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KUMAR SHRESTHA

# Tarai tinderbox

## There's a brush fire igniting in the tarai, but Kathmandu is too distracted to pay attention

SUMAN PRADHAN

While the seven-party government focuses on delicate negotiations with the Maoists, sections of the tarai, where 48.4 percent of the nation's population lives, are descending into turmoil.

Vigilantism and anti-Maoist activity are turning into sometimes violent ethnically-laced evictions and abductions. Separatist sentiments are getting populist play, while among the intellectual moderate majority there are debates on how the tarai could be best represented in restructuring.

Maoists, ex-Maoists, separatists and moderates all see a Nepal polarised between hill and plain. For many Madhesi, anger from long-felt discrimination fuelled by radicalised identity politics is boiling over.

Over the past year, Jaya Krishna Goit's Tarai Janatantrik Mukti Morcha (TJMM), which has been battling Maoists since late 2004, has also been hounding the Pahadiya community, mainly in the central-eastern tarai but also in adjoining areas. Families are rushing to sell off houses and land, and migrate to the hills.

"This trend has picked up recently, many of my friends from Rajbiraj have settled in Kathmandu," confirms former NC minister Jay Prakash Gupta 'Anand' who is now general secretary of the Madhesee Janaadhikar Forum (MJM).

A recent UN situation report also states that the situation in some tarai districts was 'rather volatile...especially in early June'. It said the TJMM issued threats against hill ethnic groups settled in the tarai asking them to go back to their villages.

Much of the unrest stems from a rift in the Madhesi movement, between ex-Maoists Goit and his arch-rival, Maoist leader Matrika Prasad Yadav.

The issues themselves go deeper, including identity politics and a sense of discrimination felt by the Madhesi. All of this is fanning radicalism in Nepal's resource-rich breadbasket.

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editors@nepalitimes.com,  
www.nepalitimes.com

Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Chief Editor: Kunda Dixit  
Associate Editor: Anagha Neelakantan  
Design: Kiran Maharjan Web: Bhushan Shilpakar  
Vicepresident Corporate Affairs: Sneh Sayami  
Advertising: Sambhu Guragain advertising@himalmedia.com  
Subscription: subscription@himalmedia.com  
Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur  
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu Tel: 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013  
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018



## PLAINS SPEAKING

As if we didn't have enough problems already, the tarai is flaring up.

While the ceasefire has restored relative calm over much of the country, in the eastern tarai districts of Saptari and Siraha the war never really stopped. The Maoists and their breakaway Tarai Janatantrik Mukti Morcha (TJMM) are battling it out with killings and abductions (see p1,11). What's brewing there is an ominous sign of the way things could go if the tarai grievances are not addressed promptly and decisively.

On the surface, this is a struggle for leadership of the tarai constituency between two militant leaders: Matrika Yadav of the Maoist Tarai Mukti Morcha and his arch-rival Jaya Krishna Goit of the TJMM. The two had a major falling out when they were Maoists.

Now, both are using long-standing injustices done to Nepal's Madhesi community: some four million people of the tarai don't have Nepali citizenship, many are treated like second-class citizens and face daily harassment. And in the backdrop is always competition for land among the original people of the tarai, hill settlers, and more recent migrants from India. The seeds of this crisis were sown by King Mahendra's transmigration program that changed the demographics of the plains and inner-tarai valleys.

Goit's group has now chased out most pahadi staff from government offices and schools in Saptari and Siraha. In Rupendehi and Nawalparasi, ethnic tension is mixed up with vigilantism. The resultant fear is taking symbolic forms, such as people not wearing the Nepali cap any more because it marks them as a hill person. These are ominous signs, all too reminiscent of scenes leading up to ethnic cleansing elsewhere in the world.

The NC and the UML, despite their preoccupation with the peace process, have tried to come to grips with tarai citizenship. The Nepali Congress central committee recently took the politically sensitive decision to set a cut-off date for citizenship. While some will say the NC went too far, the madhesi community says it doesn't go far enough. While citizenship is vitally important for those who don't have it, in madhesi politics it is seen more as part of the larger problem of discrimination.

The space for compromise and negotiation is narrowing. Yet if we don't find them, this could turn ugly. We've seen it around the world: whenever ethnic divisions and separatist sentiments are mixed with politics, they invariably turn underlying resentment into a long messy war. That is something this country simply can't afford.



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# Clean up politics

## And corruption elsewhere will wither away

If democracy does not stop corruption, corruption will stop democracy. As soon as the interim constitution is adopted and an interim government formed, another kind of transition will commence that will last till the constituent assembly is elected. After that a new constitution will lead to a popularly elected government taking charge.



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Ratna S Shrestha**

A period as fluid as this is fraught with challenges, but also affords opportunity to design a future Nepal and decide its direction. How the future constitution is designed and structured will determine whether corruption can be eliminated so it doesn't destroy democracy. Politicians and bureaucrats brand businessmen as smugglers and profiteers. Businessmen call them crooks. Mom and pop NGOs have expanded this triangle into a quadrangle of corruption in which everyone benefits.

A party spending Rs 10,000 a month to maintain a single district office has to spend more than Rs 9 million a year in recurring expenses just to have a presence in 75 districts. Then there are elections. People fight elections not just to become parliamentarians but to become ministers so they can recover the investment made to win elections. If a candidate and his party jointly spend a modest Rs 300,000 in a campaign, multiply that by 205 constituencies and the total is Rs 61.5 million. Where

are the candidates and political parties going to get that kind of money?

The answer: the business community intent on cashing in later, bureaucrats hoping for lucrative postings and NGOs wanting looser regulation. Whoever finances the politician will recover the investment with interest by means fair or foul. Nearly all other forms of corruption stems from that at a political level. Therefore, if politicians desist from corrupt practices, corruption by the other three arms of the quadrangle will wither away, if not be eliminated all together.

The following four measures need to be incorporated into the interim constitution and the one that the constituent assembly will eventually promulgate. Political parties aren't transparent and financially accountable at present, so first it should be mandatory for all political parties to publish each year's audited financial statements within three months of the fiscal year end. Parties failing to do so should not be allowed to field candidates for elections. Donations to political parties, within a limit, should be admissible as expenses for tax purposes. And one could even consider state funding for parties so they don't have to depend on businesses.

Political parties lead pro-democracy movements, but have no democracy within themselves. This engenders nepotism and favouritism, especially with dominant castes and families. The wrong elements corner important party positions, bolstering corruption. The new constitution should therefore make inclusive internal democracy in parties mandatory.

The most radical suggestion is the formation of an apolitical cabinet. Currently, the judiciary is independent from both the executive and legislature. However, people from the legislature populate the cabinet. Only the head of government should be elected by popular vote. He then puts together a technocrat cabinet from outside parliament, vetted by parliamentary hearing. This would stop politicians fighting elections with the express purpose of becoming ministers to make money. This will also stop ministers from nursing their constituencies while neglecting the rest of the country. Parliamentarians will also be able to concentrate on their legislative functions and monitoring the cabinet's work without being involved in the ministerial rat race.

Finally, the Auditor General's Office requires more teeth to transform it from being a mere watchdog into an organisation able to stem corruption at its root by adding a treasury function. Parallels exist in India and the United States, where these bodies are empowered to stop disbursement to errant organisations. Such an institution is called the Comptroller General's Office in India and General Accounting Office in the US. Corruption will decrease substantially when these two policy changes and two institutional modifications are incorporated in the new constitution. Corrupt people may then be ostracised, and corruption treated with abhorrence, as it should be. ●

Ratna Sansar Shrestha is a chartered accountant and attorney-at-law.

# Saving ourselves from relapse

## Good sense has prevailed, but the road ahead is still bumpy

The peace process was tottering early this week when Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala repeated his old drivel about ceremonial monarchy. It was not an off-the-cuff remark of a geriatric chief executive. Koirala merely stated publicly what was being whispered in



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
**C K Lal**

Baluwatar: the peace deal had to be on terms dictated by the invisible but influential 'international community'.

Predictably, Baburam Bhattarai foamed at the mouth and issued dire threats about the peace process being in tatters. For a day or two, it appeared as if the seven-party government was once again going to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

Mercifully, this one was sorted out. The government and insurgents sent similar but

separate letters to the UN on Wednesday asking it to help in five areas: human rights, truce monitoring, rebel encampment, army containment, and constituent assembly elections. For now, this has opened the door for Maoist participation in an interim government. However, doubts remain over the mechanism. The devil lies in detail and there is risk that misunderstandings may resurface. The Maoist leadership and the government will have to learn to tolerate occasional lapses and also refrain from making matters worse by playing brinkmanship.

The UN system is not exactly renowned for speedy response. Pressed with other hotspots, Kofi Annan may not be able to come our way with sirens blazing. The UN also needs to consult other stakeholders, the international community and then thrash out the details before dispatching a weapons management team to Kathmandu.

But in Nepal the government and the Maoists need to keep up the peace momentum.

The Maoists must check their wayward cadres in the countryside. The kangaroo courts still being run in some parts of the country by the self-declared 'people's government' need to be dismissed right away. Rebels must also make sure that their guerrillas adhere to the combatant and weapons management system that has been proposed for monitoring by UN experts.

The responsibilities of the government are even more complex. Despite the assertions of some parliamentarians, almost nobody in the country believes that the Nepal Army has submitted unequivocally to civilian control. In a strange press release issued by the army's Directorate of Public Relations on Tuesday COAS Thapa was quoted as telling PM Koirala that he was "extremely positive"

toward the peace process initiated by the government, and would support it to meet people's aspiration for peace. It did sound like he was saying it through gritted teeth.

The cabinet and the seven party leaders must also not be under any illusion about the intentions of Messrs Moriarty, Mukherji & Co. They are here to advance their own national interest, not ours. Even now, most diplomats would be quite happy if the Maoists can somehow be kept out of government in Nepal. Whether Messrs Koirala, Sherchan and Oli too want or can do the same is for them to decide. But they have no right to put the future of peace in jeopardy just because some of the dips don't like to see Grey Shirts being chauffeured around town in government vehicles.

Good sense has saved us from a conflict relapse. It needs to be nurtured. The journey towards peace is still long and arduous. ●



## LETTERS

## DISARM

Too much is made of managing the Maoists' arms. The seven-party government itself has lacked a cohesive opinion, and it is quite ridiculous to find even civil society intelligentsia derailing the whole debate with the paranoia of *regressive coup* before the election. Nowhere in the world do rebels get the keep the option of revolting again open if the negotiated settlement produces an outcome that differs from their manifesto. Why did the SPA not come out with a strong and unequivocal demand that the rebels disarm first? A shaky decision now may lead to an unprecedented political catastrophe in the country.

**Pradeepta Sharma, Mumbai**

## BARNYARD WISDOM

An alternative parable in place of the one you propose in your editorial ('Peace riddle', #309) might be the story of the frog and the scorpion. The scorpion convinces the frog to take him across the pond, even though the frog is deeply suspicious of the scorpion's intent.

Halfway across the pond, the scorpion stings, and when the dying frog

country at any moment. Neither should be treated favourably, or as a stepson. Nepal could look to South Africa's transition in bringing the army and guerrilla groups together successfully.

Plato wrote, "mankind will not get rid of its evils until either the class of those who philosophise in truth and rectitude reach political power, or those most powerful in cities, under some divine dispensation, really get to philosophising." As long as the politicians do not learn to speak the truth to the people, your editorial ('Peace riddle', #308) will stand. "The national mood tends to swing from euphoria to hopelessness."

