
कान्तिपुर

Imagine a speeding bus on the highway. Now imagine someone opening fire on it. You only see it in the movies. And when it happens in real life, right in front of your eyes many are too shocked to react. In case the conflict is resolved, future generations will look back at incidents like these. But if it doesn't there will surely be many more incidents like what happened to us on 20 February at Charaundi. Around 45 to 50 of us were in the Machhapuchhre Yatayat bus bound for Pokhara from Kathmandu. The bus was in a long line of vehicles and along the way it felt like we were traversing a war zone. Army patrols everywhere, vehicles on fire by the roadside.

The journey was depressing and we were filled with fear and foreboding. We used to feel safe in the towns but when we reached Charaundi Bajar a gunman in combat fatigues opened fire at the driver of the bus. I can't describe in words the feeling that ran through me. Four days earlier I had travelled this same road and my bus had met with an accident between Dumre and Damauli. I had been physically and psychologically scarred by the accident and was desperate to get home to Pokhara and be reunited with my parents, wife and children. But here I was in a bus whose driver had been shot and was speeding along the highway at 50 kmph. There were people along the side of the road and ahead of us was a stream, river and a bridge. We all got down under our seats and prayed, convinced this was the last day of our lives. However agnostic you may be, when death stares at you, you remember God. But the bus did not collide with anything, it sped on along the highway. Slowly, we peeked at the driver's seat and saw someone driving the bus. There was someone listening to our

prayers after all, God had sent a messenger to rescue us.

He was Shyam Thapa of Pokhara's Ratna Chok returning home after a holiday in Kathmandu. He replaced the wounded driver, took control and drove us safely to Pokhara. In return, we could offer him little more than thanks for having given us a new life. Two other elderly passengers in the bus had also suffered bullet wounds and their blood filled the bus till we reached Mugling. From there, the army took the three to Kathmandu in a helicopter. We joined six other buses to be escorted into Pokhara which we reached by 8PM. On behalf of all the passengers, let me thank Shyam Thapa for saving our lives. If we do not respect the fundamental right to life of every Nepali citizen, there is no doubt this conflict will turn into a bloodbath. We wish to ask all sides to stop these irrational, inhuman acts and resolve the conflict peacefully through negotiations.

Indra Bahadur Bhujel, Lamjung

Kantipur, 23 February

Thanks to Indra Bhujel for sharing his harrowing tale of survival and bravery with the readers. In today's Nepal, facts are more dramatic than fiction and this is but one example. Reading the heartfelt letter, I was overcome with emotion and felt like I had experienced it myself. I have nothing but admiration for Shyam Thapa who took over the runaway bus from the wounded driver and saved the lives of everyone on board.

Kiran Khanal, Kathmandu

Indra Bahadur Bhujel's letter describes an event that is the country's conflict in a microcosm. Those who were responsible for opening fire on the bus should read the letter and think about what they have done by targeting unarmed innocent bus passengers. The true hero is Shyam Thapa who saved the lives of dozens of frightened passengers. A hero is someone who gives the gift of life to others, who shows uncommon valour in times of crisis and demands nothing in return. Shyam Thapa is one such hero. Thanks also to Bhujel for writing to tell us what happened since details of the event didn't make it to the news. Let's hope the perpetrators realise that this conflict can only be won by discretion and rationality. Just like Shyam Thapa saved everyone with his bravery, the warring sides must also give up violence and strive for morality, ethics and idealism to win the hearts and minds of the people.

Binita Aryal, Lajimpat



Winning isn't everything...it's the only thing



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AWARDS

a tribute to the spirit of entrepreneurship and business excellence in the country

MARCH 11 2005



THE FINAL COUNTDOWN BEGINS

“Reign, not rule”

Samaya, 3 March

समय

Interview with Biswa Bandu Thapa, president of the RPP parliamentary committee

What is your take on the recent political changes?

The process of change started with the dissolution of the House of Representatives three years ago. Who was the main instigator is not certain but it was Sher Bahadur Deuba or someone higher. Soon afterwards, the prime minister was advised to postpone elections and Girija Prasad Koirala, Madhab Kumar Nepal and Surya Bahadur Thapa unanimously agreed. These leaders should have realised that the PM does not have the authority to change the election date. The king should have told Deuba that constitutional provisions did not grant him such authority. When the king used Article 127 to dismiss the PM, the people's representatives should have said the move was wrong. They should have proposed restoration of parliament even when the PM failed to do so. And in the absence of parliament, Article 128 could have been used to discuss forming of a government with the leaders.

What about the royal-appointed governments?

