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Times

Weekly Internet Poll # 312

Q. Should the government take action against wilful defaulters?

Total votes: 2,950



Yes 85.4%

No 12.2%

Don't know 2.4%

Weekly Internet Poll # 313. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. What is your opinion about the role of the civil society during the current political discourse in Nepal?



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KAPIL TAMOT

TEEJ IN THE CAMP: Women Maoists relax at a temporary camp in Muntang in Palpa last week. The baby's mother (wearing shawl) is also a Maoist. Military activity has affected students of Shree Bhimsen Primary School that falls inside the camp.

House vs street

Maoists flex their muscles on the streets of the capital

KUNDA DIXIT

Despite a public war of words between the prime minister and the rebel leadership in the past weeks, sources say both sides are privately committed to the peace process and want it to succeed.

The strong rhetoric appears to be an outward manifestation of the tough bargaining going on in back-room negotiations between

the two sides. The government, under strong pressure from the international community, wants Maoist demilitarisation to take place first. The rebels are sticking to their guns and want progress on political issues like the passage of the interim constitution and formation of an interim government.

“The reason Koirala is so forceful and confident on weapons is because he knows he

has support from India and the US,” says one Baluwatar insider. Kathmandu-based diplomats say the Maoists have got the message—the international community just won't agree to armed Maoists in government.

But civil society groups say putting too much pressure on the Maoists now may weaken the rebel leadership's hold over its own hardliners and lead to a return to war. But the anti-government

stance of the civil society and their silence over recent Maoist killings have exposed them to criticism in the party press of being rebel mouthpieces.

The Maoist strategy seems to be to use the weakness and disunity of the seven-party alliance and gain maximum concessions. The result is that the pre-April polarisation between the king and the 7+1 party-Maoist alliance has now been replaced by a growing schism between the Maoists and the parliamentary parties.

The weekend of anarchy over the fuel price hike was essentially Maoist-affiliated groups competing for supremacy against student unions affiliated with the political parties. The Maoist student union bussed in hundreds of high school students for a demonstration on Tuesday outside army headquarters.

This is becoming a power struggle between the parliament and the street. The rebels who have no presence in the house are flexing their muscles on the streets. On Friday, the interim constitution drafting committee will present its draft to the negotiating teams and there will be a decision on Maoist cantonment sites.

The Maoist leaders would have liked an interim government with them in it to take these decisions, but there is no chance of the rebels being in government until they renounce arms. So the rebels have raised the ante by talking about 'peaceful urban uprising', 'October revolution' or 'Jana Andolan III'. Sunday's conflagration could have been a dress rehearsal for future street protests.

All this comes amidst reports of harassment of political workers, stepped-up extortion and forced recruitment of teenagers. One businessman in Kathmandu received a letter from a Maoist group this week asking for “a voluntary contribution of 43 lakhs”, and trekking lodges in Jomsom have been hit hard by a Maoist extortion drive. ●


Editorial p2
Tyre power

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TYRE POWER

Time and again, we see the influence of some kind of 'people power,' whether real or manufactured. Over last weekend, for example, we saw the government announce an economically sensible price hike and, after a day-and-a-half of street protests and hooliganism, retract it. Tyre power, in all its riotous glory.

There is a lesson here, and it isn't about whether the tyre-burners are right or wrong (they're wrong, for health reasons among others), whether the government is right or wrong in treating petrol and kerosene at par for price rise (debatable), not even whether the Maoists have capitalised on and possibly fuelled popular discontent (probably).

The issue this: are we going to have future governments installed only through people power or are we going to elect them at the ballot box? And when we finally do have a representative government will it be overthrown by mobs on the streets? How much should rent-a-crowds and rampaging student affiliates of an underground militant party have a say in regime change or government policy? Is setting fire to tyres the way we are going to make decisions henceforth?

Fuel prices in Nepal can't be lower than in India, that is our geopolitical reality. Until we seal that border or earn enough hydro-dollars from exporting power we won't be able to subsidise fossil fuels. So why not make a policy that will immediately favour transport alternatives to reduce our dependence on diesel, kerosene, and petrol? Like, today.

And it's not just about fuel prices. It's the tea garden strike, the temporary teachers, students who get hard exam questions, taxi drivers who block the airport for the whole day. These are symptoms of a society in political transition. Get through it we will. It won't be easy but as we muddle our way through we have to keep in mind that if we truly want a functioning, inclusive democracy that has half a chance of being successful we must be part of it. All of us.

When we make our roadmap one section of it should be on civic education: rights, responsibilities, reasonable expectations and unreasonable means of expressing discontent. What does it mean to be a citizen? If we do it right, we could have a people that understands democracy. And that's true people power.

Also decommission

Nepalis must work together to also decommission the Maoists' discredited dogma

With the joint call to the United Nations, the prospects for 'managing' Maoist arms soon look promising. But what is to be done about 'managing' the political aims and character of the Maoists?

External help in this area is unlikely and unwise. Nepalis must now pull our own weight in decommissioning the false



GUEST COLUMN
Prem Jung Thapa

promises and discredited dogma of the Maoists. In between the 12 point, 8 point and 25 point agreements, it is easy to miss the main point: that the Maoists did not win a military victory (for which credit is due to the security forces of the erstwhile

HMG). Yet, are we not close to handing the Maoists a political victory now?

The Maoists are pushing very hard to connect the question of arms management with a broader political settlement prior to constituent assembly elections. The proposed interim government and rules for the elections shouldn't become a backdoor to legitimise the Maoists before they face elections. Mainstreaming the armed rebels should be about them moving to the well-defined middle ground of a liberal multi-party democracy that accommodates everyone, and not the mainstream lurching towards Prachanda Path.

The Maoist agenda at present sits on three main pillars:

- abolition of monarchy
- establishing a federal republic along ethnic identities

- expropriating assets of the landowning class (and apparently of royalists no matter what class they come from).

The Nepali left intelligentsia and the popular press now act as if these are immutable commandments for a new Nepal without undertaking a careful and evidence-based elaboration of the merits or otherwise of these pillars of Maoism.

How will a republic lead to improved food security in Humla? Will ethnic fragmenting help or hinder in making overseas labour contracting a better-managed and more financially rewarding option for Nepal's rural poor? And how is expropriation, even if limited to agricultural land, going to foster new investment and growth in this era of globalisation? There should be time for an informed and enlightening debate on the whys and wherefores of the constituent assembly election manifestos of all political parties.

The Maoists appear to be testing the water and making ambit claims to only excite and entice the intelligentsia and civil society. For them there is one and only one key issue: retain as much control as possible over an integrated national army that includes their own armed cadres. This confers a lasting right to the Maoists to act as a state within a state until a final and complete takeover is ingeniously orchestrated.

The Maoists appear quite clear about this endgame and so must we. There can be no halfway



KIRAN PANDAY

LETTERS

MILITIA

Suman Pradhan has rightly raised the critical issue of Maoist militia ('Militia in our midst', #311), which is being overlooked by national decision makers. I believe the issue is even more troublesome than it seems.

A militia is not the problem only of the seven-party alliance or the general population. It is equally threatening to the Maoists themselves. The frustrated, uncertain mindset of the militia is in a fluid stage and, if not channelled properly, can sink the Maoists.

Based on my grassroots experience, I believe that to assume the UN team will manage this mass militia operating in rural areas is to live in a dreamland. Neither the size of the UN team nor its local knowledge will provide the human resources needed to manage this mass. The UN will also lack the mandate to deal with them.

We have already gone through a decade-long conflict and must prepare ourselves for post-conflict consequences.

There will definitely be confrontations between the Maoist militia and Maoist victims at the local level once the militia is disarmed. This eruption of accumulated pain will result in more violence. This can only mean continuation of the conflict.

Undoubtedly, the militia numbering over 100,000 will play a very intimidating role in bringing the outcome of the constituent assembly in the Maoists' favour. The seven-party alliance will clearly not agree to go for a constituent assembly under this situation, which means delays in the peace process.

Amir Bhochhibhoya,
Sansthaag Bikas Consultancy
Kendra

- At this stage, it looks imperative to form a military advisory body to solve peace-keeping problems that may arise after the implementation of the arms management agreement. This body could consist of retired Nepali army officers who have served in UN peacekeeping missions, serving Nepal Army officers, and Maoist

representatives. The team may also be needed to plan for the integration of the Maoist militia into a future Nepal Army. The purpose of such an integration is to remove, in the name of peace, adversarial feelings, and so clear the way for Loktantra.

Ishwari Pradhan, email



- It's been 100 days since the reinstatement of the House of Representatives and the setting up of the seven-party alliance government. The honeymoon period is over, but without any qualitative betterment in the lives

of the average Nepali. There has been aggressive and annoying rhetoric from members of the government and parliament. Some ministers appear confused, and others have resorted to vengeance. The disgruntled lot includes the UML, a key alliance partner in government, and its invisible ally, the Maoists, who are out of the government. There is mistrust in everything. The only achievement so far is the pushing of monarchy to a virtual state of coma. We NRNs believe that an all-side consensus approach is the only way to move ahead for sustainable peace.

P Sharma, Mumbai

NON-STOP

For months I've had to read daily, never-ending stories about the Maoists: what they should do, should not do, what they want to do, don't want to do, and just what they are doing and not doing.

I think the reality is that the supremos and super-supremos in Kathmandu lost control over their cadres throughout the country a long time ago. Does anybody believe that the 'People's Subjugating Army' will really lay

down arms? Never, because if they do, they'll immediately become poor helpless souls, beaten up or killed by their former victims.

That's why they will keep doing the things they've learnt over the last ten years, murdering, kidnapping, stealing, extortion, vandalism, and suppression.

Bishnu Ram Joshi, Bansbari

RAJIV KAFLE

I read with much interest the different opinions ('Aids alarm,' #311), including Rajiv Kafle's piece on the current 'alarm' in Nepal. Indeed, your supplement was the only one that I e-browsed in the entire Nepali media to coincide with the 16th International AIDS Conference in Toronto. Bina Pokhrel's interesting view that the government lacks further financial and technical absorption capacity might be more human resource-related and can be solved. For instance, the National Centre for AIDS/STD Control certainly needs periodic strengthening in its behaviour change interventions, communications outreach and training programs. It is also true, as Shyam Mishra, suggests that

aims

Maoism. They are not in this game to score points over left-wing rivals such as the UML, or even to upstage the role of Nirmal Lama in the 1991 Constitution with their own new and improved constitution-making process. The logic and indeed the legacy of over 12,000 deaths in the 'People's War' necessarily make the stakes higher.