**S Tuladhar, Geneva**

## WHEELING DEALING

The royal government, being what it was, may have ordered the two useless, outdated, and dangerous MA-60 planes for the army from China and paid the \$5 million advance ('No plane dealing', #309). But why is this new (loktantrik) government not scrapping the deal altogether? Even \$5 million will be nothing compared to the potential dangers that these planes pose for the people and the total loss they will cause if ever they are put in service, having no insurance etc. As the remaining payments are being made only now, who is pocketing the \$8 million dollars being paid over the cost price—Ram Sharan Mahat, the seven or eight parties, and in what proportion? Bad wine will always be bad, even if it comes in brand new loktantrik bottles.

**Rajendra Khadga, Kathmandu**

- Thanks to Suman Pradhan for unveiling the story of the controversial Chinese aircraft deal. I as a taxpayer am disappointed that Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat has sided with the army chief to okay the deal.

How much can we lose to protect 'bilateral ties'?

**Shiva L Bhusal, via email**

- We are glad to know through your paper that Sharad Chandra Shah is behind the dubious Chinese aircraft deal ('Not plane dealing', #309). Please print some evidence and we will expose him ruthlessly for the people's verdict. Otherwise, we will do the same to you. Somebody is getting away with lots of things and we will not tolerate it anymore.

**R. Parajuli, fax**

## CORRECTION

The article 'Once and future champions' (#309) should have said: Kanishka Chaugain was the captain of the under-19 Nepali cricket squad. Shakti Gauchan's quote reads as follows: "If we come out as a winner in the ACC Trophy, we'll secure a place in ICC Cricket World Cup's qualifying games; if we come out as runners, we'll qualify for Asia Cup." Finally, there are 17 teams in the ACC, but Nepal does not need to play all of them.

## FOUNDING FATHER

There have been efforts in the past to discredit King Prithbi Narayan Shah to meet vested political interests. Vandalising his statue was a hollow attempt by the Maoists to push their republican agenda, but it hurt the sentiments of Nepalis, whose very sense of identity comes from this man ('Prithbi Narayan's message', #308).

Maoist rhetoric goes that this country was not unified, but pulled together for one man's ambition. Enough is enough; there is a limit to one's tolerance. We Nepalis know well that Nepal was and is integrated in the real sense by King Prithbi.

Our government, which calls itself a Nepali government, should show some respect for the man who made that possible, and restore the idol to its previous self.

**Pratt Rana, via email**

## NATIONAL MYTH

I agree with Bharat Basnet's worries on how to foster inclusive nationalism, if that is what he means by a 'stronger nation' ('Prithbi Narayan's message', #308). But despite his good intentions, Basnet's assessment just echoes the fabricated historical narratives popularised under Panchayati Raj.

Does 'stronger praja' (from *Dibyopadesh*) really mean 'empowered people', or does it mean *baliya janata*—strong subjects—who could work and provide labour for the landlord? The king was *bhupati*, lord of the land. Semantics matter, when the contexts of such phrases are obscured to make them fit contemporary national myths. Who authored these phrases and who interpreted them? Who gained by its telling and who suffered? One way of staying in power is by writing a history that masquerades as unquestionable truth.

During PN's time, territorial conquest to become a maharaja was common. But this unification didn't bring 'unity', unless by that we mean a social order of the victors. In *Dibyopadesh*, Shah says, 'I've earned this land by dint of my sword,' having defeated so and so. Would janajatis and others depicted as conquered subjects see this as a legacy of unity or pluralism? Of course this territorial unification was significant for the later historical formations of the nation-state of Nepal. But to see a single historical actor or action as historical saviours from colonial powers is to ignore political-economic history.

Basnet finds it 'ironic' that the various groups demanding their rights in front of the Singha Darbar are standing at the foot of the great king of justice. Sure, there was a saying 'Go to Gorkha if you don't get justice', but many times in Gorkhali history there was terror and suppression—for example, what PN and his army did to the people of Kirtipur, and later to the Kirati people.

Prithbi Narayan's 'garden of all castes' homily is held up as an instance of concern with pluralism. But PN also naturalised the caste hierarchy by defining his country as a garden of high and low castes. He claimed that his country was '*asali Hindustaan*' untainted by Muslims and Christians. How is this an inspirational message for pluralism?

The unification came at the price of wounds inflicted on different subjects, communities and cultures. Many of the 'crowds' that Basnet sees at the foot of the masked statue are acknowledging the historical wounds and envisioning a Nepali nationalism that does not credit any single historical actor for what we are today. The women, janjatis, 'freed' kamaiyas, Madhesis, Muslims aren't just standing at the foot of a masked statue laden with symbolism. They are citizens with political agency standing up to Singha Darbar, where Prithbi Narayan's messages often become stand-ins for real debate.

The essence of Bharat

Basnet's message is important, but his choice of historical actor to carry that message is misplaced.

**Janak Rai, Tribhuban University**



looks up at him with a bewildered look, the scorpion says, "What can I say, it's in my nature." Both die. We all know who the scorpion is.

**SB Shrestha, via email**

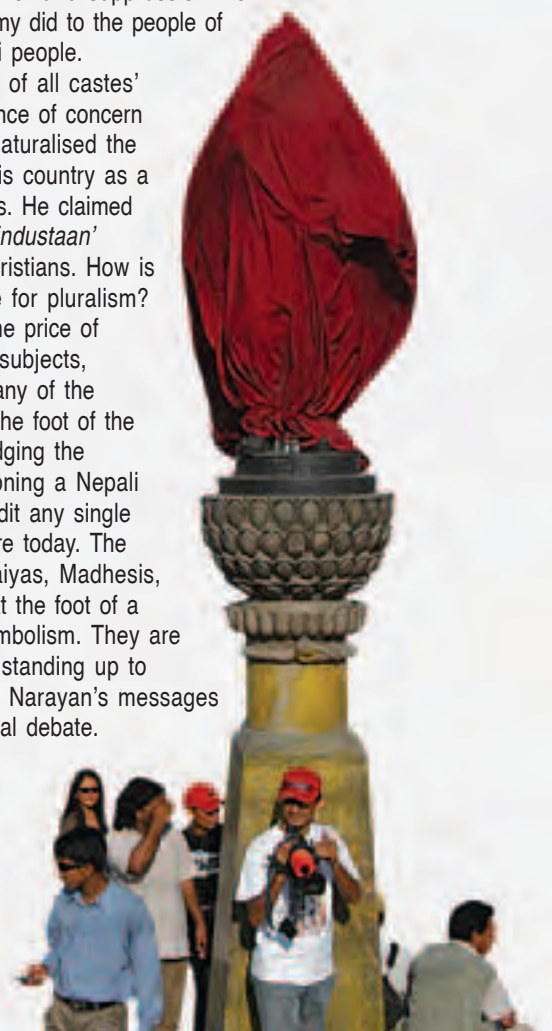
- Last week's editorial ('Peace riddle', #309) presented the real deadlock between the Maoists and the seven-party government starkly with the apt analogy of the farmer, the grass, the goat, and the tiger. The deadlock is a crisis of confidence that was clearly exposed by the two side's differences on managing their two armed forces. The blueprint offered by CK Lal ('The elusive formula', State of the State, #309) seems plausible, if not complete.

**Prakash Pangeni, via email**

## TRUTH-TELLING

The SPA, the Maoists, and other players lack sincerity, transparency, honesty, and unity. The political discourse now should be on what is right and what is wrong and who gets what and who takes responsibility.

The government must consider the Nepal army and Maoist military wing as formidable forces that can destabilise the



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Coming soon...





# Radio activity in Palpa

Nepal's rural radio proves the medium is the mediator



KUNDA DIXIT in PALPA

When an approaching storm rattled window panes at the Nepal Army barracks here last week, the sentry guards thought the base was under attack and let off a volley of warning fire.

The Maoists, who had been holding a mass meeting to push their agenda of Magar autonomy promptly issued a statement accusing the army of firing at them. Although things may seem outwardly calm here in the hills of central Nepal, incidents like these prove this is a hair-trigger ceasefire.

In the bazar, Maoist extortion is intense. The hotel in which rebel leader Ram Bahadur Thapa is staying has been taken over by Maoist militia. Visitors aren't allowed and those who enter are body searched. The lobby is full of Comrade Badal's bodyguards stretched out on the sofas watching news of the de Mistura visit on tv.

The district capital of Tansen still shows scars of war: the old palace that

housed the local administration is in ruin—a daily reminder to Palpalis of the Maoist attack on the night of 3 February in which at least 16 people were killed. There is a plan to rebuild the palace, but some want to keep it as a reminder of the senseless waste of war.

Up on the ridge overlooking the town, Radio Paschimanchal was literally caught in the crossfire that night. In the dark, a small army patrol ran right into one flank of the attacking Maoist force and a fierce firefight ensued. The soldiers ran up to the roof of the hotel above the radio's studio while 400 Maoists went on surrounding rooftops.

There are still bullet holes in the studio's acoustic panels. On the roof, station manager Damodar Khanal shows us the damaged antenna, pock-marked and bent by bullets. "The battle lasted all night, and we found the bodies of two soldiers right here, next to piles of cartridges," Khanal says.

Radio Paschimanchal is one of four FM stations in Palpa and was out of air for three weeks after the attack, it has resumed broadcast but at only one-third its



PICS: KUNDA DIXIT

**RADIO CONTACT:** The Radio Paschimanchal studio in Tansen which was recently renovated after being damaged during a Maoist attack in February and (right) station manager Damodar Khanal.

transmitting capacity. "Many people said that they'd help, and the government promised compensation, but we still can't transmit at full strength because we don't have Rs 300,000 for the transmitter," Khanal says.

In April, this radio as well as FM stations across the country played a critical role in defying government control on information and spreading the word about the pro-democracy movement through news, interviews and studio discussions.

Radio Paschimanchal is part of a network of over a dozen district stations that exchanged news and programs about the intensifying protests during the uprising. Its partner station in Kathmandu, Nepal FM 91.8, brought news of what was happening in Palpa and elsewhere to the capital as news of the street agitation in Kathmandu was beamed

live across Nepal.

Radio journalists and producers from across the country met in Kathmandu last week to analyse their own role in the April uprising and brainstorm about how to strengthen the role of medium in supporting public debate and free speech. District FM stations were banned from broadcasting news for four months, later they were harassed and some were raided for trying to do independent journalism. In Tansen, radio stations banned from airing news and current affairs turned to SLC coaching classes which became widely popular.

"It was community radio that gave voice to people who would not otherwise have been heard," says Min Bahadur Shahi whose group runs Karnali FM in Jumla, "during the conflict the medium played the role of a mediator." However, Shahi says Karnali FM is often off the air because of transmitter problems caused by unreliable power supply, and the lack of kerosene for the backup generator.

Now that democracy has been restored, seemingly small logistical problems like these have prevented community radio stations to fulfil their true potential. Station owners are also critical of the government which they say only pays lip service to radio. Although Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat in his budget wrote off for this year the annual Rs 200,000 royalty that FM stations have to pay to the government other taxes remain.

"The government says information is a citizen's right but we have to pay income tax, VAT, a four percent levy on all transactions and excise," points out Raghu Mainali of the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters. The irony is that other businesses that invest in remote areas of Nepal are eligible to a tax holiday.