Lokendra Bahadur Chand couldn't bring in anyone from any party, not even from the RPP. Later, with Surya Bahadur Thapa there was hope that he would convince the UML and NC to join. But he couldn't. Deuba managed to get the UML on board. The RPP has accepted all governments and has not called them 'regressive'. But now, the RPP is in a difficult position since this government is formed under the chairmanship of the king who asked for three years to do the job. The king's order is like an elephant's tusk. It is tough but when the tusk falls off, it never grows back. Chand, Thapa and Deuba, each got a year to hold elections and were sacked when they couldn't. Yet the king has given himself three years for the same job. Does this mean the tusk is falling off? The RPP wants to see the government of the people but we also want to ensure that monarchy is not in danger. The king is the symbol of nationalism. Whenever Nepal is weak, India steps in. The king is the institution that keeps our country strong, for which monarchy must be constitutional. The citizenry wants an elected government. The king is the constitution's guardian but there needs to be harmony between parties for healthy politics. Foreign countries, including India gives more importance to elections than to peace.



BHASWOR OJHA

So, what now?

We are still called the king's party though we were never consulted when Chand or Thapa were appointed prime ministers. Still we supported the king. That has changed now, UML and NC leaders should realise this. They should prove their statesmanship. There is no leader like BP Koirala. He did not talk about changing the constitution but his statesmanship led to the fall of the Panchayat. Girija's daughter Sujata is in Delhi crying herself hoarse about a republic while NC spokesman Arjun Narsingh is saying something else in Kathmandu. I'm not sure about Girija's expectations. We need to push for elections.

What will the RPP's policy be now?

The king cannot afford to make everyone rebel against him. Haven't the parties always said he is the keeper of the constitution? The constitution says the king must walk with the parties. But we say elections are necessary. Peace is not the only precondition to holding elections. The army can be mobilised to control the Maoists if they create trouble.

Was the international response towards the February First move expected?

Tulsi Giri has called attention to international double standards: how the Americans had to act post 9/11 and India had to act in Kashmir, so Nepal must also act as it sees fit. But they never stopped their democratic process. Instead, they held elections to ensure mass support. Here, constitutional and democratic processes have been stalled. The king has the authority to reign, not rule.

Solid support

Nepal Samacharpatra, 27 February

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

To counter accusations of Nepal alienating itself from the international community owing to the royal move of February First, the Foreign Ministry furnished the names of six countries that have announced their support. Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey said they were: Cambodia, Laos, Qatar, China, Pakistan and Syria. North Korea and Bangladesh have also expressed their solidarity through embassies here. Acknowledging their support, Minister Pandey has sent them thank you notes.

Cuba libre

Rajdhani, 2 March

राजधानी

Cuba has termed the recent political developments in Nepal as the country's internal matter. Cuba's Deputy Foreign Minister Avelardo Moreno, during his two-day visit to Nepal on 1 March, said Nepalis were free to select the kind of system they want in their country. "Nepalis have that freedom," Moreno said after meeting Foreign Minister Ramesh Nath Pandey. "No foreign country should interfere in its internal matter." Moreno said he discussed the upcoming UN Human Rights High Commission meeting with Minister Pandey saying Cuba would support Nepal. "The High Commission has shown double standards and has not been effective," he said. "All developing countries need to work together to make the High Commission just, impartial and effective."



will be easier said than done.

The anti-Maoist vigilantes went on warpath after Maoists abducted two villagers from Ganeshpur on 16 February. They have killed Krishnanagar's Maoist area in-charge Roshan Urf Akhtar Ali and beaten to death a man named Nandu of Lawani. Prem Bahadur Rajkoti of Hallanagar's Sukumbasi Tol died in a fire they started. Kapilbastu policemen who reached the scene of attacks say things are spiralling out of control. Nothing could be salvaged from the burning ashes. The leader of the vigilantes, Ganeshpur's ex-VDC chairman Asul Kalim Khan, said: "We will go after those who don't help us."

Travel restriction

Himal Khabarpatrika, 27 February-13 March

हिमाल

If you are planning to leave the Valley you better think twice. Your name might be on The List. After February First, security personnel at the airport have turned back passengers waiting to board their plane saying: "Your name is on the list." Om Gurung was among 25 people heading for Shillong to attend an Indigenous Peoples' Conference, former justice of the Supreme Court Laxman Prasad Aryal was flying to Mumbai to attend a conference on girl trafficking, Hemanta Bahadur BC of NCP (United) was going home to attend the last rites of a relative, deputy

speaker of the dissolved House of Representatives Chitrlekha Yadab, member of the Human Rights Commission Kapil Shrestha and many others were turned back from the airport because their names were on the list. It is said that Padma Ratna Tuladhar, Daman Nath Dhungana, Mathura Prasad Shrestha, Krishna Pahadi, Sushil Pyakurel, Nilambar Acharya, Krishna Khanal, Gauri Pradhan are also on the list of 200. No one wants to confirm the list, or who is on it. They wave it off as an order from 'higher up'. While some listed have been kept in custody, others are not even given prior notice. Public Security Act, 2046 provisions the government with the authority to stop anyone who might harm the state or the people from staying in Nepal, entering or leaving it. But only one vested with the authority can issue this provision. The Act does not authorise tricking somebody or stopping him without giving prior knowledge. Even when ordered, the order expires after 30 days. According to the law, if extension is required, the local authority must seek permission from the Home Ministry.