What a great irony that abolition of the monarchy is now the clarion call of the Maoists when, if left to their own ways, their aim was to create a monstrosity authoritarian state along the lines perhaps of North Korea.

An active monarchy was not the issue when fighting started in 1996. Their terrorism was directed against a budding democracy and against potential political competitors. Why has the seven-party alliance and indeed our self-proclaimed civil society leaders forgotten or even forgiven these transgressions?

As the Lebanese tragedy shows, we cannot allow a Hizballah equivalent in our midst to dictate the difficult transition to an interim government and a constituent assembly. The failure of the sovereign Lebanese government to decommission Hizballah's arms and aims after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000 has now destroyed the democratic gains of Lebanon's Cedar Revolution of April 2005.

We must ensure the fruits of Nepal's Rhododendron Revolution of April 2006 do not suffer a similar fate in the endgame of the Maoists. ●

Prem Jung Thapa is an economist based in Canberra, Australia.

This way or that?

Royalists loved to ridicule Girija Prasad Koirala as a *havaladar* lacking grace and sophistication. They love to look down at this arriviste bahun from Biratnagar. But that was yesterday, before the April Uprising and the republican wave swept the country. Now, even an unrepentant Kamal Thapa loyal henchman of the ex-Chairman-King calls Koirala a "statesman".

For those deeply suspicious of Maoist motives, Koirala is the last hope. All of a sudden, Koirala has turned from bad guy to good guy. This transformation is an object lesson in the degeneration of a mass leader in the process of a mismanaged political transition.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

pressure to take the People's Movement to its logical conclusion. In clear contravention of the eight-point and five-point agreements that he himself signed with the rebels, Koirala now ordains that Maoists can't be recognised as a political party unless they give up arms. Since containment of the Nepali Army and cantonment of Maoist combatants are proposed to be conducted simultaneously under UN supervision, the objective of the geriatric premier's outbursts defy logic.

In any case, the transitional government itself is of indeterminate legitimacy. The premier of a caretaker government lacks the moral authority to raise questions over the legality of a group that has directly or indirectly contributed to the success of the political campaign that put him back in Baluwatar in the first place. Perhaps the premier realised the faux pas and then raised questions over the very desirability of a transitional statute. Unfortunately, that turned out to be yet another controversial statement that opened an even stinkier can of worms.

In the absence of an interim constitution, the validity of every parliamentary pronouncement and the government remains open to judicial review of the Supreme Court. In fact, the court has already drawn appropriate conclusions from the premier and registered cases that were earlier denied permission for constitutional hearing.

It can be argued that other than the doctrine of necessity, the appointment of Girija Prasad Koirala as the leader of a restored parliament and prime minister have no legal validity. Post-facto recognition can only be conferred upon him through an interim statute that he now feels is unnecessary. No wonder even as mild-mannered a person as Laxman Aryal, convener of the interim constitution drafting committee, was incensed enough to denounce Koirala's remarks. The government and the rebel negotiating team are to receive a draft of the interim constitution on Friday. What they do with it will determine the pace of the peace process.

The Maoist leadership isn't handling the transitional hiccups any better. Its cadres prowl the countryside as if there was no administration, no government, and no law in the land. Such an

The hometown homilies delivered by Koirala over the last week make s one wonder whether it's the same person who stood resolute against all international



KIRAN PANDAY

Maoist misdemeanours don't free the government of its obligation to bring them into the mainstream

attitude isn't rebellion, it's anarchy. Armed guerrillas acquire respect only when they begin to respect the life, liberty, and property of the common citizenry. This is something that Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his cohorts must impart to their cadres.

However, the misdemeanours of the guerrillas do not free the government of its obligation of bringing them into the mainstream. One of the unmistakable messages of the miscarried Rhododendron Revolution was an endorsement of rapprochement between the seven party alliance and the Maoists to establish sustainable peace and enduring democracy in the country.

By listening too keenly to conflict resolution experts swarming all over the place, the government seems to be falling into the trap of those who don't want to see the safe-landing of the Maoists. Meddling by minders is perhaps the root cause of the stalled peace negotiations.

In informal conversations, then US Ambassador Michael Malinowski used to say that there were only two people in Nepal who couldn't be swayed by what foreign envoys said: King Gyanendra and Premier Koirala. At some point, King Gyanendra began listening to Malinowski's successor and gambled on his support for his February First adventure. The result of that miscalculation is clear for all to see. History will be less forgiving of Koirala if he persists with his new-found love for the international community. ●

programs must be rolled out more to the field.

But perhaps the following is a more acceptable answer for Nepal. Anders Nordstrom, acting director-general for the World Health Organization, recently said at Toronto, "The most important area to ensure success in achieving universal access is a skilled and motivated workforce. No improvement in financing or medical products can make a lasting difference to people's lives until the crisis in the health workforce is solved."

Nepal's current limited HIV/AIDS-focused health workforce needs further training and encouragement backed by apolitical national commitment. Donors need to concentrate on how the government can make the national strategy truly workable given its limited 'dead' timeframe.

The Toronto AIDS Conference might have helped strengthen the global response, but in my view in Nepal we still to need to work collectively to activate a more human national response, the gist of Rajiv Kafle's view.

Surya B Prasai, Toronto

GOING UNDER

A few points in response to articles in the last issue (#311) of your esteemed organ:

- Mr Under-My-Hat, please keep on peddling your non-stop nonsense: it's the only thing that stops me jumping off the Dharara.

- I'll eat my hat if Sharad Chandra Shaha wasn't being seriously evasive in many of his responses in the interview ('I wasn't King Gyanendra's adviser').

- In response to the Spanish letterwriter ('Be wise'), isn't the key question to ask the electorate in the forthcoming constituent elections: 'Do you want Paras as your next king?'

- Thanks to Rajiv Kafle ('Let's stop being polite') for eloquently and accurately pointing out that most development agencies don't explore their mistakes honestly and constructively, but instead write in their reports that 'lessons were learned (whether they were or were not)' and anyway forget any lessons by the time the next round of staff are appointed.

On-on.

Stephen Keeling, Lalitpur

- It's not fair that after writing such a hilarious masterpiece ('To end the news, the main points again', #312) Kunda Dixit has decided to terminate his column. Don't go underground just yet!

S Sharma, Bag Bajar

MISSING TENNIS

I haven't seen my favourite tennis column 'Game Point' by Sujay Lama for the last few weeks. I miss it. Any chance of reading 'Game Point' soon?

Ma. P, email

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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Playing devil's advocate

Talking of elections won't get us there, removing arms will

This past week, as street fury over the fuel price hike brought the capital to a standstill, Kathmandu was still full of seminars and workshops on constitutional reform and state restructuring. Scores of articles and op-eds too were published on the same issues.

Also in this one week alone, numerous reports appeared about intimidation and threats. One story headlined Maoist taxation in Dhanusha, another a murder in Bardiya, yet another reported the capture of government officials in Bara. None of these stories mentioned the word 'militia', but anyone with more than cursory knowledge of the Maoists knows it is fear of their militia that is fuelling Maoist expansion.

In the four months of the peace process, the Maoists have moved in from the jungles and expanded their way into all sectors, particularly trade unions and civil society. They now appear entrenched not just in the countryside, where they have roamed freely for years, but also in towns and cities. This is from where their 'non-violent' civil protests are going to come from, if regular Maoist warnings are to be believed. But the activity of our media, civil society, parties, NGOs, INGOs, and donors shows that they are all focused on constitutional polls, rather than on reclaiming political space.

While the nation looks ahead towards constituent assembly elections to find a durable solution to the conflict, the reality on the ground is shifting in the Maoists' favour. The rebels are once again proving adept at using Mao's old dictum: take one step back and two steps forward. If agreeing to a peace process was a step back from their eventual goal, then the expansion of the last four months can be seen as a double leap ahead.

This raises a simple question: What is more important today, talking about the constituent assembly election or working to actually make it happen?



KIRAN PANDAY

Conventional wisdom today is that Nepal's peace process can only be institutionalised through a new constitution written by an elected constituent assembly. But here is the catch: how do we hold a free election when militia activity reinforces a culture of fear? The focus on polls is fine as long as that is our overarching goal and we concentrate on the tactics of making it a reality. And that means zeroing on potential spoilers such as militia weapons.

But no one is even talking openly about the militia yet, focused as they are on the Nepal Army and the PLA. The PLA, however, was not an instrument of terror but of force projection. The militia is the instrument through which the Maoists have always struck fear. Logically, the focus should now be shifting towards the militia. Perhaps that will happen in time, but public discourse so far does not suggest so, dominated as it is by a new state structure under a new constitution. This assumes that constituent assembly polls will be held. But what if they aren't, or are pushed back indefinitely? Worse still, what if elections are held, but are deemed un-free and illegitimate?

These worst-case scenarios could emerge if the militia issue is not handled properly, and fast. No elections will be free and fair until the militia are removed from the scene. And without an election, there won't be a constituent assembly or a new constitution. We might as well forget about re-structuring Nepal towards a more inclusive democracy.

Removing the militia is certain to be problematic because the Maoists do have legitimate concerns about army-backed vigilante groups and state security organs which, until four months ago, they were fighting. Without a credible guarantee and proper incentives, just asking them to remove the militia won't get us anywhere.

This points to the complete lack of trust between all sides in this troubled peace process. The SPA government lacks control over the army, which makes the Maoists suspicious about army and police intentions, which fuels their militia activity, which is perpetuating a climate of fear. Breaking this vicious cycle will require patient trust-building between all sides, a task the UN will need to demonstrate it is capable of handling. ●



MEANWHILE
Suman Pradhan



NARESH NEWAR

Impunity matters

The new Army Bill could hinder justice for victims of the military and the Maoists

NARESH NEWAR

It's been two years since the infamous extrajudicial killing of 15-year-old Maina Sunuwar by Nepal Army personnel. We're told her corpse has finally have been discovered this week, buried deep under the Pachkhal barracks' grounds.

The discovery gives Maina's mother Debi some hope of resolution, but there are fresh complications.

Debi will have little chance of finding peace in justice if the government passes the proposed Army Bill. Potentially, the new laws could prohibit civilian courts from trying army personnel even for grave rights abuses, extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, and torture. And if the army gets impunity, the Maoists are unlikely to agree to pay for their sins.