There are nearly 100 applications for new FM stations pending at the Ministry of Information and Communications and the association wants the registration process streamlined and expedited. Radio journalists say more FM stations are needed for public debate and education since most people don't know what a constituent assembly is.

"Even commercial FM stations like ours played a key role in conflict resolution and during the democracy movement," says Khanal in Palpa, "so the government can't make a distinction between commercial and non-profit radio in rural areas." ●

# Go, go dancers

ALOK TUMBAHANGPHEY

Dance bars around Nepal attract all kinds of attention. Customers, salacious or bored, looking for a drink and a show. Cops on the take. Women's rights and labour activists. The moral outrage brigade.

Now these diverse groups are coming together to counter the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Women's Organisation – Revolutionary (ANWO-R). In late July the organisation started a "preliminary investigation" into the dance bar, *dohori*, and cabin restaurant business. The Maoist women seem to have sent the message: "clean up the dance bars, or we will." When contacted, ANWO-R downplayed the issue, saying it was a small part of its larger political awareness program.

But the dance bar owners and the police are not taking the 'investigation' lightly, and neither are labour unions and NGOs, who believe that dance and *dohori* restaurants come under the purview of 'civil society'. It's almost a turf war, and who calls the shots is significant.

Three weeks ago, faced with the ANWO-R investigation, the police sent a letter to owners directing them to stop nude dancing, among other things, or face closure. In response, about 50 dance bar owners got together to figure out how to save their businesses, and

formed the Nepal Dance Bar Entrepreneurs' Association.

They consulted the Nepali Congress (D)-affiliated Democratic Confederation of Nepalese Trade Unions (DECONTU), the Nepal Police, and members of various civil society groups, and came up with a code of conduct. While this motley crew of previously opposed groups wrote the code jointly, it is to be "self-imposed", says Sameer Gurung, president of the owners' association.

Though the business has grown enormously in the last dozen or so years, it is all illegal. Bars, even regular ones,

## Maoist women keep dance bar owners and police on their toes

may not legally stay open after 10PM. The Hotel Management Sale and Distribution of Alcohol Control Act 2023 also prohibits what it calls "obscene and vulgar dances". Dance bars started up in Kathmandu in the mid-90s and were tolerated in large part because gentrified versions already existed in the city's casinos.

The Nepal Police has for years played a cat and mouse



KIRAN PANDAY



## NGOs under pressure

Maoists in Arghakhanchi and Parbat districts want local and international NGOs working in the districts to register with their ‘people’s government’, pay taxes, and seek permission for every activity. NGO staff have been asked to pay five percent of their salary as monthly tax. Aid workers are concerned that this has already led to suspension of several poverty-alleviation, income generation and forestry activities. “Many NGO workers are now really afraid to go and work in remote villages where they are needed the most,” said Padam Pal from the NGO Federation of Dadeldhura. Maoist leaders in Kathmandu have expressed their commitment not to hinder development and humanitarian work.

## Janajati demands

World Indigenous People’s Day was marked in Kathmandu on Wednesday with a two-day political conference on constituent assembly elections and re-structuring of the state. The National Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NFIN) and along with the seven-party affiliated Indigenous People’s United Struggle Committee also issued a manifesto. The 24-point document includes, among others, demands for a representative national political convention to decide the interim government and interim parliament, a representational election system to vote in political and community representative, and 50 percent seats reserved for women at all levels.

Dr Om Gurung, NFIN general secretary, academics Dr Harka Gurung and Krishna Bhattachan, and former NFIN general secretary Krishna Mabuhang also met with Maoist leaders Prachanda and Baburam Bhattarai last week to discuss janajati-related issues.

## Easier imports

India has revoked the 4 percent additional customs duty on specified goods manufactured in Nepal and exported to India. Exemption was given on primary goods in June 2006, during prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala’s visit to New Delhi to meet Indian premier Manmohan Singh. Nepal’s exports have been hurt by the additional duty for the past five months.

### NEW PRODUCTS

**SANITARY PADS:** Jasmine Hygiene Products has introduced Safety Sanitary Pads Eco-Ultra. The new pad comes with dry net cover, gel core flow guide groove, all sides seal and adhesive system. The product is priced at Rs 60 for a 10-pack and is available at all drug stores.

**NEW BRANCH:** Siddhartha Bank opened its fifth branch in Pokhara, at New Road, offering complete banking services. The four-year-old bank already has branches at Kamaladi and New Road in Kathmandu, and Birganj and Biratnagar outside the Valley.



game with dance bars owners and dancers, arresting them and letting them go after payment of a fine. Often, the proliferation of dance bars, and what goes on inside them is explained with the argument that many members of the police force have a financial interest in the business.

Owners, police, labour unions, and dancers we spoke to all said the only way to improve conditions is to legalise the business. DSP Pradhuma Karki, who prepared a report on dance bars after ANWO-R’s investigation began, says the only license any restaurant or bar needs is that permitting the sale of alcohol. And even that, he says frustrated, is a bureaucratic trap: “They have to register in four places and we are supposed to ‘follow up’. It’s just not possible for us to stop it, but if we legalise the business, we can monitor the excesses.”

Nude dancing is cited as the worst of the ‘excesses’. Rama Poudyal, chair of DECONTU’s women’s committee, believes in legalisation and better management practices, but says there must also be limits. “Employees in these bars are there to work, not sell their bodies,” she argues.

At a recent meeting, the owners’ group agreed in the short term to stop the nude dances. As of last weekend, not everyone had put this into practice. In the long term, they agreed to try and “make the business more respectable and organised, and bring it under legal jurisdiction.” They say their business is real economic activity, and a good potential source of revenue for the government.

Owners, dancers, women and labour rights groups, and

police we spoke to all buy the law enforcement and economic arguments, but the stigma attached to working in—and owning—a dance bar is harder to eradicate. Even as owners say they’re willing to clean up their act if a law comes into effect, nearly everyone we spoke to requested anonymity. A straw poll of some women who do dance suggests that for them, the financial gains outweigh the ‘shame’. Many argued for legalisation to reduce sexual harassment, improve working conditions, and slowly strip away the taboo.



A dance bar customer wears his feelings on his T-shirt.

need to be expanded if the new laws are to legislate reality on the ground, rather than enforce morality. “It’s easy for radical groups to target dance bars,” she says, “but not all who work there are sex workers, and compared to other underprivileged women they make good money.” Malla says we need to examine our social values, if anything, because “It [dance bar work] is a question of voluntary choice, though as long as there is demand there will be supply.” ●

# Elephant in the room

## Do we like what Nepal will look like if the Maoists have their way?

What do life, liberty and pursuit of property mean to the Maoists? Nothing, if recent newspaper items are to be interpreted. The items present a disturbing trailer



STRICTLY BUSINESS  
Ashutosh Tiwari

of life in Nepal for 25 million Nepalis in the near future, brought about by thirty thousand Maoists. In the evergreen words of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, such a life will happen according to “the people’s wishes”.

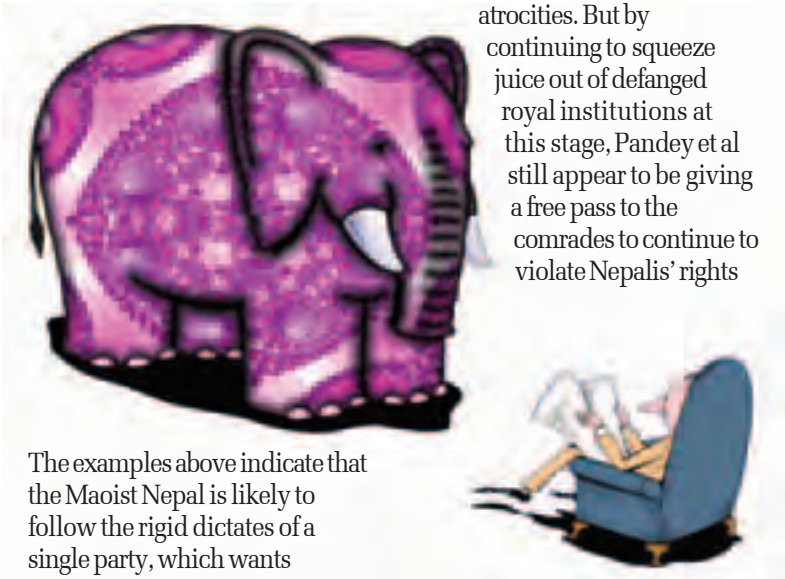
Consider the case of two hapless Maoist lovers Man Bahadur Moktan, 20, and Muna Humagain, 18, who flung themselves to safety at a Kavre police station recently. Earlier, they were in a Maoist prison, undergoing a punishment for committing a ‘cultural crime’—a clumsy phrase meaning ‘sex between consenting adults who fail to invite Politburo members to peer in from the windows’.

Or, consider the case of Rajendra Karki of Morang, kidnapped on his way to a pilgrimage in late July. Or, Ram Tamang of Sunsari, sent off to a ‘labour detention camp’ to toil in the field of a Maoist adherent. Or the report that Maoists continue to collect steep tolls on the highways from buses and trucks to provide, well, “security to vehicles as security forces failed to do so.” And what is one to think when the Maoist law primer, compiled by one-time architect Babu Ram Bhattarai, declares that private property is a source of crime, and therefore, as per *The Communist Manifesto*

(1848), has to be abolished?

Had people affiliated with the Nepal Army or the present government been caught suggesting, let alone committing, similar acts, a big *hangama* would have erupted. But because rifle-toting comrades are involved, no one knows just what to say and how loudly. And all one senses is a nervous hush, even while degrees of freedoms get reduced.

But it’s that hush which allows the Maoists to remain blindingly clear-eyed about earning their version of a communist utopia in Nepal soon.



The examples above indicate that the Maoist Nepal is likely to follow the rigid dictates of a single party, which wants everyone to chant slogans from a single book. Such a Nepal is likely to be intolerant of individual voices, dissenting opinions, diversities of views, behaviours and mores. That Nepal is further likely to see dubious social rights trumping inalienable individual rights—in the name of specious justice.

And as the law primer suggests, debate is likely to be heresy, while doubt will be considered a sin. Meanwhile, justifications will be served, with the usual leftist phrases in

the cadence of Nepali *bhasa* belonging to the era of Bhanubhakta. The sales pitch will be the same: The radical change is compulsory to set the inequities of the past 300 years correct in a few years with Maoism. No attention will be paid to why, alas, no one freely wants to copy such a ‘scientific system’ anywhere else on the planet.

In a recent Kantipur op-ed, socialist and civil society leader Devendra Raj Pandey worried more about the SPA’s wavering stance toward royal institutions than about the Maoists’ ongoing atrocities. But by continuing to squeeze juice out of defanged royal institutions at this stage, Pandey et al still appear to be giving a free pass to the comrades to continue to violate Nepalis’ rights

to have life, liberty and property, as though somehow such violations were not a harbinger of atrocities to come.

Pandey’s wish was that if only our *netas* behaved better, all would be fine. But who’s to tell him that, in the long run, our democracy’s causes are far better served by flawed politicians answerable to diverse, competing voices than by a sure-fire cabal of radicals who assert that they alone possess the truth which they want to foist upon all with the barrel of a gun? ●

## We have a deal

Boots on the ground, it won’t be. But a civilian UN operation to monitor arms and armies could begin in a matter of weeks, thanks to a joint invitation sent on Wednesday to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan by Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist chairman Prachanda.