\$150 minimum

Nepal Samacharpatra, 2 March

नेपाल समाचारपत्र

Nepalis will not be permitted to go overseas for employment if their salaries amount to less than Rs 10,000 a month. The government is introducing this provision through an amendment in the Foreign



Sack: National problem
Arrow: Solution, 1095 days

राजधानी Rajdhani, 27 February

QUOTES OF THE WEEK



"When you don't give oxygen to somebody, he dies within minutes. When you are hooked to a life support system, you can't complain that the doctor is not giving you the liberty to go to a pub or disco. We are merely surviving. What we first want is oxygen. When we are well, we will go to the pub and the disco. We will enjoy freedom, democracy and all the good things in life."

Neurosurgeon and former minister, Upendra Devkota quoted by Associated Press.



KIRAN PANDAY

IMMOBILISED!



Some are paralysed by the cell phone ban, others don't miss it at all



NARESH NEWAR

You can use it as an alarm clock, take pictures, play games, write notes, use it as a digital phone directory, as paperweight or even throw it at someone. Mobiles may not ring anymore but they still have multiple uses.

The cynical among you will argue that even when mobiles were working way back in the heydays before February First, they didn't work half the time. 'Network Busy', calls that got cut off halfway and people shouting

"Hello! Hello!" into their phones inside restaurants was common.

"Actually I don't miss it at all," says an office colleague. "It never roamed anyway, I save money, I don't get crank calls and I don't get silly jokes on SMS."

Still, people who had grown used to the mobility of mobiles are, one month later, still suffering from withdrawal symptoms. We went over to the Nepal Telecom (NT) but couldn't find anyone who could tell us when the service would be restored. "We are waiting for the government's direction to

relaunch the service," is all NT's General Manager Sugad Ratna Kansakar could tell us.

This means nearly 250,000 mobile users across Nepal will have an indefinite wait. Its phone network already covered 50 districts and NT was planning to spread out to all 75 districts, adding one million lines in the next four years.

"We are being very patient hoping the service will restart soon," says Bhupal Chettri of Nepal Overseas Marketing, the official distributor for Nokia in Nepal. Hundreds of wholesalers



MIN BAJRACHARYA

DIGITAL DIRECTORY: Mobile phones serve just as a phone directory, and (above) with all UTL lines off, the main exchange at UTL office in Putali Sadak rechecks its facilities.

and retailers of mobile phones are worried about the loss of business. "If the service doesn't resume soon I'll just have to close down," says Hari Thapa who invested Rs 500,000 to start a

phone shop in New Road.

"I don't want to close down, there are rumours the service will start soon," says an optimistic Uttam Maharjan at an electronic shop in Lagankhel, who is diversifying into tv repairs to make up.

The suspension of services is also a huge loss for NTC, which loses up to Rs 6 million a day in revenue. The annual turnover of mobile telephony was

estimated at Rs 1.3 billion. Also badly hit has been the Indian joint venture UTL, which uses local wireless loop technology. It was required to re-register all users so security could check subscribers.

"Mobile phones have become a basic requirement in this age. The government should consider reopening both mobile and UTL services," says businessman Rajendra Khetan who recently sold his shares in Spice Nepal to diaspora Nepalis.

Spice Nepal has influential Nepali shareholders along with Russian and Indian investors and is said to be pressing for an early resumption of service because its deadline for launch expires in April.

"We are ready to start, a lot of money is at stake here," explains Spice's Indra



MIN BAJRACHARYA

PLAYING GAMES: Phones have become play stations, and Nepal Telecom's Sugad Ratna Kansakar (above) doesn't know when phones will be restored.

Subedi. The company has deposited Rs 290 million which could be forfeited. Spice had planned to distribute 300,000 mobiles at its launch on the Nepali new year next month and reach a target of one million subscribers in two years.

Subedi claims Spice's technology is much more advanced than NT's and will be more reliable and ease

congestion. "We welcome the competition, the choice is up to the consumers," NT's Kansakar told us. The main concern is not the quality of service or numbers of users but who will qualify as subscribers since the government will now be vetting all pre-paid subscribers. Many subscribers are giving up hope and want their refunds from NT and UTL. Says Kansakar: "We will ensure that everyone gets refunded with the money not yet used for their calls." ●



KIRAN PANDAY



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Chidambaram's 'New Deal'

NEW DELHI - Nine months after being voted into power on a wave of public anger against pro-rich polices, the Congress Party-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) - backed by the communists—has proposed a budget that may actually give a human face to economic reforms.