"I may not live to see Maina's killers punished, but I hope my fellow citizens and the new loktantrik political leaders will make sure it happens," said a tearful 50-year old Debi as she kissed a much-handled photograph of her daughters.

"Our biggest problem is impunity. Guilty soldiers often get away with crimes due to army protection," says Mandira Sharma of Advocacy Forum, which was also a key force in lobbying the UN to adopt the International Convention on Enforced Involuntary Disappearance back in June. Nepal is already under international pressure to ratify the convention, following which national legislation should be framed to start investigations into the forced disappearances and address past violations by both the state and Maoists.

It took three months for the Defence Ministry to finally announce that at some point the whereabouts of 49 detainees who 'disappeared' from the Bhairabnath Battalion would be

made public. There are concerns that this might be all that happens, if the bill is passed.

The army says that passage of the bill, which has the support of the Defence Ministry, will help democratise the Nepal Army. But even debate about the proposed legislation ruffles feathers. Defence Secretary Bishnu Dutta Uprety is said to have been furious about public comment on the bill by the UN's Nepal human rights office. The OHCHR (Office of the High Commission for Human Rights) said that the bill fails to guarantee victims rights, including access to court martial proceedings and human rights protection for detainees.



Maina Sunuwar

Sources say a team of forensic scientists from the UN will arrive in Nepal in a few weeks if the government starts exhuming the bodies of disappeared people. But an equal challenge is bringing the Maoists to book, and the UN is being closely watched for indications of how it will address torture, brutal killings, and disappearances caused by Maoists. Rough estimates say the army involved in 3,000 cases of extra judicial killings, but there is no data on similar violations by the rebels.

OHCHR says both sides must be held accountable for serious violations of human rights. "This is necessary to re-establish the rule of law, provide justice to victims and their families and send a clear

message that there will no longer be impunity in Nepal," says David Johnson, officer-in-charge at OHCHR-Nepal, adding, "Holding those responsible for human rights violations is a key step in deterring potential abusers and preventing future violations, thus contributing to the peace process."

Activists say that the reality is, not one case of disappearance has been investigated yet. And once the investigations begin, there are no laws in place to determine standards for investigation, prosecution, compensation, and modes of sentencing. The peace talks so far have not discussed what such law might look like.

So far, diplomatic missions have kept mum about the Army Bill, which could potentially thwart transitional justice mechanisms, and have not raised the issue of impunity. However, some have flown in senior defence experts to discuss reform and democratisation of the Nepal Army, and the UK and the US defence ministries recently brought in teams to assess the country's security situation.

On Tuesday this week, Defence Secretary Uprety announced that five 'disappeared' persons had been released to their families, but a frustrated Bishnu Maya Rokka says she has no news of her husband, whose name is on the list. "Where is he? I haven't seen him yet," she shouted outside the army headquarters. Hira Bahadur Rokka was arrested three years ago in Kathmandu.

The Disappeared Families' Group plans more agitations, on 3 September they want to lock in Singha Darbar and hold a 5,000-strong rally until the whereabouts of all detainees and disappeared are revealed. "The home minister and prime minister just make promises, exactly like the National Human Rights Commission used to during the royal regime," complains the group's Sharmila Tripathi. ●

ADB may join West Seti

The Asian Development Bank is considering joining a consortium of investors on the 750MW West Seti project that hopes to sell power to India. The Manila-based bank has been in consultation with the other investors, Australia's SMEC, China's CMEC and Nepali financial institutions. ADB could have a direct equity participation and guarantee the project's debt financing. Officials are in Kathmandu and will tour the site in Doti district as well as India.

"ADB's participation would help bolster confidence among investors and in India, China, and Nepal," said Himalaya Pande, the project's Nepali promoter. West Seti has negotiated a plant design contract with China's CMEC which will also have an equity share in the project. China's Export Import Bank, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China and China Development Bank could lend up to a billion dollars.

Project sources say the big hurdle now is political risk assessment and insurance. "Despite recent political changes and the ceasefire, Nepal is still viewed as very high risk for foreign investors," said Pande. The China Export and Credit Insurance Corporation (Sinosure) will likely provide \$400 million of insurance, and West Seti is doing an insurance roadshow in North America in September for the rest.

Tea trouble brewing

Small tea producers say the labour strike, on since 13 August, could force them to shut down gardens in east Nepal. The workers' 21-point demands include that the monthly minimum wage be increased to Rs 5000. Farmers say that while they are willing to listen, concrete improvements are not possible without subsidies. Wages here are linked to those in tea estates in West Bengal, since most Nepali tea is exported to India. The strike is costing the industry Rs 10 million per day, and could increase, as tea buds mature and become useless if they remain unpicked for more than eight days.

NEW PRODUCTS

GIN STAR: Himalaya Distillery has introduced new North Star extra dry gin. The makers claim that the new gin contains ten special herbs. This product comes in 180, 375 and 750ml bottles and is priced at Rs 198, 210 and 425 respectively.

MOODS: Krishna Nepal Trading has introduced Moods brands of condoms in the local market. The product was manufactured in collaboration with Hindustan Latex Okometo, Japan and is available in all drug stores.



Fuelling discontent

Only competition can solve the fuel crisis

The lesson from this week's petrol riots is this: when market forces are subverted in the buying and selling process of essential commodities, it invites riot forces. Just look at how the petrol business has been run in this country.



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

Dipping into its foreign currency reserves, Nepal buys petrol from global markets. It pays market rates to purchase the 'mother stock' of petroleum products from India and other countries. The government organ which alone is entrusted to buy petrol, the Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC), has long been considered a den of corruption.

The NOC's business model is straightforward: buy petrol at (high) international prices, do bits of processing in Amlekhganj, and sell it to domestic consumers at (low) government-fixed rates via a consortium of dealers. In a competitive business setting, such a buy-high-and-sell-low pricing scheme would bankrupt a firm. But successive governments threw open the treasury to keep the NOC going so that 'the poor'

would continue to have access to petrol (as if they owned cars and buses!), and few saw reason to protest against petrol prices. But in recent times, with global petrol prices continuously heading north, coupled with a relative decline in the Nepal government's ability to provide huge subsidies, the NOC's only option was to raise the domestic price.

And when it did that early last week, the reaction from 'the poor' (whose choice of protest included motorcycle rallies!) was vicious. After two days of shutdowns, the government agreed to roll back the prices. That meant diverting money away from, say, primary education or basic health care to continue to provide subsidised petrol for a few. In this politics of hasty compromise were these questions: have we locked ourselves into a dangerously unsustainable position here? If so, is there a way out?

The NOC is a Panchayat-era monopoly, set up to streamline petroleum purchasing, pricing and distribution decisions. With government money available, NOC bigwigs discovered that the only incentive they faced was to make money for themselves and their political masters. There was

money to be made when conducting international purchases, in selling subsidised Nepali petrol in India, in adulterating fuels, and in deciding who gets to own petroleum depots across Nepal. Ministers, who signed the government cheques, saw NOC as a quietly lucrative entity that helped pay for party expenses and elections.

The NOC is a huge drain on public resources. Sure, ministers can keep propping it up for their own narrow political interests, but that comes at a very, very high cost to us all. To get out of this unsustainable position, it's time to think of dismantling the NOC. Let's instead have competing private domestic and international suppliers who can buy petrol directly from anywhere and sell it straight to Nepali consumers. As with airlines and long-distance bus services, competition—not a monopoly—will provide choices of products and services to consumers at market-driven lower prices. The only losers will be NOC officers and their political masters.

If we fail to think through alternatives to NOC now, no matter who's in government later, we will find ourselves more vulnerable to riot forces than to those of the market. ●

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Revolution from cities

Interview with Baburam Bhattarai on *Bahas*, Kantipur TV, 19 August



You've had some success in 10 years.

We were successful if we achieved our dream of liberating this country and people.

So many people died due to your 'People's War'. Do you feel burdened by the crimes committed in your name?

People have died anyway. They have died of hunger, and disease. In this case people died for liberation. Nepalis are not poor bahadurs, gorkhas and foreigners' soldiers any more, they're now seen as people who fought for liberation. Such recognition is no an ordinary feat, and comes from the sacrifice of 10-12,000 people.

It wasn't a sacrifice for those who died due to you and your army. Don't you feel responsible?

Look at history, the French revolution, the British revolution, American civil war, and revolutions in Russia, China. Hundreds of thousands of people died. Think about World War II, millions. Compare all that to the sacrifice of just thousands. (*Hastily continues*) We have to look at the great work we have achieved.

You don't you feel any sadness at all thinking about the deaths of so many?

Of course, I do. Does anyone feel at ease about killing? Never. But due to certain circumstances, sacrifice is necessary for social transformation and advancement.

Have you ever been on the front?

We made the war plans, provided training, monitored.

Have you been on the battlefield, armed with a gun?

Well, I'm too old for that. I have not participated directly in the war. I'm over 50, but if I were young, I would have.

Has anyone died at your hands?

No, not by me or the chairman. But we take moral responsibility, as we made plans which got people killed.

The Maoists have intimidated, killed, made the poor suffer.



Those with a reputation for corruption weren't touched.

Our strategy was to start with small-time local thugs. We gradually moved from the villages to towns and cities. By the time we were planning to attack the 'big fish' in the cities, the peace process started.

But you admit that poor villagers suffered immensely while those who ruined this country got away scot-free?

No, it got better for villagers. Women can talk freely now, dalits no longer have to bow down to higher castes, farmers don't fear landlords.

Let's talk about some of the people you killed, like the teacher in Lamjung.

If we made mistakes, we've have managed to improve. Mistakes happen while undertaking great work.

You consider Girija (sic) a leader and joined the Jana Andolan under him. But when he said the king should be given ceremonial space you seemed furious.

Not furious, sad. We accepted him as a leader following the 12-point agreement, and trusted him to lead the loktantra campaign. Now he's close to losing the goodwill he'd earned. We hope that doesn't happen.

Have you had any contact with the palace?

Not at all.

You've had absolutely no relations with the palace?
Never, we don't find it at all necessary.

You won't lie to millions. Can you tell them right now whether you've had any talks with the palace?

Our party members never met the king. A month before King Birendra was killed, his younger brother Dharendra said the king wanted to meet us. A party member who met Dharendra was asked why the political situation had not been solved. He said that the king was worried.

Will the Maoists go back to the jungle?

We were never in the jungle, but among the villagers.

So, you will not return to the villages?