Annan announced in New York on Thursday that he was satisfied with the invitation. Contained in separate but identical letters signed by Koirala and Prachanda, the invitation is based on a five-point agreement asking the UN to deploy qualified civilian personnel to monitor and verify confinement of combatant armies and their weapons within designated cantonment areas. It also asks that modalities for all arrangements, including of arms and munitions, be worked out at a later date between the parties and the UN. The deal will confine both the PLA and Nepal Army in their respective barracks.

It now falls upon Annan, who has been using his “good offices” channel to nudge Nepal towards a peace settlement, to ask either the UN General Assembly or Security Council for an expanded UN mandate, sealing the world body’s long-term involvement.



Left to right: Home Minister Krishna Sitaula, Maoist spokesperson Krishna B Mahara, member of Maoist talks team Deb Gurung, and acting UN Resident Coordinator for Nepal Abraham Abraham at the handover of the letter.



# Unicameral legislature

Balkrishna Basnet in *Kantipur*, 9 August

The Interim Constitution Drafting Committee, which will present its draft constitution, is leaving unresolved political issues to the government and Maoist negotiating teams. The draft envisages a unicameral interim parliament but does not speak about its structure and number of members.

Committee Coordinator Laxman Prasad Aryal said final preparations were underway to hand over the draft Wednesday morning. [Note: The draft was not in fact delivered as planned.] “We are not in favour of extending the committee’s tenure,” he said. “We will present the draft with the issues already agreed upon.”

The committee had repeatedly urged all sides to come to a common understanding regarding interim parliament, arms management and procedures for a constituent assembly. “No understanding has been reached on the big political issues, so we see no alternative but to present those issues for the negotiating teams to resolve,” committee member Shambhu Thapa said. The draft to be presented by the committee will only include theoretical aspects of interim

parliament, interim government and the constituent assembly process.

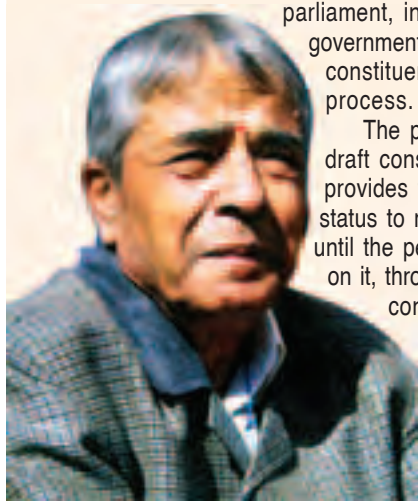
The proposed draft constitution provides for the king’s status to remain as is until the people decide on it, through the constituent assembly. Though the preamble has not been

finalised, the understanding is that it should enshrine loktantrik governance, sovereignty of the people, individual and human rights, and a new constitution formed on the basis of constituent assembly elections as mandated by the people’s movement.

Many of the 16 committee members can’t arrive at a consensus because the parliamentary parties and Maoists haven’t yet agreed on many issues, and everyone is arguing for their own party and side. Committee sources say that there were long arguments over a Maoist proposal to enshrine a federal loktantrik republic in the preamble and about their demand that people’s courts be recognised as equal to government courts.

Also undecided is who will promulgate the interim constitution. The draft allows extension of the interim constitution by six months if a new constitution is not ready within the stipulated one-year period. It states that the main responsibility of the Election Commission, which will have three commissioners, would be to hold constituent assembly elections. Similarly, to hear cases pertaining to election disputes, the draft constitution provides for a constitutional court comprising of three sitting justices of the Supreme Court. Though it has been agreed that judges at all levels should be re-appointed, the exact procedure has not been decided. A member explained the debate is over which organ should re-appoint the judges: the judicial council or the interim parliament.

Thapa said citizen’s rights have been expanded in the draft, and that if the parties and Maoists had reached an agreement, a good draft that addressed key issues could have been finalised. “The constitution is a political document of compromise. If the political views are divided, then just writing a draft will not do,” he said. Thapa feels that the inability [as of Wednesday] of the two sides to write a letter to the UN on arms management has affected the drafting committee as well.



## No dream job

Nepal, 13 August

नेपाल

Yambahadur Sherma collapsed under the weight of a 500 kg sandbag [sic] while working for a sand-casting company in a small town five hours from Seoul. The bag was supposed to be lifted by a loader but the company bosses forced her to do it instead. She was hospitalised for 10 months and is under medical care for 17 months. Her right leg was severely injured and she has been unable to walk properly ever since.

The company refused to take any responsibility for her hospitalisation as a result of hazards at the workplace. Sherma received only 11 months of basic salary. To make matters worse, the company made a decision not to renew her visa and deported her home. She has appealed to Amnesty International through a local association of Nepali workers.

Sherma dreamt of earning a lot of money, so she took a huge loan to travel abroad for work. She shut down her photo studio in her village in Panchthar and went first to Qatar and then to Seoul. But in the end, this not only worsened her financial state but also affected her health. “All my dreams have been shattered,” says 38-year-old Sherma. She has to support four daughters in her village but does not know how, as she also has to return a huge loan to her

moneylender.

During the 1990s, a large number of Nepalis had headed to South Korea hoping to become rich. The reality is different. Most of the over 8,000 Nepalis there work under difficult conditions. Madan Khadga has been hospitalised for the past two months after he injured his leg while at work. Iswar Chandra Rai lost both his eyes. Khagendra Kumari’s index finger got chopped off by a work machine. At least 700 Nepali workers have been disabled. Over 80 have died in the last 10 years. There is no Nepali embassy or contact office to offer assistance or to fight for justice and against exploitation by employers. The situation would be better if Nepal could forge a bilateral understanding with the South Korean government.

## Madi waits

Dristi, 8 August

मडि

The victims of last year’s Madi incident have still not been compensated by the Maoists. They may have started their campaign to demand a federal republic from Madi, but the Maoists’ big words and campaigns mean nothing to Bishnu Maya BK, one of the victims the attack. She has lost the little respect she had for the Maoists and is tired of being consoled by people. “They come, take our pictures, talk to us and then leave. What do I get from all that?” asks the still-grieving BK.



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It has been a year since the Maoists blew up a bus at Bandarmude river, Madi, claiming the lives of 38 passengers and injuring many. BK, who comes from Ganeshkunj, was travelling with her one-year-old daughter. When the bus exploded, her left leg was injured, as was her daughter's. Both have difficulty walking. BK's husband is mentally ill, and her other children have been so traumatised by the incident that they are scared to go to school.

The Maoists came to her house last week to ask her to attend a public campaign function for a federal republic. She went, expecting the Maoists to offer her a public apology or compensation. They bandied her name about and garlanded each other, but BK was offered neither compensation nor an apology. Meanwhile, she is unable to work and can barely feed her family. Even going to the Maoist meeting cost her—since she couldn't work for that time, BK now has no money and no idea about how to feed her family this coming week.



EKAL SILWAL

Krishna Adhikari (above) was also handicapped for life in the Madi explosion. The drugs he now needs are so expensive, he has had to sell his land and house to finance his medication. He, too, attended the Maoist function and came away disappointed. "The Maoists blew the bus up to supposedly send a message to those in power in Kathmandu. Couldn't they compensate the innocent who suffered in the process?" Adhikari asked. Santa Bahadur Magar, husband of victim Durga Maya Magar is helpless, "I have no job, no house, and no money. How do I support my family?"

The Maoists have failed to address the nine-point demand prepared by victims of the Madi explosion. Many of the injured say that the Maoists did once promise to address their demands, but the only response to their questions from the Maoist leadership was a statement made by Debendra Paudel 'Sunil', who is in charge of Maoist southern bureau. "We are sad that so many people were killed in our fight against feudalism," he said.

Misconduct

Kantipur, 9 August

Smuggling is rampant in the border areas of Morang district, under the protection of local Maoists. Businessmen smuggle out expensive timber to India and illegally import chemical

fertilisers and textiles into Mahadeva, Jhurkiya, Burdanga, Dieniya, Rangeli, and Babiyabirta VDCs.

"The businessmen pay the Maoists a certain percentage and smuggle the goods without any interference," said Nityananda Laldas from Mahadeva VDC. The timber is said to come from the Char Kose Jhadi forest of Pathari, Urlabari, Mangalbare, and Kanepokhari.

One businessman who admits to smuggling timber and chemicals said, "No one has stopped us after we started paying the Maoists." He even claimed that he started the business on the recommendation of local Maoists. After he paid the Maoists, even the police do not interfere. Apparently, the Maoists have warned them there will be 'retaliation' if they create problems. Another businessman said the Maoists seize the goods of those who conduct business without their permission.

Although smuggling did stop briefly when the police checkpoint in Jhurkiya was reposted two weeks ago, sources say that the Maoists threatened the police again, and the illegal trade resumed. The Maoists are said to have told the police to mobilise their patrols against looters and dacoits, but not interfere anywhere else.

Morang police chief ASP Gopal Bhandari said he wasn't 'fully aware' of these goings-on, but noted that the Maoists' comments were against the ceasefire code of conduct. Bhandari also stated that the police had information about smuggling taking place under Maoist protection in rural areas, but that in the current situation they were not keeping tabs on rebel activity. "The ceasefire monitoring committee should look into the matter. We have not gone against the code of conduct or shown any extra interest in the Maoists," he said. Shakti, a local Maoist leader in Jhurkiya countered by saying that smugglers were paying regional leaders in exchange for impunity.

Anarchy

Samaya, 10 August

Interview with acting IGP, Om Bikram Rana

How would you describe the crime level in the capital? The incidents have grown. But we cannot compare the current situation to the past. The country is in a transitional phase and it is inevitable that crime will rise, perpetrated by disgruntled people. The same vigilantes who had infiltrated the loktantra movement and spread anarchy there are also now involved in criminal activities.

Is the police a mere spectator even when civilians are being attacked on the streets?

It is not possible for the police to stand and do nothing. But this does not mean we have to use force at a time when the country is in a transitional phase.

People involved in crimes in the capital are still on the loose.

We have been successful in uncovering those involved in crimes. As far as the infiltration by the vigilantes is concerned, we need everyone to be supportive and alert. The government also has to make a political decision on provisions for the security of citizens.

How about the credibility of the police?

It is true that some police are involved in crime, but the whole organisation cannot be portrayed in that way.

Can't touch me

Himal Khabarpatrika, 1-16 August

In early July, a complaint was filed at Biratnagar City Police Office accusing Dr Abhaya Kumar Thakur of fraud. Prakash Phunyal of Khotang Diktel said Thakur made him pay Rs 1,100 for medicine worth Rs 250. Thakur returned the money, but his medical degree and practice have come under scrutiny. Apparently, he employs over 200 rickshaw pullers to hang around busparks, convincing people seeking medical treatment to go to his clinic.

On receiving complaints, Morang's Public Health Office chief Nabaraj Subba conducted an investigation which found Thakur guilty. He could not even explain to the officers what his BHMS (Bachelor of Homeopathic Medicine and Surgery) medical degree stood for. "The man did not even know the full form of ISC," Subba told us. Thakur is sticking to his claim that he is recognised by the Health Workers' Commission. Although there is new evidence against him everyday, Thakur seems unfazed. "Let me see who can charge me, they can't touch me," he says.