The communist parties had only asked for an outlay of at least of \$12 billion to be spent on education, health care, mid-day meals in schools and farm development. But Finance Minister P Chidambaram has proposed a social package worth \$ 16 billion in budget on Monday.

"The discussions and debates between the UPA government and the Left parties on the direction of economic polices seem to have had some impact," conceded Prakash Karat, politburo member in the powerful Communist Party of India -Marxist (CPI-M) which leads the Left Front. But he was worried that if tax revenue as estimated by Chidambaram is not fulfilled, the actual provisions for the long-neglected social sectors may suffer.

The communist parties, in pre-budget meetings with the finance minister and at public rallies had demanded that the government, to which it provides critical outside support, take steps to recover tax arrears from the well-off and also the vast amounts of money they owe public sector banks.

Indeed the communist parties, which had joined hands with the ideologically dissimilar Congress party with the single purpose of defeating the BJP, have been giving fierce warnings that their support for the UPA coalition should not be taken for granted.

As a result the budget, which Chidambaram himself described as a 'New Deal', shows a 33 percent hike in the allocation for rural development to \$4.5 billion. A pro-active feature of the budget is the national food for work programme that started three months ago and which now has allocations worth three billion dollars. The program aims to alleviate poverty and pays the poor, for work done, partly in cash and food grains. (IPS)



Malaysia return

Migrant workers push for minimum wage

ANIL NETTO in PENANG

More than half a million enforcement personnel and volunteer vigilantes pursued undocumented workers last week as the deadline for illegal migrant workers passed.

Those arrested will be jailed, whipped or deported. When it was discovered that some Malaysian employers appeared to have taken advantage of the impending crackdown and withheld wages due to these targeted migrant workers, it threatened to sour diplomatic ties with Indonesia.

The problem of illegal workers in Malaysia must be tackled at source, said some analysts, pointing to the syndicates and agents that lure these workers and dupe them with false promises. Once here, migrant workers are left in a vulnerable position as, in many cases, their employers hold on to their passports and their work permits bar them from switching jobs.

Often, for the workers, it's a case of either grin and bear it or run away and lose their passports, thus rendering themselves 'illegal'.



For K George, an 85-year-old former vice-president of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC)—the umbrella body for trade unions in the country—the solution is simple. "Foreign workers must be allowed to join (Malaysian) unions," he said. Had they been allowed, "We would have been able to minimise problems with illegal workers and unpaid wages." George explained that the immigration status of migrant workers would have come to light much earlier when workers' applications to join trade unions were processed. "The unions could have taken over the job of ensuring that migrant workers had proper work permits and immigration documents."

The MTUC will have to tackle these and other issues after its stunning elections recently swept in new leaders, raising fresh hopes for workers. On 30 December, the team aligned to

incumbent MTUC Secretary General G Rajasekaran made a clean sweep of all contested union leadership positions.

Over the 22 years of Mahathir's tenure, workers' rights were gradually whittled away. Out of the more than 10 million workers in Malaysia, fewer than 10 percent are trade union members. This leaves the vast majority of workers—including migrant workers—vulnerable to exploitation. It is situation that employers relish. In the past, MTUC has adopted an ambivalent position towards migrant workers. Some unionists saw the influx of these workers as depressing wages levels in the country and thwarting attempts to lobby for a minimum wage.

"We are looking at (the situation of) workers, whether they are local or foreign," he said. "Of course, the MTUC is focused on local workers but we cannot ignore the exploitation of any worker." • (IPS)



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 BISHALNAGAR - 4420794 (Time 10:00 am - 2:00 pm)
 Forms for A-Levels will also be available from April for classes beginning in May, 2005

Square impact

Being consistently square will land you in the round hole more often

There's a magical feeling in hitting it perfectly off the sweet spot. No jerks and vibrations, just that buttery smooth feeling as the ball soars effortlessly towards the target.

Yes, one more enticing fascination of this sport that draws participants again and again. Once the sensation has been felt, you are as good as hooked. The reality is nobody hits the ball off the sweet spot with a square clubface on every shot. Even hitting half your shots this way is an unrealised dream for most.

TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya



Squaring the clubface at impact and hitting the ball straighter is arguably the hardest

aspect of the game. When you look at the mechanics of a golf swing, it appears almost impossible to achieve. That's especially true with the lower lofted (longer) clubs.