No, we will now stay in the city because the future movement will be city-centric.

Will you go underground again?

No, we will stay among the people and start a revolution through them.

What will your government do on citizen's rights?

Today, not everyone can exercise their rights. We will ensure a large-scale change. They will have more rights once we come to power. For example, we will ensure free medical aid, education, and unemployment benefits.

What about foreign policy?

We'll ensure our bilateral policies with neighbouring countries are mutually beneficial, and have diplomatic ties with all countries. We will have new treaties. But we will not allow foreign diplomats to dictate who should join the government and what policies it should adopt.

Why the new silence on Kalapani, the 1950 treaty, and Indian expansion.

We can't bring up these issues whenever we like.

Does your party still consider the Indian government expansionist?

Certain policies of the Indian government are not in favour of the Nepali people and nation.

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Two armies

PLA Deputy Commander, Janardan Sharma (Pravakar), *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 17-31 August

Attempts to hinder the peace process include: talking about ‘decommissioning’, contrary to the eight-point agreement; saying the king must be given a role; not allowing the Maoists to join the interim government with their weapons in violation of the agreement to allow both armies to be placed in temporary or permanent barracks. This is a masterplan to save the monarchy and use the country for imperialist motives.

There are two armies in Nepal. That’s the reality, whatever the eight-point agreement says. If issues of armies and power are not resolved, the peace process will be a sham.

One set of weapons was used to oppress the people and protect the feudalists. The other fought for the people’s liberation. The ‘royal army’, which stood against the people’s movement is the problem. The issue is democratisation of this army and its use for the people’s wishes in the changed political scenario.

Decommissioning and disbanding the PLA now will be suicidal. People can only vote in a fear-free environment if both armies are in barracks. The confusion of many leaders and ministers indicates that foreign powers are at work.

What guarantee is there that once the PLA is disbanded this constituent assembly will not be like that in 1950, or the election like the 1979 referendum? What will other groups without an army do?

The PLA is not just the Maoist party’s army but belongs to all protesting parties. Placing it under the interim government means other parties are also included. The PLA will obey the interim government’s orders and consider the UN. If people doubt this, what guarantee is there that the Nepal Army will pay heed to the government? It is still the king’s army. Placing both armies under unified command is also about the creation of a new republican national army. Many doubt this is feasible, but once it is united ideologically and psychologically, institutional unity is possible.

Wrong passport

Kantipur, 23 August

Two Nepali women from Sindhupalchok have been imprisoned because of a spelling error in the official Nepal Government stamp in their passports. Ankita Nepali, 21 and Sumitra Nepal, 23 were travelling to Kuwait via Delhi when Indian officials detained them for carrying ‘fake’ passports. They are in Tihar prison in New Delhi.

Their passports were issued by Sindhupalchok district administration in June. Sindhupalchok’s Chief District Officer, Jiwan Prasad Oli admits the official stamp has a spelling

error. “We were in such a hurry to change the official stamp after the historic HoR proclamation in April, that the error was overlooked,” Oli said.

Over 1,600 passports issued from May 19 to July 12 carry the spelling mistake. District administration has sent a letter to the Home Ministry informing them that Ankita and Sumitra’s passport are authentic. Over 150 passport holders have received replacements. Four other Nepali women are in Tihar jail, all accused of passport forgery.

Mutiny trial

Nepal Samacharpatra, 22 August

The western headquarters of the Nepal Army has released 10 of 27 soldiers detained on charges of mutiny after interrogation. Chitra Ale, Dipak Shahi, and an unnamed third are still in custody and said to have been tortured excessively.

Spokesman Hem Jung Thapa said a three-member court of inquiry headed by Colonel Bharat Malla will investigate, after which the General Army Court will rule.

The soldiers revolted against what they termed “excesses” committed by the commanding officer of the Tripura Dal Battalion, an army training camp in Pokhara sub-municipality’s Setidovan. One released soldier said they could not bear the tyranny of CO Himadri Kumar Thapa, his deputy Yadav Silwal, and Subedar Ramsharan Bhatta.

He also said human rights activists were not interested in their problems. Himadri Kumar Thapa has since been replaced by Prakash Deuja as CO of the 270-strong battalion.

Child pawns

Kantipur, 24 August

The Maoist student wing ANNFSU-R held a demonstration last week, surrounding the Nepal Army HQ, wanting to know the whereabouts of the disappeared.



But using school children in uniform was in many ways the wrong approach. Such behaviour only provokes the other side, and the use of school children for political aims should be stopped.

The 25-point code of conduct signed by the government and the Maoists agrees that protests shouldn’t take the form of bandas or stopping traffic, so people can receive basic service, and development work can continue.

For the peace process to be relatively easy, citizen must be able to live free from fear, there must be an environment of trust, and there must be no forced donations.

“This is my pilgrimage”

Nari, August/September

Sita Poudyal and Chabilal Dahal, or Prachanda, married young and both joined the communist party. Sita Poudyal keeps a low profile, but is a CPN-Maoist central advisor. [Throughout the interview, Sita Poudyal refers to her husband Prachanda in the third person, as ‘he’.]

You married very young. Today it would be called a child marriage.
(Laughs) Probably. It was an arranged marriage.

What about your education?
I have no formal education. In Pokhara, I might have studied like my friends, but after we came to Chitwan I herded cattle and played with my Tharu friends. The school was very far away. My parents did want to send me, and if I were a son perhaps they would have. It was probably the place and the environment.

Was it difficult to adjust to an educated husband?
No difficulty. When we got married, he was in class ten, he only went to study in Kathmandu later.

What did you do after he went to Kathmandu?
I did what other village women did. We stayed with the family for the first 12 years, until 1978. Prakash was born in 1981, after our three daughters.

So your desire for a son was fulfilled later in life...
(Laughs) My mother-in-law wanted a grandson! I wanted to go for family planning after my daughters, and he agreed once our son was born.

When did you get into politics?
In 1978 there was talk of Amik Sherchan’s wife teaching us. He also agreed. Influenced by her, I joined the movement.

Did you argue about your husband joining politics?
Women have a part to play in the party and I struggled with those matters. I did my best to save the party from dangerously divisive arguments. Once, there was trouble at a meeting in Rolpa. I pressed for the unity. I told everyone (pointing to Hisila Yami) that no one should make any trouble. We argued about these matters, but never about

anything personal. I was married when I was a child. Unlike husbands and wives of today, I feel like I was born and grew up with Prachanda.

Were you ever scared that he might leave you?
We married as children, I became a mother. It was hard. We struggled against the world, but I never had any doubt, not after I joined the party, not now.

Do you ever feel like going on pilgrimage?
We’ve been on a pilgrimage all our lives, I’m 53. This is my pilgrimage.



Yet you’re the daughter and daughter in-law of Brahmins.
My father used to scold my mother for doing puja, “what will you get worshipping stone idols?” Perhaps that’s why I’ve never had faith in religion.
Wasn’t it difficult living underground?
Let us not even talk about the struggles. There were countless uphill and downhill.

What do you do in the party at present?
I’m a central advisor.

Isn’t this a post without responsibility?
My job is to give internal advice and make corrections according to the party’s wishes.

Like your husbands, do you and Hisila Yami fight?
Why fight? Ask her. I used to say, beware, you have a role to play too. But there was never any animosity as outsiders think.

What has the ‘People’s War’ given Nepali women?
This used to be a feudalistic, patriarchal society. Today our party has 40 percent women and they are in upper posts too.

What do you think about quotas for women?
It’s not about weighing how much a woman needs. Women should take as much as necessary. We must demand our share.

Thousands have died since the beginning of the war. Don’t you feel pity for them?
We’ve had sleepless nights. We felt the pain when we heard how many had died. We worried about the families of the soldiers of the Royal Nepal Army. We cried when our friends died.



Ceremonial raag

Dewen in Nepal, 20 August

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“Until the constituent assembly takes place, it is futile to protest about the existing system.”

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat speaking about the Seven party alliance’s support for the ceremonial monarchy in Rajdhani, 24 August.



KUNDA DIXIT

Leave road maintenance to local communities and feel the difference

The road ahead for Nepal

PRAGYA SHRESTHA

If you’ve ever wanted to hop on your bike and rise around your own country, this is the time to do it. Because of this year’s deficient monsoon, there are very few landslides blocking Nepal’s highways. The ceasefire means there is no harassment at army checkpoints and no danger of being caught in a highway firefight. But the real reason is that Nepal’s highways have never been better.

Thanks to proper planning and maintenance under a Department of Roads (DOR) program, it is actually fun to drive in Nepal these days. That was the impression we got during a recent trip across the Prithbi Highway to Pokhara, down the Siddharth Highway to Butwal and then looping back across Butwal and Narayanghat to Mugling and then Kathmandu. There are no more daily headlines about the Narayangat-Mugling stretch still being closed, or the landslide at Krishna Bhir blocking Kathmandu’s main artery. As

far as our highways go, no news is good news. People take roads for granted and underestimate the care they need. The worst enemy of the asphalt pavement is water—without proper drainage a road is destroyed within a few months of being paved. Many don’t realise this and blame corrupt contractors. While contractors may cut corners, the reason could also be farmers diverting drainage to their fields, roadside settlements blocking drains and potholes being allowed to grow. Part of the reason for the relatively good

shape of Nepal’s roads is the Swiss-funded Strengthened Maintenance Division Program (SMDP), which has just wound down after 13 years. One of the enduring legacies of the SMDP is a nationwide system of daily road maintenance by local communities. As with everything else in Nepal, the best solution is the local solution. “The Swiss perfected the system after building the Lamosangu-Jiri Highway and let villagers along the highway maintain a length of the road. They came to be known as ‘lengthworkers’ and the program was scaled up nationwide,” says Devendra Dhar Pradhanang, maintenance management adviser at SMDP. You see them everywhere today, with their faded orange flags, orange helmets and orange jackets. Usually elderly villagers, they painstakingly clear drains, fill potholes, or ensure that the road shoulders are clear of vegetation. Some even sweep the highways, because pebbles and stones can increase wear and tear. The lengthworker is vital to reliable road maintenance in Nepal and the idea has been replicated in Kenya and other Asian countries. The project has now been handed over to the DOR, and the big question is whether it will run as efficiently without Swiss management. The department employs 1,600 lengthworkers all over the country for routine maintenance. Local villagers can earn up to Rs 150 a day for maintaining a 3km length of road each. Besides keeping roads in good shape for less money, the system also contributes to poverty reduction among the rural population along the highways. Experience shows that as long as lengthworkers do their jobs properly, roads last longer and need less frequent and expensive repairs. Of course, for emergency and bigger maintenance work the department has rapid reaction teams. “This is a really effective way to reduce