Leave for Pyar Jung

Jana Astha, 9 August

Army officers at the headquarters met with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala yesterday to brief him about the strength of the Nepal Army. At the meeting, Girija Prasad Koirala said that he would defend the army and also indicated that a decision on the chief of army staff-designate has already been made.



KIRAN PANDAY

Thapa and Koirala later had a private meeting where the prime minister reportedly asked Thapa to go on leave from Friday and let Lieutenant General Rukmangat Katuwal, number two in the Nepal Army, take office as COAS-designate. The Nepali Congress' plan to have Katuwal succeed Thapa is slowly working. Earlier, on the prime minister's request, Thapa had decided to not take the standard one-month leave at the end of his term. The Rayamajhi commission interrogated Katuwal just last week about his role in the 1 February takeover and in suppressing Jana Andolan II.

COAS Pyar Jung Thapa was accompanied by generals from various departments to the prime minister's residence. The officers

described their roles and responsibilities to Koirala. Lieutenant General Katuwal explained the role of the operations section, while Department of Military Operations head Major General Kiran Shamsher Thapa explained how the Nepal Army has gone from 45,000 troops to 85,000 since 1999 under the Corp plan. He added that the army has had a difficult time, as it now has only one helicopter in working condition.

Many think the prime minister's decision to defend the army will be controversial, because of the many requests for investigation into the role of Nepal Army officers in suppressing Jana Andolan II. A highly placed source claims that Koirala justifies his decision by saying, "The army is demoralised, which is a threat to the defence minister, not to you. You don't need to worry as long as I am here." Koirala's stance on the army has changed from two years ago, when he had said that army officers were conspiring against him, for stopping him at a checkpoint on his way to the Tribhuban International Airport, and making his helicopter land due to 'security reasons' in Bharatpur. Army sources tell us that the officers rehearsed for a whole day before appearing for the briefing at the PM's residence.



The army is totally under our control

Abin Shrestha in Samaya, 10 August

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



It would be wisest if the palace remained quiet

RPP chairman Pasupati SJB Rana in Buddhabar, August 9



# On the

**MARTY LOGAN**  
in RUDIGAUN, BAJURA

"We harvested in April; that food was finished in May. I went to work in someone's house to earn money and when my husband came back from India, he brought one bag of rice. When that ran out, he went to Kolti and bought two bags. Then we borrowed to buy another bag and it ran out four days ago. If the (emergency) rice hadn't come, I don't know what I would have done."

It's a numbing, repetitive litany of hardship and hunger. In southern Bajura district, more than 500 m above the narrow, mighty Karnali River, villagers like Jasu Dhami are running out of options. The mother of five sits on the dirt floor of her house in Rudigaun, Sapata VDC, nursing her youngest child, and explaining how the family used to grow enough rice, potatoes, barley, and millet to provide most of its annual food needs.

For the rest, a family member would migrate to India during the winter to work as a labourer and earn some money. A few years ago, the already sparse rainfall petered out. Last winter was the driest on record. Lucky households reaped half their usual crop. With less yield, the food gap between harvests widened: last week, Jasu had just finished planting rice, one month late.

Kolti airfield was swarming with people when the food drop helicopter arrived. Villagers stooped to pick up the white bags marked 'A gift from Australia'. After climbing a steep flight of steps, they arranged their loads for

the walk home. "We've brought all these little kids here to help carry in the hope that we'll get food...last year it was very bad but this year is worse because of the drought," says Kanta Neupane from Sapata VDC, a day's hike along the narrow trails carved into the steep hills that flank the Karnali.

From these paths, the scene below can be deceiving. Green plots may signal irrigated land, as in the fields near Kolti or, on closer inspection, contain stunted maize or millet that will yield little. In days ahead, the main meal will be emergency operation (EMOP) rice with stinging nettles and for visitors, chicken soup. Many locals say the EMOP rice stopped them leaving their homes in despair. "Before this program was announced, 95 percent of people were planning to go to India but many have changed their minds. This is very good for the short term but do you have anything for the long term?" asks Birsingh BK at his farm in Sapata ward 2.

People are so hungry here in Bajura, they are completing back-breaking trail-building projects even before the 40-kg sacks of food 'payment' can be delivered. The operation here follows WFP's 'food for work' model, which the agency believes prevents locals from becoming dependent.

In April, the UN World Food Programme started hearing that villagers in pockets of 10 mid- and far-western districts were selling not just their few valuables but also essentials like utensils to raise money for food after their crops had withered. In May, the agency approved an emergency food program, its first ever in Nepal.

"We asked SAPPROS (WFP's NGO partner) to start work only in those areas



ALL PICS: MARTY LOGAN

## Fearing famine in the far-west, many flee

### Malnourished in Mugu



"We've lost some (children) already. They couldn't be treated in time. If they could have there's a good chance they would have lived," says Mireille Seneclauze of French NGO Action Contre la faim (Action Against Hunger).

In February and March the group did an assessment of 10 VDCs in Humla and Mugu, concluding that acute malnutrition rates "were more alarming than expected." In June, it began treating about 200 children, the most serious cases. But since then an unconfirmed number of children have died.

Seneclauze told us that the most affected VDCs are Bhy and Matharpu in Mugu and Humla's Darma and Mimi. She added that from reports she has heard, a similar project might be needed in neighbouring districts such as Bajura and Kalikot.

ActionAid Nepal was so struck by video footage of hungry villagers in Mugu that it funded a small, emergency rice delivery to three VDCs. "We thought why not divert some money from our regular program. It was a spontaneous response," Ganga Dutta Acharya told us.

In the past three weeks, the organisation financed two airlifts to Kotdanda VDC in southern Mugu, from where rice was also taken to neighbouring Hanglo and Sukadhik VDCs. "The situation is worse than the year before, because of lack of rain mostly," says Raju Karki of Mugu's Human Rights and Environment Development Centre, who showed the video to ActionAid.

Karki criticised WFP for not identifying the three VDCs during its assessment in April-May. But WFP staff say that they confirmed the 70 VDCs to get EMOP food only after a consultation that included representatives from the SPA, Maoists and NGOs.



**FOOD AND WORK:** Locals and WFP staff share the flour. (above) Most farmers are a month behind in pl



# e edge



where rice had been delivered...but most communities went ahead and did all the work before getting any rice, which shows how hungry people really were,” said WFP Emergency Program Coordinator Julie Thoulouzan after landing in Kolti last week. Now WFP faces a bigger task: persuading donors that the pattern in this food deficit region has been upset this year, and that the food gap has become a yawning, dangerous chasm. “We’ve certainly been vocal about the crisis, but this area has food shortages regularly so we have to work harder to overcome scepticism that this year is different,” said WFP Country Director Richard Ragan in Kathmandu.

**“For the cost of helping one person here, you can help two people somewhere else in Nepal.”**

Out in Rudigaun, just a few hours walk from Kolti, at least some development has occurred. Birsingh explains that an NGO gave him an improved variety of rice seed, which he planted successfully for three or four years—but then it stopped producing.

After a few questions SAPPROS regional chief Ratan Sharma figures out that the farmer should have sown the new variety in only one field, surrounded by fields of the traditional one. A trained farmer would have anticipated the failure.

Earlier, at the foot of the Pilichaur

suspension bridge, where the Karnali lapped at its banks like an ocean, Sharma asked men puffing on hookahs what sort of development they wanted. Irrigation and seeds, they promptly answered.

SAPPROS has irrigation projects in other parts of the region “but here would be very expensive because of the remoteness,” said Sharma. “We have written many proposals to donors for funding but have got no response.”

“What these people really need are development projects, but my god, where do you start?” says an official at one donor agency interested in funding the EMOP, adding, “we are planning to get more serious about the Karnali. But for the cost of helping one person here, you can help two people somewhere else in Nepal.”

In July’s budget speech the government said, “The absence of a road transportation network is the main reason for the economic backwardness of the Karnali” and surrounding districts. It pledged to finish routes linking Kalikot and Jumla and a ‘detailed survey’ of a road connecting Kolti and Bajura headquarters Martadi.

Back in Rudigaon, Jasu Dhami’s neighbour Maghi Dhami isn’t heartened even by the thought of normal rainfall. “I have so little land since the landslide,” she says after opening her grain cupboard to reveal a few utensils but no food. She estimates that the 40 kg bag of rice will feed her ill husband and 10 children for roughly a week. Then she will return to India to earn money carrying sand. “Some days the children eat wild vegetables, some days they sleep without food.” ●

## e annually. Emergency rice is a stopgap



## Disastrous math

**People targeted:** 225,000 in 70 VDCs of Jajarkot, Kalikot, Bajura and Dailekh (phase 1) Humla, Jumla (2) Mugu, Rukum, Rolpa and Dolpa (3)  
**They receive:** 80 kg of rice and 7 kg of fortified flour, half when they begin 20 days of food for work, the remainder when they finish  
**Already delivered:** First half of rations to most families in phase 1 districts  
**Total budget:** \$5.4 million  
**Donated:** \$365,000 from Australia, \$250,000 from the US  
**Money left:** \$0  
**WFP’s EMOP debts:** 543 metric tonnes of rice borrowed from Nepal Food Corporation, \$500,000 from an internal account

trail from Kolti to Sapata VDC. (top). Locals begin the long walk home from Kolti airport carrying their rice and  
 planting after lack of rain led to two failed crops. (above right)



# Lebanon return

MALIKA BROWNE in DAMASCUS

For the first time since the war began in Lebanon, this main road is deserted. Lebanese refugees who, until two days ago, poured over the border in thousands stopped crossing after recent Israeli air strikes made it too dangerous.

Pema Sherpa and Gori Karma stand under the hot sun at this southern Syria-Lebanon border crossing. This has been their home for the last twenty days. The dusty, dun-coloured landscape is a far cry from the mountains of Pema's village of Lumcha in Solu Khumbu, and Gori's lush hometown Dharan.

Pema and Gori had been working as maids in southern Beirut for a year-and-a-half when the war with Israel broke out. "The bombs were close to the house, near the airport. Our madam left with her family, telling us to stay and look after the house. We didn't want to die so we left as well," explains Gori. Despite being owed four months' salary each, the decision to leave was still easy, as the two women had been virtually enslaved by their employer.

They left with just their handbags and a small suitcase. By chance, they met some fleeing Sudanese and Ethiopians and shared a taxi to the Syrian border for \$100 each. There they were safe from the bombs, but didn't have the papers to enter Syria.

Border officials told them to go back to Lebanon, but they refused and slept outside until they attracted the attention of the Syrian Public Relations Association, an NGO that has placed 2,000 Lebanese families in Syrian homes so far.

Pema and Gori's story is not uncommon. There are an estimated 4,000 Nepalis stranded in Lebanon at the moment, but nobody is sure of exact numbers. Now heading back to the safety of Kathmandu, Pema and Gori are happy to have been so lucky.

The women said they were well looked after by Syrian volunteers. They slept in a mosque and were given adequate free food. The only request they had was for new underwear and clothes. "We can't be fussy about the food we are given," said a pragmatic Pema.

What were they looking forward to most back in Nepal? "I just want to farm," laughs Pema. She is pleased she'll be home in time for her son's fifth birthday. "The Syrians have been very kind. And we have made many friends, from Palestine, Dubai, and Qatar. We spent our days cleaning our living quarters and playing volleyball."

A little community has sprung up at the border. Several babies have been born here, including twins last week. Free phones are provided by a major Syrian network, and multinationals such as Pepsi and Nestle have been distributing free water, food, nappies and milk powder around the clock since the troubles began.