The shorter, higher lofted clubs compensate for a wrong swing path and non-square clubface. That's why many club golfers can hit their short irons to reasonably good standards but fail miserably to do the same with longer irons and the woods.

How is it possible to accomplish this with all those unnatural twists and turns the body takes when swinging the club? An essential part of the sport and a hard one to master, this skill can be learnt. The idea to start with, is to find a way to do it often enough to make a marked impact on your game. For this, you need to be aware of the fundamentals that will lead to such a scenario.

Most recreational golfers believe in squaring the clubface by uncocking their wrists at impact. Yes, this is essential and part of the process but one must realise that it is a result of other factors and not something consciously concentrated on. The two essential components leading to this are: The body turning through the shot and the forearms rotating.



Uncocking the wrists is the final step. It is a natural reaction to the uncoiling of the body and the momentum of the swing, provided that a reasonably good down swing path has been attained. If the swing path is too far inside or outside the target line, the wrists won't uncock correctly.

If the body turns through the impact area, the hands have a natural chance to remain square. If the body is not turning, it leads to an inconsistent swing path and a conscious manipulation of the hands in trying to square the clubface.

To get the feeling of a proper turn through the hitting area, get on the green and try small swings by rotating your body. If you do this often, it will become a habit leading to consistent shot making. Allow your professional instructor to get you started and you can be sure your ball is going to be flying towards the target more often. ●

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



The boys of Sahara Club line up for a football practice session.

Pokhara's young champs

Abandoned boys aim high on the football field

RAMESH POUDEL
in POKHARA

Sushil Bika is 12 years old. He fled from home and scavenged for plastic in Pokhara's garbage dumps to earn enough to buy food.

Today, he is training to be a football star and asked who he wants to be when he grows up, he says without hesitation: "Ronaldo!"

Like the boys of Brazil's favelas who rose up to become national champions and then international football stars, the boys of Pokhara's streets are aiming high. The Sahara Club based here has, for the past five years, been rescuing street children and providing them with a home and education. But six months ago, it decided to start a football academy for former street children and took in 20 boys aged 10-14.

They are from underprivileged families, indigenous groups and dalits. They go through four hours of intensive football training every morning and evening with a professional coach. The rest of the day they attend classes at the Naba Prabhat Secondary School. Many of the boys are not just good in sports but top the class

in studies as well. Sahara takes care of their food and hostels with money raised from donors.

"It's amazing how quickly the boys have been transformed," says Basanta Thakali of Sahara, "Till last year they were picking garbage, look at them now." Indeed, they brim with confidence and are proud of how far they have come.

Bikram Basnet, 14, remembers scavenging garbage, selling paper and plastic to recycle, being chased by dogs, by shopkeepers who thought he was a thief and harassed by the police. "It all seems like a dream," Bikram tells us tying his boots. "Now, all I want is to do well in studies and be a great football player some day."

Coach Dambar Gurung is full of praise for his boys. "They are learning very fast," he says during a training session at the stadium under a spectacular backdrop of the Machhapuchhre. "At this rate, they'll all be champions."

Basanta Thakali says Sahara Club's real intention is to rescue street children and give them an opportunity to do well and contribute to society. Football was just an idea and it took off immediately. It's not been easy: it costs Rs 1.6 million a year to take care of the children, pay for their



Bishal Lama, 12, practices dribbling the ball with the other boys.

PICS: SUDARSHAN RANJIT

studies, food, lodging and coaching. Luckily, the Aha Gold Cup Tournament earnings have been helpful and the shortfall has been met through donations from Pokhrelis themselves.

"We have taken responsibility of the boys for five years," says Thakali, "and we'll keep on taking new children." Performers Nabin Gurung and Mahesh Gurung have organised charity shows in the UK to raise money for Pokhara's football academy and Thakali hopes money won't be a problem in future. ●

www.saharaclubpokhara.com



Post-February First postmodern democracy

Democracy is a literary protagonist in Manjushree Thapa's latest book

A skillful mix of history, reportage, memoir and travelogue, Manjushree Thapa's *Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy* reconstructs three centuries of Nepali history as an elongated journey towards individualism and freedom. What distinguishes this book from mainstream history books is its stance: the *Elegy* revisits Nepali history from the point of view of a history-dweller rather than a history-broker.

BOOK
Asthi Sakhwa



It is at once a celebration of the power of the literary monologue and a cry of outrage at the reality in which the present Nepali state and society are trapped. *Elegy* is woven around the theme that Nepal is heading towards what she calls a 'postmodern democracy'. Starting with an account of the Narayanhiti massacre and its aftermath, she goes back to trace the medieval history of chaos and intrigue in search for evidence to either validate or falsify conspiracy theories.

