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Overall Nepal Situation: June 2005

THIS bloody month records some unprecedented happenings.

The Maoists owned-up to the ambush of a passenger bus carrying 110 passengers. The death toll was 38 people, including 4 children, with another 39 critically hurt.

This was followed by further fatalities in a gory incident where they abducted three families of the armed police force in the far west, brutally stabbing three wives, 21, 23 and 34 years old, a one year old baby, and two relatives.

There were several attacks in security and several clashes between the security forces and the Maoists. One of them in Khotang (eastern hills) records the bombing of 11 government offices, the freeing of 66 jail inmates, with five security men and three Maoists killed and 11 security personnel missing. It has been impossible to keep up with all the bad news this month.

Just this month the price of cooking gas has increased by 100 rupees or over 15% - the increase in prices holds true for most construction and consumer industries.

The political parties sometimes declare that they will join hands with the Maoists against the King - this is then promptly and hotly contested by the leader of the Communist Party.

Student, journalist and political party agitation continues for "anti regression" with very little apparent public support. The calm in Kathmandu feels eerie.

Phones Are Us?

WHAT is this obsession for people to talk on their mobile phones all the time?

It's a fairly facile obsession, but when this is done when people are driving it is not only illegal, but damn dangerous.

Last week, I read somewhere that if you are speaking on a phone whilst driving - even if it's a hands free phone - you are four times more likely to have an accident. That also means four times more likely to cause an accident.

I am constantly amazed at how many people I notice driving around our area talking away on their mobile phones. The really dim ones are people in sign written vehicles... useful information when you ring their company, or the police!

It's about time that the uniformed people we have begun to enforce the law.

The editor would like to echo the sentiments above and report that on a recent trip to Greenham there was an incidence of on-horseback mobile phone use. Is this legal?

Speedsters

Speed on the roads continues to be a major source of annoyance to people in and around these parts.

From my daily vantage point I see a constant stream of individuals who seem to think they own the roads and care not for other people or animals.

Our little stretch of road seems to have attracted a whole host of people who seem to think pedal to the metal and overtaking in a 30mph are 'de rigueur'. And that's not overtaking slow vehicles, in some cases it's overtak-



SPEAKERS' CORNER

ing the speeders!

Why? What's the hurry? If you live in a lovely place like Wivey (and even if you don't), why not take time to savour the views?!

I was accosted recently by someone lamenting the fact that someone always wants to know your business. The beady eye of the government, Big Brother is watching you and all that.

I bit my lip and let him have his little rant, not wanting to ask just how fast he thought it reasonable to drive in a 30mph zone. 35 perhaps? Maybe 40 is ok if you're going down hill, saving the brakes for something else?

Well sorry, but I see people at 50 plus on a regular basis, and it's only the speed at which they come into and out of view that prevents me from giving them a piece of my mind.

Of course, all motorists are to blame. I'm sure we all do it on occasions. Just seems like the last thing to think about as you wend your merry way.

But do try and spare a thought for those other road users. From cats (and sometimes dogs), to the young, the old, the infirm, bikes, cars, lorries and tractors, the fact that people might emerge from a concealed entrance, or you might encounter a cyclist or a horse around the corner from that overgrown hedge.

That's now 10 cars well over the limit since I started writing this. About half of those on road. And would you believe three of those were school buses with kids on board? Your kids perhaps?

Blast OFF

Remember, remember the 5th of November.

An early reminder to all those people who enjoy letting off fireworks but don't think about their neighbours, human and animal.

The law has been tightened to restrict how loud fireworks can be and the times when they can be let off. It isn't reasonable to blast your neighbours with fusillades of your

'fun' without letting them know or considering them, their pets or, in our rural environment, nearby animals.

Grumpy old man

I have recently installed a cunning little software device into my email filters which emits a very loud and satisfying gunshot sound whenever it encounters suspiciously spammy messages in my inbox.

It is particularly adept at finding and destroying online pharmacies which want to sell me Viagra.

Just when I thought it was safe I became the victim of an entirely different attack which came not via the computer but through my letterbox via the snail mail. Worryingly it came from a very local and easily identifiable source.