Bio-engineering tames Krishna Bhir

The infamous Krishna Bhir landslide is no longer in the news everyday for blocking the Prithbi Highway. Why? Because now, the road works. A cost-effective, home-grown system of slope stabilisation using vegetation perfected by Nepali road experts is in use at Krishna Bhir and other major landslides in Nepal. Bio-engineering has nothing to do with genetic manipulation; it just means planting the right bushes and trees to stop slopes from sliding. An entire side of a mountain slithered down to the Trisuli River during the 2000 monsoon blocking the main highway for 11 days. Even after the debris was cleared, the road would be blocked following relatively light rain. A Japanese contractor studied the problem and proposed to fix Krishna Bhir for over Rs 2 billion. The successful plan finally used was Nepali-made, and cost under Rs 40 million. “We studied the landslide carefully and found the weak points,” recalls Naresh Man Shakya, the engineer in charge of the project. “We decided on a combination of water and debris management, and bioengineering.” Shakya uses special grass to trap debris, armour the surface and anchor the topsoil, thus stopping the slope slide. “Bio-engineering improves the environment and increases stability due to the plants’ root system,” explains Shanker Rai, an expert in the field at the Swiss-funded District Road Support Program (DRSP). Shakya’s work at Krishna Bhir is internationally recognised and he is often called to share his experiences in Bhutan, Japan, Britan, and Norway. “We succeeded,” he sums up, “because we pinpointed the problem, then designed a solution according to technology and local resources available.”



SLIPPERY SLOPE: Krishna Bhir in 2000 (above) when it was blocked for nearly two weeks after a mountain collapse, and in 2006 (below) after the bio-engineered slope stabilisation.





KUNDA DIXIT

SWEeper HIGHWAY: Female lengthworker Debi Maya Gurung (right) on her way home after a day maintaining a stretch of highway in Syangja recently. Nepal's highways wear a clean and smooth look in most places (overleaf) except where there are still scars of fighting, like (right) at the strategic Surai Naka Bridge in Kapilbastu. The bridge was bombed by the Maoists in 2001 and although hundreds of buses and trucks risk crossing it everyday it still hasn't been repaired. If this bridge collapses the Mahendra Highway between Butwal and Kohalpur will be cut.

pavement deterioration," says Narayan Puri, engineer with the Road Division in Butwal, "and the added advantage is that when local sections of the road are maintained by local people, there is a feeling of ownership and pride. And it provides employment to villagers."

Lengthworkers are now respected, though when they started ten years ago villagers used to make fun of them. More and more lengthworkers are also women. A group of women lengthworkers had just finished the day's work near Waling on the Siddhartha Highway recently and were trundling their wheelbarrows home when we ran into them.

"We thought all roads were the same," said their supervisor, Debi Maya Gurung, "but now I can tell just by looking at the grass on the shoulder or the state of the drain whether the lengthworker is doing her job properly."

The SMDP is competing directly

with a new performance-based maintenance contract system being pushed by the World Bank and the ADB. The two approaches couldn't be more different. One relies on community participation in road maintenance, and the other on big contractors awarded huge sums to maintain sections of the road.

A performance-based system may work in western countries, but Nepal's roads pass through villages and farms and are used by livestock, children playing on the pavement, and peasants who dry wheat and corn on the asphalt.

Experts say the performance-based contract system would encourage corruption, lead to road deterioration and remove the lengthworker system, which enhances the livelihood of the local communities.

Nepal's roads need communities involved in their upkeep. The lengthworker system is a proven, cost-effective success story. ●



AMRIT GURUNG

Social roads

With the ceasefire, Nepal's Rural Access Program (RAP) is being restarted with support from the British aid ministry, DFID. Its new model of road-building and maintenance provides roads and alleviates poverty.

The \$44 million program which aimed to link roadless districts to the highway network, was started in 2001 but stopped because of the insurgency. After debating whether to terminate it, DFID has decided to go ahead with a scaled-down version.

The project will be handled by new management and plans to refocus work on four eastern districts (Bhojpur, Khotang, Sankhuwasabha and Terhatum), terminating work in Dailekh, Accham, and Doti where only 10 percent of the project could be finished because of the conflict.

"With new management and the new political situation, we hope roads will help in poverty alleviation, by providing livelihood opportunities through employment in construction," says Roger Weatherell, the newly appointed program manager at RAP/DFID, adding, "it's better to concentrate on fewer areas with better output than to take a bigger area with no output."

Durga KC, director general at the Department of Roads, says he is glad RAP hasn't stopped completely. "We feel sorry that people in the west couldn't benefit as planned, but we are relieved to have at least the eastern cluster."

RAP is planning to do with local Road Building Groups (RBGs) what forest user groups did for community forests. The idea is to promote decision-making and maximise benefits in local communities—for example, by providing new livelihood opportunities through local enterprise.

Already, 13,500 local people of the eastern hills have benefited directly from road construction. They are paid for work, and incomes are then enhanced through saving and credit schemes. This ensures sustained improvements to livelihoods even after the construction phase is finished.

Says Indu Prasad Dhakal, coordinator of the Hile-Bhojpur Feeder Road Project of RAP: "These are the kinds of new roads we need all over Nepal, focusing not just on technical aspects but social ones too."

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Wireless villages

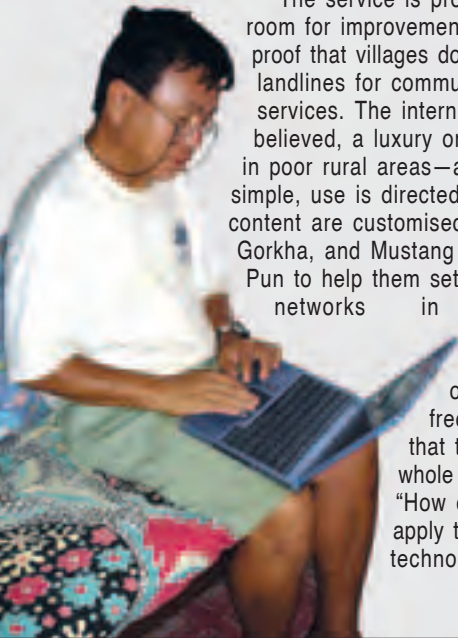
Mahabir Pun knows the value of education. His father, a retired Indian Army soldier, sold the family home and land to send Pun to school. Mahabir earned his ISc in Kathmandu and won two scholarships to get a bachelor's and then a master's degree in the United States, in Nebraska. He wanted to return the favour on a larger scale, and after he finished university, Pun went straight back home to Naangigaun, Myagdi, to give the school there a new lease on life. He ended up doing a little more than planned.

About five years ago, most international reports on his work focused on the novelty factor—running a computer out of a wooden box amid the Himalayas. But today the Nepal Wireless Project in mid-western Nepal is a model of a simple, effective, and successful rural internet access.

In five years, the Project has connected some 22 neighbouring villages in Myagdi and Parbat at a cost of Rs 2 million. It's an efficient wireless network that uses, among other technical options, a single telephone line originating in Pokhara to serve 15 villages. The local network and internet are used to exchange information about locally produced goods and commodity prices, as well as other programs and weekly markets. The wireless network also provides telemedicine facilities to eight villages using doctors from Pokhara's Om Hospital.

The service is probably slow and there is room for improvement, but Pun's model is proof that villages don't have to wait for landlines for communication or improved services. The internet is not, as commonly believed, a luxury or irrelevant entertainment in poor rural areas—as long as access is simple, use is directed, and services and content are customised. Observers from Palpa, Gorkha, and Mustang districts have requested Pun to help them set up similar wireless networks in these areas too.

Pun has lobbied hard for the de-licensing of the 2.4 and 5.8 frequency bands, but says that telecom regulations as a whole need to be updated. "How can 50-year-old laws apply to 21st century technology?" he asks.



GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA

Ring in the new

Telecom laws limp into the 21st century

GAURAB RAJ UPADHAYA

Last week parliament's Development Committee issued a long overdue directive. The much-used 2.4 and 5.8 wireless frequency bands could become legal for use. The directive also mentions legalising VoIP (Voice over IP), a telephony option that could rapidly bring communications to remote areas. The announcement must appear in the Gazette to come into force.

VoIP has been legalised since the late 1990s in many countries, and is especially good for Nepal. Phone tariffs could drop considerably, and together with wireless internet service, VoIP is a relatively quick way to extend telephony to remote and rural areas of the country.

The de-licensing of wireless frequencies comes late in the day. In Nepal, if you use the WiFi feature on your laptop, you're a scofflaw. Unless, that is, you pay the Rs 6,000 annual license fee, which most don't know about. The 2.4 and 5.8 frequency bands most consumer wireless cards on laptops and desktops use are restricted in Nepal.

These should be unregulated frequencies, as the International

Telecommunications Union designates them as Industrial, Scientific and Medical Bands frequencies on a non-protection and interference acceptance basis.



Most countries, barring a few like North Korea, allow unrestricted public use of these frequencies.

The directive came following serious lobbying by Mahabir Pun of the Nepal Wireless Project (*see box*) and hobbyists.

There are undertakings like Pun's Nepal Wireless Project and private businesses that use the two bands. Pun has been open about having 'illegal' equipment handcarried into the country by volunteers. But this means he has to send damaged equipment abroad to be fixed, taking some villages offline for weeks. The new regulations will help projects like Pun's, and help establish benchmarking for ISPs

and other telecom businesses.

Changing regulations is difficult as the Nepal Telecommunications Authority is often toothless, and frequencies are regulated by an unwieldy committee headed by the Minister for Communications and including secretaries of Home, Communications, Defence, Tourism, and the NTA chair. But after this come more difficult issues, such as harmonising the licensing regime and bringing import regulations and duties in line with telecom policy.

Nepal's telecom policies are based on a 50-year-old regulatory framework. This stops even public institutions from using expensive equipment. The much-touted 1500 telecentre project of the Ministry of Science and Technology was established in Mustang, and then held hostage to the licensing regime.

The World Bank gave the Nepal Wireless Project a grant from its national Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) last year, but didn't push for legislative change. Very soon, the project will end up on the list of 'success stories' to be replicated, whilst it cannot even be replicated in Nepal itself. ●

What do
YOU
want them to hold?