The author's inclination towards the postmodern is reflected in her willingness to bend, test and challenge every perceived rule and statement: an approach that also leads the reader to ponder whether postmodernism is not the very essence of that increasingly

elusive democracy, which every interest group in Nepal today is frantically trying to bait and define.

The key feature of postmodernism is deconstruction. It is the rejection of the sovereign autonomous individual with an emphasis on diversified, collective, anonymous experience. Postmodernism in Nepal undergoes two distinct transformations: First, from a medieval country ruled by either the solitary Shahs or Ranas with the help of their Pandey or Thapa mukhtiyars, to a modern country caught in a continual power struggle between the royals and party leaders. The second transformation (the visibility-constraining 'haze', as Manjushree puts it) that had enveloped the country making it mandatory that it worshipped one distinct figure, is blown away to welcome the global wave of democracy into Kathmandu. The central figure of worship finally disappears, only to be replaced by endless squabbles among the various interest groups including the Maoists.

This also sets the stage for Manjushree's post-February First writings, where her cry is for 'the right to talk about everything and anything' and not to reinstate any of the ruling figures.

Not least because democracy is



MIN BAJRACHARYA

the breathing protagonist in almost all of Manjushree's writings, one cannot help but notice that her post-February First writings come as a natural extension of her concluding chapter in *Forget Kathmandu*, 'The Unfinished Revolution'. Postmodern democracy can now no longer be associated solely to the lawless and objectiveless street protests of the student unions, nor the UML's endless rostrum-gheraos, nor the Koiralas'

blind clench to premiership.

Real democracy, now, must not just look like a democracy, but act like one as well: 'whereas in earlier spells of democracy, Nepalis were asked to be content with a few freedoms (assembly, speech), we now want social and economic equality as well'.

The conclusion of *Forget Kathmandu* somehow outpaces the rest of book and the 256.5 pages boil down to a two half-page wish list. While the diagnosis feels sound, the prescription is less persuasive, which, ironically, might reflect the current state of Nepal. Still, there are a number of weaknesses in the diagnosis. For example, the book hardly ever recalls Newar history and culture, which prevailed in Kathmandu and which the book urges us to forget. The 32-page 'History Exhibit' chapter hardly speaks of the equally vibrant histories and cultures that lived outside that memory-unworthy Kathmandu until the second last chapter when democracy starts dismantling.

The author is not alone in this peril. All Nepali today would confess to knowing less about their own selves than about the 'other'—the almighty God, the red revolution, the glamorous west, the oily sands. Every Nepali would also confess

to not knowing a single name free from the pollutions of corruption and self-centredness. Is it not time now that we come to terms with our diversified pasts and presents within the boundaries of our common territories?

The *Elegy* is open-ended. The book needs to be read in conjunction with the rapid unravelling of the post-February First events, which might very well turn out to be the earnest forbearer of the conclusion of that 'Unfinished Revolution'. ●

Asthi Sakhwa is a doctoral student and lives in Washington DC.



Forget Kathmandu: An Elegy for Democracy by Manjushree Thapa Penguin/Viking New Delhi, 2005 Rs 560

World wide Wave

The young take on the world charging through the Internet

The third Wave Web Winner 2004 (www.com.np) awards organised by our sister publication, the monthly youth magazine, *Wave*, took place on 25 February. Of the more than 150 websites submitted, 124 were shortlisted for the final contest sponsored by ITNTI with xtremenepal.com and DVD.com as co-sponsors. Here's our review of the six winning websites:



Wave Web Winner 2004, Prajwal Shakya
<http://prassanna.150m.com>

This website not only has class, sophistication and style, it has comprehensibility to boot. Designed in orange and black, it might as well be the official website for the WWW contest. Using the main title package, Prajwal has laid it out with panache. For those planning to participate next year, check this website out for not just its winning streak but also for the 02 WWW's interview. Add your own formula and who knows, you might be the next Wave Web Winner!

Best Site-Content, Indira Sharma
www.nepalnari.com

The only female winner of WWW 2004, Indira's done a great job. Designed for the ultimate women with beauty tips, fashion, cuisine and more, it also tackles serious issues that the Nepali nari deals with. While its bulletin Take It Easy shares ideas such as hair damage control, the Nepalnari Special gives an in-depth insight into the situation of Nepali women and how far they've come. It also lists the girls' schools, women's colleges in Nepal and the first Nepali women to accomplish various feats. Interesting and enlightening, this is girl power Nepali-style.



Editor's Choice Award, Kailash Gyawali
www.klash-design.com

Young and peppy, this is a bilingual website with German and English. Kailash maintains a daily blog giving a firsthand account of a Nepali youth's life in today's Kathmandu. He also posts interesting photos to go with his blog entries. Take a look at the photos of the zoo animals and a photo made up of the letter k. This is more than just design, it is lifestyle.