Our very friendly doctor's surgery wanted me to go and take a test to see whether my arteries were about to blow my gut to pieces.

You might think that here was the NHS executing a very commendable preventative medicine exercise but at the end of the letter was an invitation to pay £95 for this one minute test.

It transpired that this was a wholly private enterprise-based scheme and not vastly different to those other letters soliciting varying amounts of money for all sorts of services.

I'm all in favour of medical efforts to prolong productive life but take exception to this kind of cynical marketing ploy.

I'm now working on a device which I can attach to my letter box.

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Problems with words

I was talking to my wife Doris the other day and she told me that I was incongruous.

I was stunned. I mean, first of all I didn't know what the word meant and, secondly, I didn't know whether she meant it as a compliment or not.

In the end, I decided to look it up in our dictionary. It said it means 'incompatible with what is suitable'.

What a cheek, I thought. I'm the most suitable man around these parts.

Anyway, the incident got me around to thinking about the way we speak and write and what a wonderfully expressive language English can be when used properly.

I went shopping in Taunton with Doris the other day and, as usual, she wanted to buy some bits and pieces from the food hall in Marks and Spencers (or should that be Marks & Spencers, or even Marks & Spencer's?).

You see my problem. When should we use an ampersand (&) and when should we use an apostrophe?

My problem was compounded at the check-out. Doris had only bought three items and so she went to the till headed 'Five items or less'.

I asked the check-out assistant whether the notice was written in correct English because I thought it should read 'Five items or fewer' but the assistant just gave me one of her looks and sniffily said that she just worked on the till and didn't know much about English.

I got it in the neck from Doris, too. 'Fancy embarrassing the poor girl like that', she said, and she was probably

right, but surely someone in the management of the mighty Marks & Spencer organisation knows English well enough to get it right.

I have a friend named Herbert (that's why they call me Herbie, to tell us apart). Anyway, Herbert is the owner of a car showroom in Kent and last November I decided to buy a new car from him.

Opposite the showroom was a newly opened restaurant. It proudly proclaimed that it was licenced to sell alcohol and served delicious breakfast's, lunche's and dinner's. Ouch! I couldn't help but wonder if the restaurant owner was once a greengrocer! Shades of Lynn Truss.

But once I started looking, I found there were literally dozens and dozens of restaurants claiming to be licenced.

It must be an American influence because in the USA 'licenced' would be right but, in our country, I was always taught that 'licensed' was correct. When I pointed this out to Doris, she said I was being pedantic. Again, I didn't know what it meant but I took it as a compliment.

Now, I don't want to be critical of our friends in the south east of England but, while I was visiting Herbert to do the deal on the car, I used a number of local authority pay-and-display car parks and in every one of them were prominently displayed notices asking drivers 'Have you paid and displayed'.

Is it really too much to ask local authorities to use question marks when asking questions?

And it's not just in the south east.

The other day, Doris and I went to visit some friends who live in Milverton, quite near the church.

We parked the car on a road that bore the sign 'St. Michaels Hill'. Pardon me, but I think it would be correct to call the road 'St. Michael's Hill'. It makes all the difference.

Similarly, there is a delightful little church in the village of Fitzhead. It calls itself St. James' Church. If we all agree that St. James was a person, then I believe that a church belonging to him ought to be afforded an apostrophe 's', as in St. James's Church.

I am all for the English language evolving to meet the needs of a changing society. The way we speak and write today is different from (to?) how we would have done a generation ago. But I draw the line at text abbreviations creeping into everyday use (Phones4U!).

And I am more than concerned by the intrusive use of the word 'like' in everyday conversation. The other day, my teenaged granddaughter was telling me about her day. 'Laura was like "What planet are you from?" and I was like "I just need some bread to top up my mobile";' she said.

I'm not really sure I understood any of it and I was certainly baffled by the function of the word 'like' in their exchange.

Doris says that I get myself wound up about things that don't matter, and she may well have a point. But I have certain standards and I am sad to see these being eroded on an almost daily basis. What do you think?

Herbie Best