Pema and Gori were the only Nepali refugees at this southern border crossing. With no Nepali representatives in Syria, the Syrian Public Relations Association did not know how to deal with them. Calls to the Indian embassy proved fruitless. In the end, it was a Nepali occupying a prestigious and appropriate position in the region who came to their rescue.



## A Nepali army man helps rescue Nepalis from the Lebanese war zone

Maj Gen Bala Nanda Sharma (pictured at left, above, with Pema and Gori wearing khadas) is force commander of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), set up in 1974 to maintain an 'area of separation' 80 km wide—the Golan Heights between Syria and Israel. When he heard of the stranded women, he visited them, and began to make inquiries. After calls to Nepali embassy in Cairo, an embassy official was sent to Beirut to help stranded Nepali citizens. General Sharma then found a courier willing to take documents to Beirut through the war-torn countryside and back. The Institute of Migration then took over, arranging for the women to fly home.

As the women walk towards the gates into Syria and freedom, they wonder what awaits them in Nepal. "Can we walk in the shade? I don't want my skin to turn dark," Gori asks. "You're already dark!" Pema laughs at her friend. The girls may have lost a lot, but have kept their sense of humour and their freedom. ●



WAR CLASS: Young Maoist soldiers on parade in Kabhre. Rebels say they are not underage.

NAYANTARA

# Long way home

## Nepal's child soldiers need to make the journey from war to peace, drill to class

NARESH NEWAR

● 15-year-old Abhin from Dhading is a popular composer and singer—of Maoist revolutionary songs that encourage more children like him to join the PLA.

● Yamu Sonu Lama from Makawanpur was 16 when she joined the Maoists and now, at 18, is a section commander.

● Ramu, 18, from Ramechhap has been a frontline fighter in many Maoist military operations.

● The Nepal Army has used children too, as messengers and spies. Not being combatants didn't protect them from capture and torture by the Maoists.

The insurgency, and the armed forces' response to it, have had appalling consequences for children. They have been forcefully recruited by the Maoists or tortured for being 'informants', and been arbitrarily detained and then 'disappeared' by the army and police for alleged involvement in Maoist activities.

UNICEF defines a child soldier as any boy or girl under 18 involved with a regular armed force or group. This definition is not restricted to combatants—it also includes those involved in any other capacity, such as cooks, porters, or informers.

The international children's watchdog, Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, claims that up to 30 percent of the Maoist forces may be children. Human rights group Insec estimates that around 345 children have died at the hands of the Maoists and the state between 17 February 1996 to June 2006.

Yet children are nowhere in the peace process. Not one discussion has focused on children, and there has been no mention of how child soldiers are to be integrated during discussions on demobilisation,

demilitarisation, and reintegration (DDR) of the people's liberation army. The government has not drafted any plans and policies for demobilising and rehabilitating child soldiers, and the Maoists want to wait until political issues are resolved.

Under these circumstances, child soldiers will be hesitant about leaving the Maoist army, particularly given past experience. During the second round of peace talks in 2003, a number of children returned to their families. However, no demobilisation and reintegration agreement was discussed between the government and the Maoists, and when the talks broke down, all these children were recalled to the PLA.

"Removing children from any activity linked to armed conflict is essential and should not be dependent on any adult DDR process, peace talks, peace agreements or cessation of hostilities," stresses Sandra Beidas, chief of the protection section of the UN's Nepal Office of the High Commission for Human Rights.

The psychological and sociological scars are as serious as the physical, and will only get worse the longer we wait. "Child DDR should start as soon as possible. Early intervention is critical for the normal development of children even without a peace process. If you don't act now, it could be too late," explains Rosanna Vega, a child protection officer with UNICEF, which is working with child protection agencies to prepare an action plan for child DDR.

Other countries have dealt with demobilising and rehabilitating child soldiers during a ceasefire but before a formal peace process. In Sri Lanka in 2003, for example, while the peace talks were going on the UN

worked with the LTTE to release over 600 child soldiers and develop a plan for social reintegration and education of the returning children. In Sierra Leone, the child-focused DDR process helped to demobilise over 6,000 child soldiers who were then sheltered in interim care centres between 1998-2002. The success of these two programs, UNICEF experts say, came from the fact that the children had access to education and community support.

In the absence of an official child DDR program, a network called Children Associated with Armed Groups and Force has already been set up to help former child soldiers with rehabilitation, social integration and psycho-social counselling. "The immediate step should be to form a national child protection policy to ensure safe return, free education, vocational training and, most importantly, immunity to former child combatants," explains child-rights expert Bhola Dahal of Save the Children (Norway).

The start of a UN-brokered peace deal could be what's needed to speed up the process, as UN Security Council Resolution 1314 stresses that national governments in such situations must include provisions for DDR of child combatants in peace agreements.

In the meantime, the agency's action plan is taking shape, and will be based on the UN experiences in successfully advocating and securing the release of children from armed forces in a number of countries, including Afghanistan, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, and Sudan. ●

(Names of the children have been changed to protect their identity.)



# Slow burn in the tarai

A volatile cocktail of separatism, discrimination and citizenship fuels a split in tarai Maoists

SUMAN PRADHAN

A lifelong communist, Jaya Krishna Goit joined the UML after 1990 but was lured into the Maoist fold by Matrika Prasad Yadav. But the two fell out and in 2004, when Yadav replaced him as chairman, Goit set up the Tarai Janatantrik Mukti Morcha (TJMM). The TJMM’s stated aim is to fight the Maoists for control of the Madhesi agenda. More worryingly, it is aiming to split the tarai plains from the rest of Nepal. It has an estimated 150-200 fighters but is active from Saptari to Rautahat districts through its ally, the Tarai Tigers. The tactics it uses are brutal, many would argue, terrorist-like. Earlier this month, the TJMM abducted two Nepal Telecom engineers for ransom. This month it captured two employees of the small border customs in Saptari. All were of hill origin and were later released, but it’s not clear whether ransom was paid. Goit’s group has threatened hill origin people to vacate the tarai or face “action”. Several Pahadiya-owned industries have been forcibly closed and their owners forced to flee. Large farms owned by Pahadiya *jamindaars* have been confiscated. Madhesi intellectuals and leaders in Kathmandu deplore the TJMM’s tactics. “There is no support in the Madhesi community for an independent Madhes, we all want to remain a part of Nepal,” asserts Vijay Kant Karna, a lecturer of political science and chairperson of Jaghrit Nepal, “but I can’t say what will happen if Madhesis do not get due recognition in the state restructuring.” People who have known Goit say the TJMM leader was radicalised after falling out with the Maoists over his replacement by Yadav in the Maoists’ Tarai Mukti Morcha, apparent discrimination against Madhesis even within the Maoist hierarchy and the division of Madhes by the Maoists into the ‘Madhes Autonomous Region’ and the ‘Tharuwan Autonomous Region’.



“Goit was dissatisfied by the discrimination within the Maoists’ own ranks, very few Madhesis got leadership roles in the party’s organisational structure in the Madhes. Almost all were sent from the hills,” says Karna. Yadav agrees there was plenty of discrimination. He told us in an interview (*see box*): “I myself resigned from all major positions in the party to show my dissatisfaction.” Yadav says the grievances have been addressed, particularly after the Maoists’ Chunwang plenum in late 2004. But this was too late for Goit. Having lost his leadership position and disagreeing with the Maoists’ division of the Madhes into two regions, he split and set up the TJMM. The division of Madhes is a potent issue. The Maoists have not just split off Tharuwan from the Madhes, but have also floated a concept of further divvying up the Madhes into five different regions. Many Madhesi intellectuals and leaders see this as an attempt to diffuse the Madhes’ power. “Nepal’s ruling elites have forever been suspicious of the Madhes because they think these people are of Indian origin, and therefore pro-Indian,” explains Gupta, “that is not true. We Madhesis are as much Nepali and pro-Nepal as anyone else.” Even Maoist leader Yadav hesitates about accepting this division. “I am in favour of a unified Madhes,” he says haltingly, “but I also believe there can be separate regions within a unified Madhes.” Mixed up in all this is the issue of citizenship for two-four million people in the tarai who don’t have it, the main plank of the Nepal Sadbhabana Party (NSP). In the seven-party government it appears to be a way to buy time and make concessions—the NC and UML have set a deadline to resolve the issue. For Gupta of MJM, citizenship is not the topmost agenda in the Madhesi mind. He says: “The main issue is discrimination, and how that might be resolved through a federal state structure with real autonomy.” Gupta has written a book titled *Rebellion against Tamil Discrimination in Sri Lanka* which he says is about how problems like Sri Lanka arise if ethnic discrimination is ignored by the state. ●

## “A unified Madhes”

Interview with Matrika Parsad Yadav, Maoist Central Committee member, Chairman of the Tarai Mukti Morcha, Chairman of the Tarai Autonomous Region



KIRAN PANDAY

**Nepali Times: On Goit’s Tarai secession agenda**  
**Matrika P Yadav:** We are not in favour of secession. Madhesi people don’t want secession. We want a democratic republican state based on federal autonomy and proportional representation. But when these rightful demands are not addressed, then the country will break up on its own.

**On dividing Madhes into several regions**  
I am in favour of a unified Madhes. The division you are talking about is only in conceptual form. Debate is on-going in the party. But I believe that several regions can exist within a unified Madhes. The main issue is how to make discriminated and marginalised communities participate in a new governing state structure.

**On anti-Madhese discrimination within the Maoist party**  
Yes, there was discrimination, and I even resigned from all party positions citing my dissatisfaction. But now most of those issues have been addressed, especially after our party’s Chunwang plenum. Many Madhesi cadres have now been given leadership roles in the party’s organisation in the Madhes. Our army has even formed two Madhesi battalions.

**On reconciling with Goit**  
If they want to stop fighting, we too will stop. What we have seen is that his agenda is harmful to the Madhes. Even now, we want to resolve this problem with him peacefully. But knowing his nature and personality, I know he is not conciliatory.

**On the citizenship issue**  
It is a big problem, but the cut-off date proposed by the other parties is not the solution. In our view, after a new constitution has been declared, a committee comprising government officials and all political parties should go into each and every village and distribute citizenship based on local people’s recommendation. The locals will know who are genuine citizens and who are not.