To be literate is every child's birth right.

Issued in Nepali child's interest

Associate Chgvy @ Mather

FORCED OUT: The owners of this house in Terathum were evicted by the Maoists and haven't yet returned.



PRADEEP MYANGBO

What about the displaced who want to stay?

The long wait

MALLIKA ARYAL

“We are tired of knocking on government doors, we have come to the UN so they can pressure the state to do something about us displaced people,” says Putali Rokka, who left Rolpa with her husband and children eight years ago following Maoist threats.

Rokka is among 100 displaced people gathered in front of UN’s Nepal human rights office (OHCHR) in Chauni on Monday. Many walked all morning to attend the rally hoping for help.

The government has offered help to return and in rehabilitation, but the refugees say that is not enough. They want security and their property returned.

Kalpana Bhandari, whose husband was killed by Maoists five years ago, wants to continue living in Kathmandu because she is scared the Maoists will come for her. “I often get threatening calls, they say they will cut off my fingers and legs. I know they will not spare me if I go back,” she says. During last year’s ceasefire, she had returned to her village in Ramechhap only to flee once again.

The murder of NC cadre Sushil Gyawali in Bardiya last week and of another activist by Maoists has deterred those who were thinking of going back. The displaced also want Rs 1 million

in compensation, five percent representation in the government and interim parliament, and jobs.

Despite the ceasefire and a code of conduct, abduction, extortion and murder have continued. The OHCHR has expressed concern that local rebels do not always follow orders. The Maoists are still threatening to make returnees appear in their ‘people’s courts’, and punish them before allowing them back.

“Who can dare to return when it is obvious that the killings haven’t stopped?” asks Rokka.

Estimates vary, but there are said to be anywhere between 100-200,000 people displaced from their homes. Largely from rural communities, they have fled violence and economic hardship. The majority live with relatives in temporary accommodation, abandoned plots or in small rented rooms in Kathmandu. The maoist victims association (Maobadi Pidit Sangh) says there are at least 27,000 displaced people in the capital alone.

Living conditions are harsh and the refugees struggle for employment, lodgings, basic services like health and education. Most work as labourers, factory workers, security guards or house help.

These jobs are insecure, so they end up surviving on loans.

“I have not paid the rent for the last four months,” says Kul Bahadur Karki, who was abducted by the Maoists in Dolkaha, beaten and left to die, “I borrow from my neighbours when I can, otherwise I just eat what I find.”

“There is never enough to eat,” says Sita Pariyar, who fled Kailali when Maoists threatened her. Five other members of her family share a room in Dallu. “I have a ten-month-old daughter, a husband who suffers from lung problems, a father who can hardly see and a sister who cannot attend school because there is no money,” Sita adds.

The human right’s group, Insec, says it is the state’s responsibility to take care of citizens. “It is only the government that can provide shelter, employment, education and other services,” says Insec’s Prekshya Ojha.

The royal regime did set up a national policy on the internally displaced, but no one else is talking about it. There isn’t even an accurate figure on the number of people affected.

OHCHR’s Bjorn Pettersson says: “According to international norms, integration for those who want to stay back in their current locations is as important as return and rehabilitation.” ●

Rolpa’s reality

The ceasefire is a respite for the country’s most war-ravaged district

LIBANG—As the ceasefire takes hold, the action shifts to Kathmandu and many of us have forgotten Rolpa, the cradle of the Maoist revolution.

More than 700 Rolpalis lost their lives in the past ten years of conflict, making this the district with the highest casualty level. Many were killed during police offensives in 1997-98 to root out the Maoists. Even today, people talk about ‘Romeo’ and ‘Kilo Sierra 2’ in hushed tones, of how their brothers and neighbours were killed on mere suspicion of being Maoist sympathisers. Others were killed by Maoists, and those that didn’t flee to Libang, have lived here ever since.



NEPALI PAN
Shrishti RL Rana

Madav Acharya, district chairman of the NC, says his wife never let him go even on the terrace fearing Maoist snipers from the surrounding hills would get him. But for now Rolpalis, whether they live in the government-controlled fortress capital or the Maoist-dominated hinterland, are happy that the fighting has stopped. The war-weariness is palpable and there is a deep yearning for peace.

At a photo shop, Prem Bahadur Buda is cautiously optimistic. “Things are much better but the Maoist activities are almost the same,” he says, “we do not have enough food for ourselves yet we have to feed the Maoists or pay them Rs 50 a month.”

The shop has a large portrait of Princess Shruti with her daughter, next to a picture of the daughter of Maoist negotiator Krishna Bahadur Mahara, a Rolpa native. On the street outside I overheard a 12-year-old boy threaten a retired British Gurkha soldier that he had a socket bomb in his bag.

People are less afraid to talk. Hari Khadki opens out: “There is a ceasefire, yes, but they still force us to work on the Shahid Marg. If we don’t go we have to pay Rs 5,000 fine.” The 93km ‘martyr highway’ connects Thawang with Nuwagau.

Shiva Chhetri, proprietor of Shiva Shakti Hotel in Libang shows me the barbed wire fence (*tar bar*) surrounding government buildings, party offices, and private schools. The barbed wire never really stopped the Maoists who had the run of the place, extorting money and abducting those who didn’t pay. With the ceasefire, the Maoists walk around openly and extortion is now called ‘tax collection’. The *tar bar* is a grim reminder of a senseless war and its legacy.

The NC’s Acharya says he is happy about the ceasefire, as there is more security. But he is worried that the Maoists still haven’t allowed his party workers to go back to their home villages. The UML’s Man Singh Dangi says the people of Rolpa have learnt to live with conflict and urges that the constituent assembly elections not be delayed because it may jeopardise the peace process.



SHRISHTI RL RANA

VIDEO PARLOUR: An armed police sentry watches a Maoist video of a battle in Libang recently.

“Rolpa suffered the most during this war,” muses Krishna Gharti of the NC-D, “unless Rolpa develops, the rest of Nepal won’t either.” Gharti, Dangi, and Acharya say they are convinced the Maoists are genuine about wanting peace, but on their own terms.

Is that true, we asked the Maoists. “Parliament proclamations are not enough, we need to stop all exploitation,” says Nava Raj Acharya, district rebel leader who now has an office in town. He confesses that his party has made mistakes and knows that is why the Rolpalis still don’t trust the Maoists completely. But Acharya is convinced 95 percent of the people of Rolpa will soon support them.

We asked Narendra Batha Magar, a Maoist militia member why his group was still recruiting and forcing children to join the movement. “No one will listen to us if we give up arms right away,” he said, adding, “there may be some violations of the code of conduct but that is because we haven’t had a chance to talk to our cadre.”

On the ride out of Rolpa, a soldier at a checkpoint wanted to know the prospects of peace. An FM radio was highlighting news of Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s talk of an ‘October Revolution’ and Baburam Bhattarai threatening an ‘urban uprising’. The soldier’s face fell. He pointed out an old man at a paan shop nearby, and said: “They beat him up because he didn’t pay them their tax.” ●

Governments must take the lead and invest in the future of the poor

The truth behind Asia's boom

Behind the news of Asia's booming economies, vast pockets of persistent and paralysing poverty remain. China raised eyebrows around the world with 11.3 percent growth in the second quarter of this year, but 42 percent of all Chinese continue to live on the equivalent of less than \$2 a day. In India, three-quarters of the population—more than 800 million people—survive each day on less than the cost of a Starbucks latte.



ANALYSIS
Ifzal Ali

All told, almost 1.9 billion people, or 60 percent of all Asians, still live in poverty. But Asia's deep and rapid economic expansion creates an opportunity for a sharper focus on eliminating the roots of poverty. Education and health are critical areas where the state must take the lead. Many Asian governments are well placed to make decisions that could lead millions of their people out of desperate situations.

Health-related shocks are among the most common events pushing people into poverty, and education is one of the most important stepping stones out of chronic want. Making education and health care available to the poor can, over time, position them to capitalise on opportunities to enter the formal economy and help close the wide gap between rich and poor. Countries that create this kind of 'inclusive' growth beat poverty and build political and social stability.

To address social inequalities that



hinder poverty reduction, three factors must come into play. First, policy makers and civil society must commit to improving primary health care and basic education for the poor, not only in rhetoric but also in practice.

It is hard to find anyone who doesn't believe children should be healthy and in school. But the picture on the ground in much of Asia is disturbing. In many countries, child mortality rates for the poor are two to three times higher than those for the rich; primary-school age children from poorer households are almost three times more likely to be out of school than those from richer households.

The picture in India is particularly startling. Almost half of all Indian children below the age of five are

underweight. Infant and child mortality rates are higher than in Bangladesh and Nepal. More surprisingly, India's level of child malnutrition is higher than that in sub-Saharan Africa.

Second, countries must examine why education and health services are not available to, or not being used by, the poor, and design policies and remedies based on country-specific evidence and experience.

Both supply and demand-side constraints could be hampering improvement. On the supply side, a lack of focus on serving poor communities may be a key challenge. The poor often lack political power, and their needs often fall down the list of priorities as a result. In such cases, change will likely be needed at the institutional level to establish and

maintain elementary education and basic health policies that mandate equal access. Countries like Sri Lanka and Vietnam have succeeded in directing funds to promote access for the poor and now see low enrollment inequalities.

On the demand side, individual household situations—such as the parents' level of education and income—are more important than access to a school in determining whether a child actually attends classes. Evidence from India suggests ethnicity and caste are also important factors.

Asia's experience offers some solutions. Carefully targeted programs such as conditional cash transfers, food-for-education and midday meal programs, school health services and scholarships for girls are highly effective in getting poor kids in school and keeping them there.

Third, once the challenge is clearly identified and the best remedies are selected, policy makers must be held responsible for making the solutions work. The public will need to hold the government accountable for ensuring that funds actually reach poor communities and are spent wisely.

Evidence from Asia shows overwhelmingly that economic growth has the greatest impact on poverty reduction in educated populations with lower levels of income inequality. Governments can learn from this experience and spread the benefits of Asia's rapid growth by investing in the future of the poor. ● (IHT)

Ifzal Ali is the chief economist of the Asian Development Bank, based in Manila.

Parties and populists

As populists gain during social transitions, parties must reclaim their space

This is not a good time for political parties, especially those with traditional orientations. One can no longer count on two major parties—one social democratic, the other more to the right of centre—dominating the political scene.