Best Site-Technicality, Chandra Man Maharjan
www.multimedia.com.np/cmans/

One look and you'll see why this website was a sure-fire winner for this category award. A Flash XML, PHP application, it is creativity at its best and the cute illustrations will keep you occupied even while waiting. The layout and design is just as attractive too. Check it out for yourself. After all, it's only a click away.



Best Site-Visual Appeal, Shrijit Rajbhandari
www.geocities.com/officialstoopid/

How adorable can scrawls on a crushed page off a spiral notebook be? Visit this website and you'll see. The official site for the band Inside 2 Stoopid Triangles, don't get taken in by the first page though. Inside 2 Stoopid Triangles is a whirl of impressive rebellious adolescent work that belies first impression. It definitely catches the eye!



Best Site-User Friendliness, Digital Max Team
www.multimedia.com.np

This website design is simple, elegant and as plain as the nose on your face. It is the perfect website for dummies, first-time and multiple users but it is not exactly boring either. All about how to redesign small businesses to conquer the market through the Internet, this website equips you with all the tools and tricks of the trade. As they say, keep it simple and you just might win!

"Lata ko desh ma gaando tandari." (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 can also be seen at www.extreme-nepal.com

#58 2061 by jigme gaton - read. love. write.

ABOUT TOWN

FESTIVAL AND EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Ceremony and Stillness** Photographs by Frances Klatzel at Siddhartha Art Gallery. Until 5 March. 4411122
- ❖ **Khumbu Himal** Photos by Kim Hong Sung at Gallery Nine, Lajimpat. Until 5 March. 4428694
- ❖ **Reflections from Tibet** Black and white photographs by Kevin Bubricki at Indigo Gallery. Until 6 March. 4413580
- ❖ **Smile** Photos of Nepali icons by Kumar Ale at Nepal Art Council, Baber Mahal. Until 9 March. 4466956
- ❖ **Kathmandu & Kali Gandaki** Exhibition of photographs by Anagarika Sugata at GAA, Thamel, till 18 March. Proceeds go to the Chair 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
- ❖ **Surya Mandala** Newari Paubas at Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234



EVENTS

- ❖ **Friday Fiesta** at Latin Quarter Salsa Bar, Baber Mahal Revisited on 4 March. www.salsanepal.com
- ❖ **Book release** Biplab Pratik's *Nahareko Manchhe* on 5 March at 4.30 PM at Gallery Nine, Lajimpat. 4441689
- ❖ **Shiva Ratri** on 8 March, also International Women's Day.
- ❖ **Jat Sodhnu Jogi Ko** Play directed by Anup Baral at Gurukul, Dhobikhola, Setopool, 5PM. Till 10 April. 4466956
- ❖ **Art workshop** for kids at Buddha Gallery. 4441689
- ❖ **Rugby Practice** Every Saturday for both experienced and beginners. Contact Gopal Chhetri at 4435939, citygymktm@hotmail.com
- ❖ **Sanibaar Mela** Every Saturday at the Dharara Bakery Café, 12AM-5PM.
- ❖ **The God Dance of Kathmandu Valley** Tuesdays at Hotel Vajra. 4271545

MUSIC

- ❖ **Live Jazz** by JCS trio and McTwisters on Monday at New Orleans Café, Thamel on 7 March. 4700736.
- ❖ **Live with Abhaya and the Steam Injuns** at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Live Music** Everyday at Hotel de l'Annapurna, Darbar Marg. 4221711
- ❖ **Good Time Blues Band** at Rum Doodle, Fridays, 7PM onwards. 4701208, 4701107, rum_doodle@gohimalaya.com
- ❖ **Classical music**, 7PM onwards, Fridays at Hotel Vajra. 4271545
- ❖ **Jatra** Saturday nights with Looza, 6.30 PM onwards. 4256622
- ❖ **Jukebox experience** Weekends at Rox Bar. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz** at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lajimpat. Wednesdays and Saturdays, 7.45 PM.

FOOD

- ❖ **Strength of a Woman** Set lunch or dinner at Hotel Shangri-La, Lajimpat on Women's Day, 8 March for Rs 650. 4412999
- ❖ **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 Regency on weekends, 12.30 AM-3PM. 4491234
- ❖ **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** Unlimited nature at Park Village Hotel. 4375280
- ❖ **Café Bahal** Newari and continental cuisine at Kathmandu Guest House, Thamel. 4700632
- ❖ **Barbecue-Ban Bhoj** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Vegetarian Creations** at Stupa View Restaurant. 4480262
- ❖ **The Beer Garden** at Vaijyantha, 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 Cottage** Nature, peace and bird watching at 6,000 m. 4354331
- ❖ **Chiso Chiso Hawama** One night two days 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** 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

JAI NEPAL CINEMA

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.