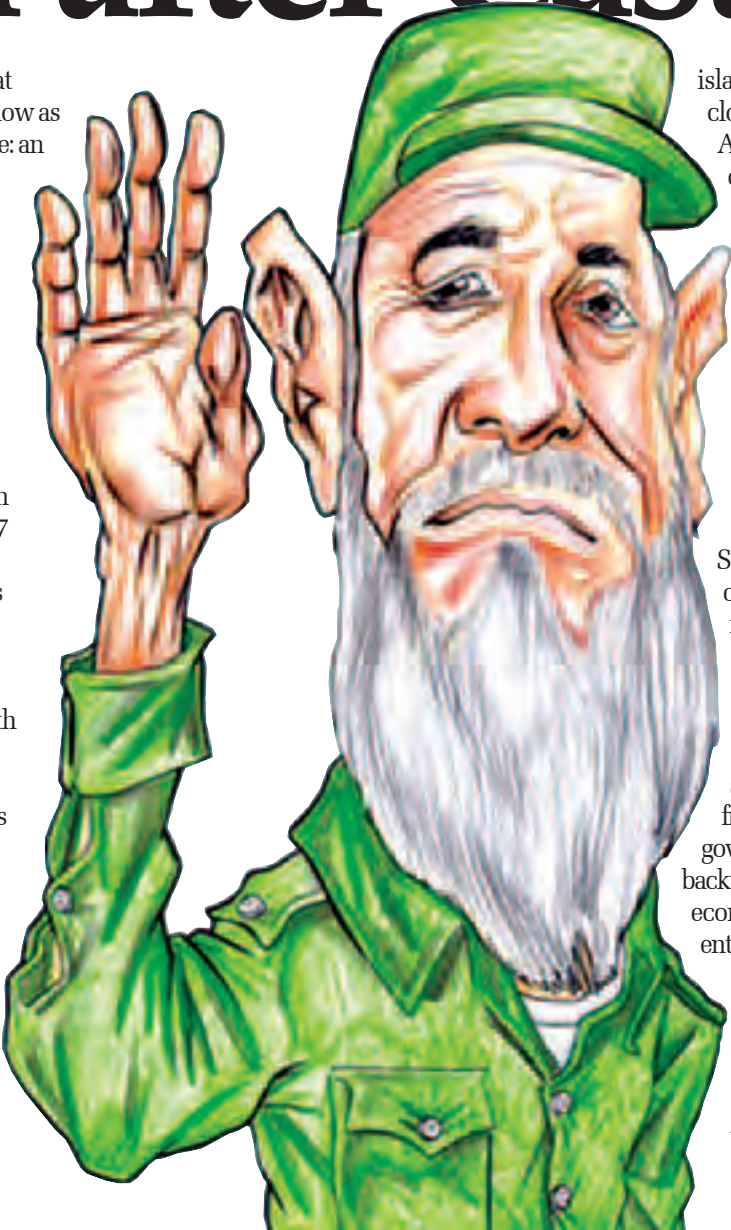


# The hopes and fears of life post-discrtatorship

# Cuba after Castro

He has been in power so long that Fidel Castro is barely noticed now as the anachronism he has become: an absolute ruler of a one-party state, a beached survivor of an ideology long swept away elsewhere, a man who has kept the modern world at bay while corruption eats away at his island fortress. Cubans rarely break the taboo and speculate on Cuba after Castro. Most, with reason, do not dare. But suddenly, only two weeks before the planned lavish celebrations of the dictator's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, they have been jolted into an uncertain future: after 47 years of untrammelled personal rule, President Castro has suffered a serious illness and handed over power, albeit temporarily, to his 75-year-old brother Raúl.

The prospect of Fidel Castro's death or disability has convulsed the Caribbean. The long US blockade, the regional political balance and Havana's predictable backing for any anti-American insurgency have all been fixtures of a stalemate that has been a determining factor in US regional policy. Cuba may have only 11 million people, and a stricken economy overly dependent on sugar and raw materials, but it has long been seen in Washington as an ideological dagger pointed at the Western hemisphere. It was over this



PRITCHETT CARTOONS

island that the world came closest to nuclear Armageddon. Cuba's defiance and the clout of Cuban exiles influence US domestic policy. What happens now will be watched in Washington and Miami as closely as in Havana.

Both on the island and abroad, people are preparing for change. Few doubt that the communist system will die with Señor Castro. The collapse of the Soviet Union made its continuation ever more precarious — and cautious market reforms a few years ago so quickly began to unravel the entire structure that the frightened Cuban government quickly backtracked. For now the economy is in stasis. But entrepreneurs know well the pent-up demand for change, for imports, luxuries and links to the outside world. They are already preparing to seize the moment when the US embargo is lifted.

Some fear that the country could quickly return to 1959, becoming a playground of the American rich, where weak governments are dominated by gambling interests and corrupt businessmen. There is, indeed, a danger of change coming too explosively and of a new mafia taking advantage of a communist collapse, as in much of eastern Europe. But that is to ignore everything that has happened since the fall of Batista. Cuba is more robust now. For all the repression, religious persecution and assault on human rights, the Cuban people have three advantages on which to build a future: an education system that has given them literacy and qualifications; a credible national health system; and a cultural pride, seen in the flowering of the arts and music.

The challenge now is how to plan the inevitable transition without triggering collapse and chaos or fresh repression. The Bush Administration appointed a Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba in 2003 to hasten political change, setting aside \$80 million to boost democracy. The US will certainly find vast sums to satisfy post-Castro expectations. Within Cuba, officials must also be looking at ways to survive the change. Rumours abound and hopes are rising. But nothing should be assumed. Señor Castro has survived past health scares. He could yet stagger on. ● (The Times)

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## Fatwa fear

PESHAWAR—Negative publicity and attacks by Islamist groups on NGOs working with women have forced the closure of several offices in Pakistan's north-west frontier province. The 16 June murder of two female teacher trainers, and 10-year-old daughter and two-and-a-half-year-old son of one of the victims, has created fear among female NGO workers and many have resigned. The attack is believed to have been carried out by Taliban supporters, and is not the first of its kind. Mosques recently called for all civil society groups to sack women employees before July-end or quit the area. Conservative authorities and media have also criticised female involvement. Many feel the situation and local attitudes are unlikely to change. On 14 September last year, President Pervez Musharraf came under fire for making comments implying that women get raped for profit and foreign visas. The comments came on the heels of a controversial government decision not to allow a women's rights activist who was gang-raped on the orders of a village council to travel to the US and Canada. The government backed down. (IPS)

## Water war

COLOMBO— Heavy fighting continues between the Sri Lankan army and Tamil rebel militants for control of an irrigation sluice near Trincomalee port, amid growing concern about the fate of the 2002 ceasefire. Fighting broke out last weekend to settle a dispute over the operation of the sluice at Mawilaru, feeds farmers who are largely ethnic Sinhalese. The government accused the LTTE of closing the sluice gate and depriving 15,000 civilians of water supplies. But the Tigers say civilians upstream have blocked the sluice to protest a government move to scrap a proposed drinking water project to benefit ethnic Tamils. Tamil and Sinhalese farmers have accused each other of trying to gain exclusive control over the sluice and the paddy fields it irrigates. Despite the bloody battle the government insists it is committed to the ceasefire.



PANOS

The Sri Lankan [ceasefire] Monitoring Mission could also be in jeopardy due to a 1 September Tiger deadline for the removal of all EU nationals from monitoring duties. Sweden, Finland, and Denmark have agreed to the request. (IPS)



# The PC turns 25

## One clunky machine wrought enormous, but familiar, sociological changes

In August 1981, IBM introduced the 5150 personal computer. It was not the first personal computer, but it turned out to be ‘the personal computer,’ which revolutionised business life and the way people thought about the world.

**ANALYSIS**  
**Harold James**

The 1981 PC was a break with IBM’s previous business model, in which it did not sell computers, but leased them. With the 5150, IBM moved into mass production of a standardised commodity using components produced by other companies. ‘Big Blue’ (as IBM is known) allowed other companies (notably the infant Microsoft) to develop its software.

By making the PC, IBM practically destroyed itself as a

The PC seemed at first to promise a restoration of balance in favour of the individual. Computing became decentralised, and the new flexibility produced a sense that control was moving away from big agglomerations of power, whether governments or companies. The triumph of the PC was accompanied by a revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> century vision of classical liberalism and individualism.

The idea was that an individual could buy a computer and the software needed for a specific (and increasingly complicated) purpose, and immediately generate a productive result. Indeed, individuals soon possessed in a small machine as much computing power as the mainframe IBM 360s that revolutionised centralised computing in the 1960s.

But this initial triumph of the PC (and very substantial sales

substantial productivity gains.

New activities—internet auctions, encyclopaedias, chat rooms—reproduced the interactions of individuals over a much wider area. Interlinked PCs created a sense of a vibrant social market. Individuals could realise themselves, as in the old 19<sup>th</sup> century model, but only as long as they interacted with as many other people as possible. It was these interactions that created value and drove a dynamic process.

The potential was alluring, but also terrifying. The linking of PCs produced scares about malevolent computer viruses that would sweep the world and destroy information and programs in just a few hours. There was fear that dependence on computers would produce a millennial catastrophe, as hospitals, airplanes, power grids, and communications would all grind to a halt when 1999 became 2000.

These traumas needed responses different from previous technological changes. Government regulation was of limited use, although it helped make destructive hackers criminally responsible. Innovation by lone companies wouldn’t help either. A solution required collaborative efforts of a sort that corresponded to an ancient vision of civic republicanism rather than the modern ideas of centralised power or isolated and autonomous individuals.

Some observers believe that this interconnectivity has now, after 25 years, made the PC obsolete. There are more specialised applications of computing and IT in smart machines and mobile telephones, whose defining characteristic is that they communicate with each other.

But the alleged obsolescence of the PC is actually a sign of how basic it has become to a new vision of society. We need to celebrate, advertise, and propagandise new innovations only when their success is questionable.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, cheap, washable cotton undergarments produced a revolution in hygiene, but soon became commonplace. The PC has become the modern equivalent of cotton: so basic that, though around 200 million PCs are sold each year, it now simply generates an electronic yawn. But, like the cotton revolution, the true measure of the social and political transformations wrought by the PC will become clear only after a much longer time. ● (Project Syndicate)

Harold James is Professor of History and International Affairs at Princeton University and author of The Roman Predicament.



# Monsoon madness?

## Not at all—golfers will tee off in all kinds of weather

Walking more than nine kilometres on a slushy golf course might not be your idea of fun but a monsoon downpour, freezing temperatures nor a blazing sun can keep some golfers away from their weekly round.

I have played more than 100 rounds in the rain and many times my club slipped from my hand as I was getting drenched. Despite this, I still like to play in the rain or other extreme weather because I take it as a challenge.

These days, most good courses are built with very efficient drainage systems, which makes them playable even during a monsoon downpour or in extreme weather, no more than an hour after the rain stops falling. Those without such a system are usually compelled to close down during heavy rains.

To be honest, playing during a monsoon rain is especially hard. You get irritated searching for your balls embedded in the wet ground or hidden in the tall, dripping grass. Players duff more shots and are constantly struggling to keep their club grips and gloves dry so the clubs don’t slip from their hand. Even with the help of a caddy, umbrella and a rain cover for my golf bag, I have a really hard time keeping my equipment dry.

It is also not easy to swing a club wearing a rain suit and a real challenge to maintain an even tempo to your game in wild weather. Even world no one Tiger Woods shot 10 over par (his worst ever score in his pro career) during the rainy third round of the British Open in 2002.

But we can’t complain. Compared to most other places, Nepal offers the ideal golf climate. We can confidently say that we have a 12-month golf season because neither the winter nor the rainy season is so harsh as to confine the hardcore players indoors. So why not take advantage of our perfect weather to enjoy this fabulous sport? ●

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



Ad for IBM 5150 pc, circe 1981

company. Its innovation gave rise to a huge number of new, dynamic companies, forcing IBM to reinvent itself completely to compete with them, an example of the socially transformative effects of the PC.

Before 1981, visionaries who thought about the impact of technology on society believed that the computer would allow a centralisation of knowledge and power. This was the world of George Orwell’s Big Brother, the extrapolation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s experience of totalitarianism. Powerful computers led to potent states and powerful and centrally directed business corporations.

in the 1980’s did not fulfil all the initial hopes for individual empowerment and social transformation. Efficiency gains were low, despite enormous investments in IT. Immense amounts of time were wasted by informal requests for assistance, forcing knowledgeable workers to become computer gurus to colleagues.