OPINION
Ralf Dahrendorf

Nowadays the two largest parties can rarely hope to muster two-thirds of the popular vote. Not infrequently they have to form a 'grand coalition'. The rest of the vote is split many ways, unless a political force emerges to cut right through the old party structures by arousing popular nationalist or socialist sentiments, or a combination of the two.

The decline of parties reflects the decline of class. The old proletariat and the old bourgeoisie are gone. Instead we see a 'levelled-in middle-class society', albeit one with an important elite of the super-rich at one end and an underclass at the other.

Society's very structure is shaky. There are no social groups on which lasting organisations can be built. People are, in a sense, socially homeless, and their interests vary as situations

change. It also means they no longer find a political home in parties, but react to situations, vague moods, and appeals to sentiments, if not resentments.

Populists thrive in such conditions. Sometimes they are individuals, like President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela or Italy's ex-Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Mostly they enter the political scene from the fringes but manage to form a highly personalised grouping, like Jörg Haider and his Austrian Freedom Party, Jean-Marie LePen and his French Nationalists, Andrzej Lepper and his Polish Peasant Party, or Prime Minister Robert Fico and his Direction in Slovakia, among others.

The list tells us two things. First, a number of populist leaders have come to power in recent years. Their success reflects the electorate's uncertainties and, increasingly, the perceived injustices of globalisation, as well as the fear of many about minorities, immigrants, and foreigners. These populists promise solutions that dispense with moderation, notably with centrist democratic policies and an internationalism that seeks to promote peace and prosperity. Perhaps we are experiencing not so much the end of history as the

end of enlightened history, perhaps of the enlightenment itself.

But the list also tells us something else: most of them do not last. As long as they accept elections and election results, they may be gone almost as quickly as they arrived. It does not take long for voters to discover that the promises of populists are empty. Once in power, they make for bad government. Poles and Slovaks, for example, will probably soon realise that their new populist governments do more harm than good to the people and their country.

To be sure, this is not much of a consolation. Some populist leaders may not accept the next election's result. It took Silvio Berlusconi a while to admit he had lost. Beyond that, populist episodes are signs of an underlying instability that neither serves national progress nor contributes to international order.

Austria paid a price for its Haider interlude, and France did not exactly benefit from the runoff between President Jacques Chirac and Le Pen in the last presidential election.

Political parties have got bad press in recent years, with good reason. Still, they do fulfil a useful function by bundling interests and issues, thereby providing an element of stability in the political system.

Existing parties urgently need to recapture the support of citizens. To succeed requires programmatic clarity, organisational honesty, and an understanding of the concerns of societies that have lost their traditional structures. Those structures are gone forever, but a liberal-democratic order cannot succeed through situational politics built on popular resentments. It requires a sense of the medium term and a commitment to rational debate, for the one tradition that can be revived—that of enlightened thinking—is the most important of all. ● (Project Syndicate)

Ralf Dahrendorf, a former European Commissioner from Germany, is a member of the British House of Lords, a former Rector of the London School of Economics, and a former Warden of St. Antony's College, Oxford.





MARTY LOGAN

Well-oiled economy

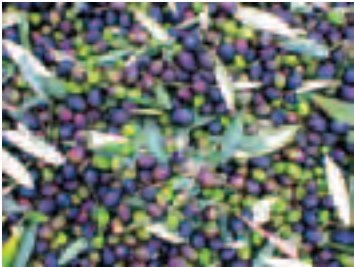
Growing olives in the far west will also add a needed source of healthy fat to local diets

MARTY LOGAN in KOLTI

It sounds like the whim of an eccentric Mediterranean magnate: ship 635 olive trees from Italy to plant in poor soil in the hills of a remote, ‘food deficit’ district in Nepal; but it’s a project that the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) takes seriously.

The two-foot saplings, of 28 imported and two local varieties, were planted in June on three hectares of land considered unproductive by local farmers next to Kolti airfield. It’s hoped that in about five years they will bear fruit, proving that European olives can survive in the far- and mid-west both as a cash crop and a source of healthy fat for villagers.

In late July and early August, the UN World Food Programme helicoptered more than 200 metric tonnes of emergency rice to Kolti to feed locals in eight nearby VDCs who must survive an annual ‘food gap’ between crops and who last year were additionally whacked by drought. The white, 40kg sacks of rice piled on the airfield were part of a



larger WFP plan to feed 225,000 people living in 10 districts.

“Compared to an apple plantation, growing olives is very easy. It doesn’t need much water or very fertile land. It’s not plagued by insects or disease,” says the FAO’s BR Dhakal, manager of the million-dollar pilot project.

Experiments grafting European olive species onto local wild olives—known here as launtho—are encouraging, and these trees could bear fruit within three years, adds Dhakal. Local olive trees grow in a handful of these districts and FAO, working with Tuscia University in Viterbo near Rome, has established another smaller plantation at a higher elevation in Dolpa.

Villagers use the olive trees mostly for fodder and firewood but the project aims to educate

them in the benefits of consuming olive oil, the cornerstone of the celebrated ‘Mediterranean diet’. And local managers of the Kolti plantation have already calculated the potential value of their crop. A mature tree can produce 25kg of olives, which is processed into 5 litres of oil which can sell for more than Rs1,000 per litre, explains supervisor Janesh Bhandari.

In 2004-05, Nepal imported more than Rs 28,000,000 worth of olive oil, according to Dhakal.

This is not the first time that olives have been suggested as a niche crop for the country. More than two decades ago, an EU project imported and planted trees in Kirtipur, Jumla, and Marpha. Two are surviving in the Mustang village and bear fruit annually.

In the late 1990s, an Italian team planted other trees at Mugu’s Rara Lake—five remain and are flowering now, according to Dhakal. But the best-known endeavour, one that continues today, is the private Himalayan Plantation near Kathmandu (see box). ●

Olive Valley

It was just over a decade ago that Hartmut Bauder’s team strapped on dokos and carried 2,000 olive saplings, bamboo stakes and other materials weighing about 170 tonnes in total into the new Himalayan Plantation in Chitlang.

They then hand dug 2,000 holes for the Italian imports and when the monsoon hit and water filled some of the holes drowning about 100 trees, they opened the earth again, this time devising stone-lined drainage channels for each plant.

“Slowly we built up our knowledge—these are problems other olive-growing countries don’t have,” says Bauder, sitting on the terrace at his home in Taiba in Hatiban.

Ten years later, the plantation on the other side of the Kathmandu Valley via Thankot has doubled in size to 10 hectares and Bauder has added five new tree varieties from Provence to the original 15 he chose after seeing olives flourish in the hills of northern India.

His product has been tested in Australia, Germany, and Italy. “They all confirmed that we have excellent oil so Nepal has very good potential. That was quite satisfying but now we would like to have more oil—it costs a lot to run this company.”



At a couple of hundred litres a year, production is too small to start large-scale export so Bauder sells mostly to people living in Nepal who hear about the oil by word-of-mouth. He has also started selling trees, along with training. One of his latest customers is the Shechen Monastery in Boudha, which bought 500 saplings.

The monastery’s Khenpo Gyurme says a friend from Hong Kong who bought oil from Bauder suggested the monks start growing olive trees. “We have space and we thought it would be good for the environment and maybe have a financial benefit also,” he told us.

Gyurme visited Bauder’s plantation a couple of times and then went to the grower’s home to watch him press the olives. “I tasted the first oil from this year’s crop. It was fruity and sort of sweet,” he told us with a smile.

Soon after, Shechen planted 500 trees at its retreat in Kabre. According to Bauder, “it would be a very good idea if more monasteries decided on olives. That would be a sound basis for the development of this culture in Nepal.”

In any case, he says he’s satisfied with the slow growth of what began as an experiment. “It’s not a question of 10 years, it’s a question of 100-150 years—even for experts, and we’re not experts.” He’s also resolute: “the more you know, the more you read and talk to experts, the more that everybody’s convinced it’s the ideal tree for Nepal.”

Square impact

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

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

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

Squaring the clubface at impact and hitting the ball straighter is arguably the hardest aspect of the game. When you look at the mechanics of a golf swing, it appears almost impossible to achieve. That’s especially true with the lower lofted (longer) clubs.



TEE BREAK
Deepak Acharya

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Buddha Realm** paintings by Prakaash Chandwadkar at Siddhartha Art Gallery 24 August-7 September.
- ❖ **Impressions of Manang** 10-28 September, Nepal Tourism Board.

EVENTS

- ❖ **The Fall of Fujimori** directed by Ellen Perry, 5.30 PM on 25 August at Yala Maya Kendra with the FSA Film Club. 5542544
- ❖ **Book Launch** Swatantrata Mantabya Yatra, book by Krishna Pahadi at Gurukul, 3PM, 25 August. 4420712
- ❖ **Environmental Impact Assessment** with Batuk Krishna Uprety, 26 August, 4PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Teej** 26 August
- ❖ **Lack of Democracy in the Political Parties and Corruption** with Ratna Sansar Shrestha at Martin Chautari, 3PM, 27 August.
- ❖ **8 ½** a Federico Fellini film, Italy (1963) at Nepal Tourism Board, 5.30 PM, 27 August.
- ❖ **Rishi Panchami** 27 August
- ❖ **Talk** by Sunil Pant of the Blue Diamond Society at Shankar Hotel, 9.30 AM, 1 September.
- ❖ **Civic Concerns** workshop 2 September, Heritage Plaza. 4107599
- ❖ **Kathmandu Chorale** rehearsals for winter concert starts at 7PM on 4 September at the British School
- ❖ **Indra Jatra** 6 September
- ❖ **International Literacy Day** 8 September
- ❖ **Carnival** to celebrate world literacy day at Hyatt Regency, 10AM on 9 September.
- ❖ **Courses** on participatory peace-conflict assessment and human rights/rights based approach, 13-15 September. 4432602
- ❖ **Alcoholics Anonymous** Problems with alcohol? 9851016079

MUSIC

- ❖ **Live Sukarma Concert** at Gurukul Theatre, 25 August, 5.30 PM. 4466956
- ❖ **Paleti** featuring Ganesh Rasik, 5.30 PM on 25,26 August, nepa-laya R sala. 5552839
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Heartbreakers** live every Friday at Rum Doodle Bar & Restaurant. 4422613
- ❖ **Cadenza Collective** live every Wednesday and Saturday 8PM at Upstairs, Lajimpat.
- ❖ **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