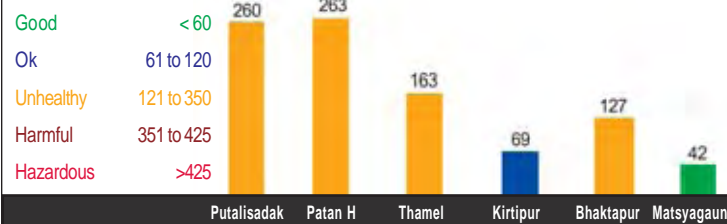
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KATHMANDU AIR QUALITY

There was a slight improvement in the air quality of Kathmandu Valley last week, mainly because of a slightly clearer day on Wednesday when the rains flushed down pollutants and a fresh northwesterly breeze blew away the dust. However, the concentration of particles smaller than 10 microns in urban Kathmandu is still way above national and international standards. As we move from winter to spring, we can expect the air quality to improve slightly but not significantly.

20 - 26 February 2005 in micrograms per cubic meter.
Source: www.mope.gov.np



NEPALI WEATHER

by MAUSAM BEED



With Shivaratri around the corner, we must traditionally expect another last cold blast from the west before we can finally declare winter over. And right on cue, we have a huge low pressure circulation over northern India that should be here over the weekend bringing some drizzles across the central and western midhills and snow flurries in the higher valleys. The mercury has been rising steadily and the minima will climb into the double digits by Tuesday. But because of cloud cover over the weekend, the maximum temperature will stay in the low 20s. Next week will be much warmer.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



फागुनदेखि वैशाखसम्मको अबधि हावाहुरी बढी आउने समय हो । आगो वाल्दा सुरक्षित ठाउँमामात्र वाल्ने, सलाई, लाइटर, मट्टीतेल आदि ज्वलनशील वस्तु केटाकेटीले भेट्ने ठाउँमा नराख्ने । केटाकेटीलाई जथाभावी आगो वाल्दा हुन सक्ने आगलागीका दुर्घटनाहरूवारे सम्झाई-बुझाई गर्ने र यस्ता कुराहरूबाट सजग रहन जनचेतना बढाउने कार्यमा सहयोग गरौं ।

श्री ५ को सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग

Madam Chair and Respected Sofas

Speech delivered by the Jointed Secretary of the Ministry of Women, Labour and Home Affairs on the occasion of the International Day of Women. (Please check against delivery.)

Madam Chair, Respected Sofas, Distinguished Desks, Honorific Ministers, Your Excellence the Donors, Members of the Muzzled Media, Ladies and, last and also the least, you latecomers at the back who are an utter disgrace to the male sex.

Now that Nepal Television has finally arrived and member states of the Much-maligned

UNDER MY HAT
Kunda Dixit



Movement such as Cuba, North Korea, Syria, Laos and Togo

have shown that they stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us in our hour of need, we can with the permission of the Chair all heave a collective sigh of relief and move on quickly to the next item on the agenda which is the International Day of Women that we are about to mark today amidst much fanfare, tongue-lashing and lip-service. Since I don't see anyone raising a hand in objection, it is so decided.

Right at the outset before proceeding any further let me state that as far as we are concerned, and if it was up to us, we'd declare all 365 days in the year as International Days of Women. Hic. I think I speak for a majority of my male colleagues when I say that we would not be doing justice to the admiration, devotion and affection we have traditionally reserved for members of the female species in general and their Nepali sub-species in particular if we celebrated Women's Day only

once a year. This is why we propose that henceforth every day be devoted to women except April First, which as a purely token gesture will be set aside by the United Nations as the International Day for Men. Going by the tumultuous applause, I hereby declare that motion passed.

I don't need to remind those of you present here that it is a scientifically proven fact that women hold up only half the sky. In fact, if it wasn't for us members of the unfair sex holding up the other half the sky as we know it would fall. However, it must be said that in Nepal women have taken great strides. Admittedly, these strides have not been as great as the strides we menfolks have taken but, hey, we're not here to gloat.

For example, us men have developed a great deal of expertise in vitally important activities such as making hilarious sounds by cupping our palms under our armpits. Too illustrate my point, let me demonstrate. Now, show me one woman who can do that. As you can see, the fairer sex has a lot of catching up to do to be at par with us men who are governed by the left hemispheres of our brain (unlike women who are governed by the western hemisphere). This evolutionary trait gives us males superior powers of deduction, analysis and an ambidextrous ability to scratch and sniff while simultaneously monopolising the tv remote. It is this capacity to multitask that makes men such great hunter gatherers to this day and this is why our country is in the state it is in today.

With that, I would like to end my two words so that I can get back home to watch myself on the evening news. ●

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