The initial disappointment about electronic productivity demonstrated the limits of classical individualism. Only with inter-connection in the 1990’s, above all through the internet, did the PC realise its potential. Suddenly, economists (especially in the US) measured



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— Mark Twain, American icon, 1835-1910 author of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

❖ Sarlm a painting exhibition by Korean American Artist Joong Baek Kim Nepal Art Council, till 11 August. 4220735

❖ Harmony: Sculpture Symposium 2006 at NAFA complex till 18 August.

❖ Infinity paintings by Ramesh KC, Gaurav Shrestha, Suman Shrestha and Binod Gupta at The Art Shop, Durbar Marg till 20 August. 4267063

❖ Impressions of Manang 10-28 September, Nepal Tourism Board

EVENTS

❖ Carandiru- a Portuguese film with English Subtitles, at Martin Chautari, 10 August, 3PM

❖ Jiwan Dekhi Jiwansamma written by Abhi Subedi and directed by Sunil Pokhrel at Gurukul, 5PM till 11 August.

❖ Sunsilk Nepal Fashion Week at Hotel Hyatt Regency, 10-14 August

❖ Teej Festival at Radisson Hotel, stalls, exhibition, sale and more 11-12 August, 9AM-7PM. 4425898

❖ A View from the Bridge by Rato Bangala School's Aangan Tedo at St Xavier's College, 11-13 August. 5522614

❖ Loktantrik and Samabeshi poetry recital by Laxmi Mali at Gurukul, 11 August, 3PM.

❖ Hike to Sundarijal with Martin Chautari. Meet at Budhanilkantha gate at 7.30 AM.

❖ Changa Chait-2063 Battle in the sky at Club Himalaya on 9,16 and 23 September.

❖ Alcoholics Anonymous problems with alcohol? 9851016079

MUSIC

❖ Cadenza performs at Moksh Live, 11 August, 8.30 PM. 5526212

❖ Yala Maya Classics presents Santosh Bhakta Shrestha, live at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 18 August, 6PM. 5553767

❖ Heartbreakers live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant. 4422613

❖ Cadenza Collective live every Wednesday and Saturday, 8PM at Upstairs.

❖ Live Music at New Orleans Café. 4700311

❖ Uncork the good times with Ciney and Par-e-jat playing along with BBQ. Every Friday from 7PM at Fusion-The bar at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479448

DINING

❖ Masterpiece menu at The Shambala Garden Café, Shangri-La Hotel. 4412999

❖ Mezza and Margarita at Dwarika's Fusion every Wednesday, Rs 555. 4479448

❖ Eden Lounge Bar Happy hour 3-7PM, buy one get one free cocktails. 6<sup>th</sup> floor, Kathmandu Mall, Sundhara.

❖ Monsoon Madness Wine Festival Enjoy wine from four continents at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440

❖ Mango Masti At all restaurants in Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999

❖ Traditional Cuisine at Patan Museum Café. 5526271

❖ Wet & Wild Summer Splash Special package of swimming and lunch, or overnight with breakfast and swimming, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

❖ Earth Watch Restaurant Breakfast with birds, lunch with butterflies and dinner by the fireplace at Park Village Hotel. 4375280.

❖ Weekend Brunch at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234

❖ Special budget lunches at Rum Doodle Bar and Restaurant. 4422613

❖ Breakfast Singma Restaurant, 8.30-11AM daily. 5009092.

❖ Jatra Wednesday Nights Free cocktails for women. 4256622

GETAWAYS

❖ Shamanism Full Moon Trek to Lake Gosainkunda Rs 5999, 4-12 August. 4412508

❖ Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, relaxation and massages in Pokhara. 4361500

❖ Conferences and workshops at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675

❖ Nature Retreat at Park Village Resort & Spa. 4375280

❖ Escape Kathmandu at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927

❖ Dwarika's Overnight Package Night of luxury at Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488

❖ Escape to Godavari Village Resort, overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5560675

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NEPALI WEATHER by MAUSAM BEED

It's a bad monsoon all right, but last year was far worse. Only a third of Nepali paddy farmers could reap a harvest, and in the far-west it was even lower. Barring the arrival of a dramatic front, August is shaping up to be the third consecutive month with below normal rainfall around the country, except for the eastern hills. We're already in the second half of the four-month monsoon, and this is traditionally less wet than June and July. Expect fewer storms but more lasting rain for the rest of the monsoon. Thursday morning's satellite picture shows just a few scattered clouds, so there are more hot and humid days ahead, with just a little rain. It'll be a scorching weekend in Kathmandu Valley, with high humidity. Relief will come from lower temperatures late evening through the night due to cooling showers.

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Sun

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नेपाल सरकार सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय सूचना विभाग





**STRINGS ATTACHED:** Lamps and exultation on Janai Purnima at Kumbheswor, Lalitpur on Wednesday.



**SINGIN' IN THE RAIN:** Outside Dasarath Rangashala, rained on but undaunted, musicians and shamans continued the festivities on Janai Purnima, Wednesday.



**FEEL THE MUSIC:** Folk-rock band Nepathya played to a full house of hearing- and visually-impaired students, using video footage, computer representations of sound, and a signer to share the music at Russian Cultural Centre on Monday.



**DECENTLY CLOTHED:** All eyes are on the birds, as the erotic carved struts at Basantapur's Jagannath temple are hidden from view, Thursday.



**BABURAM AND THE QUEEN:** Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai addressed the FNCCI's Annual General Meeting on Sunday, under the gaze of the queen.

# Top of the class

The school's tin roof leaks during the monsoon and during summer months heats up, making the rooms unbearably hot. The school has no library, laboratories or big playground. And this is Namuna English Medium School in Jhapa, where Anjana Rajbansi spent 11 years. Had the

government not decided to scrap the 'board first' announcement this year, Rajbansi, who earned 92.38 percent in the SLC exam, would have been the topper. Anjana grew up in Juropani in south-west Jhapa, in a family of five. Her parents, both primary school teachers at a government school, encouraged her to work hard and never settle for second best. Anjana makes it all sound easy. To do well on a national exam, she

says, "you have to work hard, have the drive to succeed and be very ambitious. Also, you need to study for a few hours everyday, concentrate and be very disciplined." "We were encouraged to use our imagination, to work with what we have, and all 12 of us from my class who took the SLC exam this year passed with good scores," says Anjana, who believes that as long as the teachers are good at what they do and encourage students to question, labs, libraries and other physical facilities are secondary. Anjana sounds wise beyond her years when she says, "It makes no difference to me if I am 'board first' or not. My scores reflect my hard work, and I am very happy with that." For Anjana, the story is just beginning. She was encouraged by her teachers in Jhapa to think of the SLC as just a stepping stone to bigger and better things. "I was encouraged to do well, not pressured to be the best." She now studies in the science faculty at Universal College in Kathmandu, and wants to later pursue Biology. She's here on a scholarship, and says her college administration has also promised her a scholarship to study medicine, if she keeps her grades up. This bright spark is thrilled. "I was taught to work hard and not expect things in return, so any small encouragement means a lot to me," she says. In some ways, though, Anjana Rajbansi is just another teenager—she doesn't want to make long-term plans just yet. "Let me do well in plus-two first, then I can think about what to do next," she smiles. She does believe, though, that if an SLC topper had been announced, it would have not been her, but another student, from Kathmandu. ●



KIRAN PANDAY





# Guys jatra

Not even the most patriarchal male chauvinistic piglet in this country will begrudge parliament's recent proclamation to set aside 33 percent of civil service jobs for women.

Because as long as us men can still get to be the King, Prime Minister, Speaker of the August House, Chief of Army Staff, Editor-in-Chief, Head Bartender, and also the Maid-in-Waiting in case there is no suitable female candidate, we have no problems with girls joining the rank and file to stand head-and-shoulder with us.

Parliament has also passed legislation allowing daughters to inherit parental property, and is working on a new law requiring parents to force their daughters to marry certified dorks thus making doubly sure that parental property remains in safe hands.

And right in front of our eyes, parliament has taken away our right to be king by allowing a royal first-born to be henceforth crowned Queen of the Kingdom, especially if aforementioned first-born is a she.

But parliament may be overstepping its bounds here. At this rate there will be no jobs left for men. What is parliament doing to help broad-minded men like us who, the last time we checked, were still allegedly holding up half the sky? Ok, ok, one-third.



UNDER MY HAT  
Kunda Dixit

What we Central Non-working Committee members of the recently-formed All-Nepal Federation of Alpha-Males and Drones (Reviled) want to know is, how is the interim legislature going to guarantee that this epidemic of politically-correct legislation in favour of members of the opposite species will not leave us men high and dry and out in the wilderness.

Should us guys be getting worried? You bet. And what should we gentlemen be doing about it? Kicking butt. Yes, lifting a page from the Great Helmsman himself who said, and I quote, "To be offensive is the best form of defensiveness", we men have no other recourse but to follow this wise dictum and start behaving in an even more obnoxious and loathsome manner than we do at present.

And we are going to launch this multi-pronged campaign throughout maledom starting this Guy Jatra season so those of us who wear Y-fronts and are proud of it can assert ourselves and reclaim our past honour. We will protect the bastions of our manhood from female encroachment till the last man is left standing.

As usual in these cases, it is the private sector that has taken the lead by launching a risky and pioneering venture to set up the first-ever male beauty parlour in this country. At a time when us card-carrying members of the unfair sex were feeling a trifle beleaguered and left out, at last there is a place we boys can call home, where we can go and get our blackheads squeezed by professionals without any danger of those things getting infected and erupting into pus-filled carbuncles and auntsies.

So, let this be a warning, we are not going to sit idly by while women outscore us in SLC and take away our jobs. This Tj we will counterattack by sitting outside parliament till all our demands are met. Which means we want 33 percent of all jobs traditionally held by women to also be reserved for men. Only through affirmative action can men also have a chance to prove themselves as housewives and stewardesses. ●





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## An Appeal & A Word of Caution !

It has come to our notice that UTL phone customers are handing over the phones to others without proper ownership transfer through the company's protocol.

Some dishonest hands in the market are involved in resale of UTL phones by paying high amounts to the original customers. They then misuse the phones for international call bypass or for other illegal activities.

In such a case, the customer involved loses the phone he registered and has to pay the balance for such illegal activities.

**In case of misuse of phone, the customer can be fined up to Rs. 5 lakh and amount equivalent to the local damage to the legal operators licensed by Nepal Telecommunications Authority or subject to imprisonment up to five years or both as per the Section 47 of the Telecommunications Act 2053.**

E.g. Therefore, appealed to all the customers to be alert and avoid giving phone to others for use without proper ownership transfer. Also, inform us, in case any one approaches you for hire/purchase of your UTL phone.

### IT IS ALWAYS SAFE TO ABIDE BY THE LAW.

#### Information About Payment of Ashadh Bill

**Today (Srawan 26, 2063)**  
**is the last date of payment of Ashadh bill**

**Bills can be paid at the following Customer Service Centres:**

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- Machhapokhari, Buleju, Tel: 2000401
- Chuchepati, Chabahil, Tel: 2000301
- Nakkhu Chowk, Lalitpur, Tel: 2000501
- Suryavinayak Chowk, Bhaktapur, Tel: 2000601
- Gathaghar, Thimi, Tel: 2000701

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