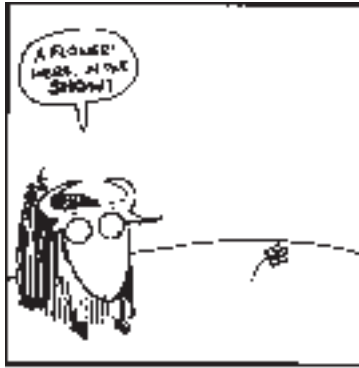
- ❖ **Mezza and Margarita** at Dwarika's Fusion. Every Wednesday at 5.30 PM, Rs 555. 4479448
- ❖ **Saffron** new Indian restaurant at Hotel Shangri-la, 25 percent discount as a promotional offer. 4412999
- ❖ **Thakali Lunch** special price, everyday at Moksh. 552621
- ❖ **Nhuchee's Kitchen** at the Organic Village, Baluwatar for lunch, dinner, and breakfast on weekends. 4414383
- ❖ **Authentic Thai Food** at Krua Thai, Thamel. 4701291
- ❖ **Eden Lounge Bar** Happy hour 3-7PM, buy one get one free cocktails. 6th floor, Kathmandu Mall, Sundhara.
- ❖ **Monsoon Madness Wine Festival** enjoy wines from four continents at Kilroy's of Kathmandu. 4250440
- ❖ **Mango Masti** at all restaurants in Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Grand Dosa Fest** at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Traditional Cuisine** at Patan Museum Café. 5526271
- ❖ **Wet & Wild Summer** **Splash** swimming and lunch, or overnight stay with breakfast and swimming, Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Earth Watch Restaurant** Breakfast with the birds, lunch with the butterflies and dinner by the fireplace at Park Village Resort. 4375280.
- ❖ **Shaken & Stirred** at Dwarika's Hotel with performances by Ciney and Par-e-jat. 4479448
- ❖ **Weekend Brunch** at Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Breakfast** Singma Restaurant, 8.30-11AM daily. 5009092
- ❖ **Jatra Wednesday Nights** Free cocktail for women. 4256622



GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge**, relaxation and massages in Pokhara. 4361500
- ❖ **Conferences and workshops** at Godavari Village Resort. 5560675
- ❖ **Nature Retreat** at Park Village Resorts & 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**, an overnight stay package with breakfast & swimming. 5560675
- ❖ **Explore Pokhara** with Hotel Glacier Pokhara, Rs 999, special package. (061) 521722

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepaltimes.com



Quest Entertainment

Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna centres on the budding romance between Dev and Maya, who are both married to different people. Settled into a life of domestic ritual and convinced that they are happy in their respective relationships, the protagonists still yearn for something deeper and more meaningful, which is precisely what they find in each other. From a relationship starting off in pleasant barbs, the two begin to develop and acknowledge the feelings they have beneath the surface. When their feelings come to the forefront, what results is a collision of lives and emotions, affecting everyone involved and changing them forever.

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NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



This year's monsoon is officially the weakest in three decades. The tarai is the worst hit and is seeing a return of rites propitiating the rain god. In Kapilabastu last week, for instance, women ploughed their fields in the nude. We're three-quarters of the way through the monsoon and with just the tapering off month left, Kathmandu has received about half its usual monsoon rainfall. Uneven spatial and temporal distribution of rain has worsened conditions for farmers and reservoir replenishment. The satellite picture from Thursday afternoon shows no significant change in weather patterns for the weekend and early next week. This means light, isolated showers and high temperatures in the day. Nights will continue to get cooler.

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अनुशासन र नैतिकताविहीन व्यक्ति र समाज अन्ततोगत्वा पतन भएर जान्छन् । त्यसैले राष्ट्रिय जीवनका हरेक आयामहरूमा उदाहरणीय अनुशासन र नैतिकता कायम गर्नुपर्छ । र त्यसको सुरुवात आफैबाट गरौं ।

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सूचना विभाग



KIRAN PANDAY

RIOT FUN: Children play see-saw on trees cut down to block the road on the Ring Road on Sunday as protests against the fuel price hike peaked. The government relented after two days of nationwide protests and rolled back the increase.



SAGAR SHRESTHA

CHECKPOINT CHARLIE: With a steep increase in the number of highway robberies, the Maoists have set up this checkpoint at Chandranighapur on the East-West Highway.



KIRAN PANDAY

CHILDREN ON THE FRONTLINE: The Maoist student union bussed in high school children to the army headquarters at Tundikhel for a demonstration demanding the whereabouts of disappeared comrades.



KIRAN PANDAY

ALL IN FAVOUR OF HUSBANDS: Women experiment with *mehendi* at a Teej event organised by Nepalese Fashion House and Punam Mehendi at GAA on Wednesday.



KRISHNA ABIRAL

HUMAN BRIDGE: For Rs 50-150 (depending on your weight) these two men will carry you across the Ram Ghat Khola on the Karnali Highway in Kalikot where a concrete bridge is under construction.

Barefoot doctor



CHANDRA SHEKHAR KARKI

With more than half of Nepal's doctors practicing in Kathmandu Valley, it's easy to see why rural Nepal has the lowest density of doctors per 100,000 population in the world. But if we had more doctors like Guna Raj Lohani, we wouldn't have a health crisis in this country. After graduating from Russia, Guna Raj (*above right*) returned to Nepal determined to make a difference in the lives of poor Nepalis. He has spent the last 12 years in Nepal's remote and conflict-ridden districts: Gulmi, Jajarkot, Khotang, and now Panchthar, where he is the district health officer. Lohani, 44, is a doctor but in places like Panchthar he has to be an all-rounder. In nearly two-and-a-half years he has had to deal

with emergencies and perform over 150 procedures such as appendectomy, hernia, laparotomy and a large number of caesarian sections. Despite the conflict, he has managed to walk to 40 of the district's 41 VDCs. "The conflict is a very convenient excuse for people who do not want to work," says the doctor, stroking his goatee, "I treat patients on both sides of the conflict. They are Nepalis, and that's all that matters." Guna Raj takes pride in Panchthar's improvements in maternal health. Under his guidance, the district hospital—which is a referral centre for neighbouring Tehrathum and Taplejung districts—has upgraded its facilities and the number of women coming for deliveries in the

past year has doubled. This is mainly because there is now a 'real' doctor available. One of the major health problems in rural Nepal is prolapse of the uterus. Under the hot tin roof of the makeshift sub-health post in a bombed out building in Subhang VDC, Guna Raj examines an assembly line of patients. In between examinations, he tells us that encouraging more doctors to stay in district hospitals would dramatically improve health care in rural Nepal. He has started an innovative program to take interns from Dharan's BP Koirala Medical Hospital to Panchthar. Says Guna Raj: "We can replicate what we have done in Panchthar all over the country. It just needs more commitment." ● *Srinkhala Sharma*



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What's the buzz, what's happening?

This may be a good time to start making a glossary of past Nepali ambassadors, where and when they served and reasons for their notoriety.

We all know about the **shoplifting plenipotentiary** who claimed diplomatic immunity when apprehended red-handed after mistaking a Washington DC bookshop for a takeaway. Nepal's formerly-royal embassies are still being used as longterm guest houses by Kathmandu's hoity-toity. During the royal period, our envoys essentially served as buying agents for the palace. The main job of the Bangkok embassy was to ship home **rambutans**, in Paris it was **lingerie** and lacy stuff for princesses, and at the Court of St James His Majesty's Envoy's role was to be a guardian for various **royal brats** then studying in English boarding schools.

After 1990, royal-appointed ambassadors were replaced by politically-appointed ambassadors and it is a matter of some debate which kind did more harm to Nepal's image abroad. These **hard-drinking dips** don't stop even when they get back. An appropriately named Mr Nepal, who served as the UML-appointed envoy to the Chrysanthemum Throne in the mid-1990s, was nearly lynched after molesting the minor daughter of a bhatti-owner in Ghattekulo this week.

How such a nobody even qualified to be chosen as an ambassador to a country with which Nepal's economic diplomacy should be on high-priority is anybody's guess. But His Excellency is lucky he wasn't killed when the girl's mother broke the bottle of **San Mig** he was drinking over his head and knocked him unconscious.



While Nepal recovers from his hangover and bad-headache, how long is his namesake country going to be without ambassadors? We seem to be doing perfectly well while missing 12 ambassadors, so why have them? They're terribly expensive, don't do much to enhance our national image and haven't yet learnt to tuck their shirts in while presenting credentials.

Still, as we speak, **Sharmas, Pyakhurels, Simkhadas, Pudasinis and Khanals** are lobbying in the corridors of power to be named ambassadors. (Editor's note: All men, all bahuns.) Trouble is, with seven parties in government, every party's candidate gets six no-votes from the other parties. From what we hear, all the candidates are cancelling each other out and hence the delay in the announcement.



It's official: Nepal's formal name in English is no more 'Kingdom of Nepal'. It's just '**Nepal**'. A cabinet decision to this effect is being circulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This has delayed donor projects which were in the pipeline, bilateral MoUs are all put off because the documents have to go back to lawyers for necessary changes. Whatever we do, can we at least spell check the rubber stamps on our passports? Nepal's are getting jailed all over the world on suspicion of having forged passports because CDO offices can't spell 'government'.

Which brings us to the national anthem. The committee set up to find a new anthem hasn't yet submitted its shortlist. But at the South Asian Games in Colombo, it was still the "**Sri Man Gambhir**" that rang out in the stadium when our karate, wushu and taekwondo champs bagged golds. I guess since "**Prachanda**" gets a mention even in the royal anthem, it's ok to keep the old one as a **caretaker anthem**.




What a historical irony that interim chief of army staff Rukmangat Katuwal, the soldier responsible for quelling the Okhaldhunga Uprising in 1974, is now **Chief Sah'b**. Although there was an effort to kick him upstairs and get him out of the way by naming him ambassador to the US, it looks like the Nepali Congress has put the man who put down its own armed struggle in 1974 as army chief. The militant wing of the NC at the time was led by none other than a younger and more radical Girija Koirala. As a baby, Katuwal was adopted by King Mahendra from Okhaldhunga and raised inside the royal palace.

Katuwal's unit was in hot pursuit of the NC militants, and after killing 10 of them captured the leader of the rebel force, ex-serviceman Captain Yagya Bahadur Thapa who was later executed. It was after that defeat that the NC abandoned its armed struggle and decided to go for 'national reconciliation'.

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