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Weekly Internet Poll # 333

Q. How will the Maoists do in the interim parliament compared to other parties?

Total votes: 4,514

- Same 23.7%
- Better 29.5%
- Worse 46.7%

Weekly Internet Poll # 334. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Should the interim constitution be revised to address madhesi and janajati grievances?

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Shadow of a gun

Nepal is falling from the frying pan into the fire



GIRL AND GUN: A wall with fading Maoist graffiti in Nawalparasi. The Maoists may be packing their guns into UN containers, but its former tarai factions are exploiting madhesi resentment to prolong the conflict.

DEEPENDRA BAJRACHARYA

ANALYSIS by **KUNDA DIXIT**

The tarai turmoil is spinning out of control, but the 7+1 parties are still treating it as just a law-and-order problem.

After five people were killed in unrest in Lahan, the violence and looting spread to Janakpur on Wednesday, Birganj and Biratnagar on Thursday.

The root of the crisis is deep, long-standing bitterness among the madhesi

population. Discriminated against by governments in the past, they saw that they would be denied political representation in proportion to their numbers by the interim constitution too.

Exploiting this could be religious and royalist groups with powerful allies in a rabidly anti-Maoist Bihar government across the border. Many of the arsonists who went on a systematic rampage in central

Janakpur on Thursday were not known to anyone.

Politics, ethnicity, and religion make an explosive combination. But the lesson is lost on the parties in Kathmandu. The Maoists find they cannot control the genie they let out of the bottle with their ethnic-based politics. They are making things worse by calling madhesi activists "criminals". The NC and UML are using the tarai as an arena for vote competition in future elections.

The unrest in the tarai is now the biggest threat to the peace process just weathering its first storm on arms management.

It's still not too late for a multiparty declaration by parliament to amend the interim constitution and meet genuine madhesi demands for proportional representation. It may not stop the violence—there is evidence it is being instigated—but it will help reduce the anger. There is no other way to tackle this. Nepal is falling from the frying pan into the fire. ●

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Lip service

On dalit rights, parties need to lead by example not rhetoric

SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

This was always an improbable nation state. Situated on the debris of the collision of two continents 65 million years ago, it is also where southern Asia's linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and religious quadrants meet. With 109 ethnic groups and at least 93 languages, Nepal is the most heterogeneous country in the region. And discard the myth that we are a 'small country'. With Nepal's population soon crossing 30 million it is going to be the 40th most populous in the world.

String together geology, diversity, and demography and what you have is a country that looks ungovernable. No wonder 19th century colonisers left us alone. With literacy and political empowerment, and especially after April 2006, Nepal's ethno-linguistic and geographically marginalised are clamouring for rights and autonomy.

The 20 border districts of the tarai now have nearly half of Nepal's population. But this strip of the plains is not homogenous either. More than one-third of the people there are made up of hill and mountain cohorts who moved down and have lived there for generations. (See: 'Nepalis want to stand up and be counted', #332) Madhesi of various castes are 40 percent, the indigenous Tharus are 14 percent, and Muslims make up nearly nine percent.

The tarai never got political representation in Kathmandu based on its population ratio. Under the Panchayat, token madhesi were given positions and after 1990, hill-dominated parties did the same with party tickets. Madhesi feel the interim constitution continues the discrimination. If the breakdown were fair, the legislature would effectively have 112 members from madhesi and other tarai groups instead of the 41 members in the House dissolved last week.

The troubles in the tarai can be resolved quickly by guaranteeing proportional representation now. Otherwise Wednesday's bushfire from Janakpur (see picture) will spread across the plains. The issue must be resolved through compromise and it is the neglect of the issue by the 7+1 parties in Kathmandu that is opening up this festering wound. This apathy has resulted in political forces competing with each other to be more radical than the other and stake their claim for madhesi leadership: the two ex-Maoist JTMM factions, two NSP splinters, madhesi from within the NC and UML, and even royalist madhesi. Royal residues working with religious extremists from across the border to provoke tarai anger is making matters worse.

Every Nepali, except the aboriginal groups, is the descendant of migrants. How far back in history do we want to go? Let's not squander our hard-won freedom for the second time since 1990.



AJIT TIWARI

The monarchy may be on its way out, but what about other forms of feudalism?

A measure of the success of the current peace efforts will be whether they help create an environment in which the most oppressed communities, like dalits, can live a free and dignified life.

GUEST COLUMN Uday Pariyar

But when I talk to political analysts about this, even those I consider friends, there is a depressing response: "Widen your horizons and move beyond caste-based thinking. This is the time to address important national issues, not focus on what benefits a particular section of society should get." Okay, so perhaps I sound a little 'racist'. But practically every breath I take is still contaminated with casteism. Even now, people look at me through their caste lens.

For members of oppressed communities, the founding of a

democratic republic will in itself not feel like a notable achievement. India is a democratic republic, but dalits continue to be suppressed in many places there. At the grassroots dalits really don't care who wins or loses on the political front. What they are interested in is whether they can look forward to a better future, if not for themselves, for their children.

Accepted, social changes can never happen as swiftly as political ones, and nobody has a magic wand to manage everybody's expectations overnight. But it is reasonable to ask whether the political players are genuinely interested in addressing these problems. If they are, we need to see this demonstrated not in words but in actions.

There is a lot of talk about the need to include dalits in the interim government and the constituent assembly. Inclusion is of course a catalyst for social change. But it isn't everything. Look at past efforts to include dalits as key players in decision-making bodies. The royal regimes did so, as did party politics after 1990. Yet, no substantial changes were noticeable as a result.

What we need now are practical measures to enforce constitutional and legal tenets on dalit rights. It's not enough to merely give it lip-service in the statute of the day. Like the provisions of the 1990 constitution, those too will likely prove meaningless. We need a separate, clear-cut policy on practical ways

of addressing the problems of dalits, and the future state needs to adopt a zero tolerance policy against caste discrimination. Untouchability should be declared a crime against the state and a crime against humanity.

It's common knowledge that the political parties, which consider themselves champions of freedom and democracy, themselves suppress dalits. Not only are virtually all party leaders high caste, there are often instances of local party bosses publicly humiliating and putting down dalits. Even the 'revolutionary' Maoist party has hardly any dalits in leadership positions, and both sides have effectively kept dalits away from the decision-making associated with the current peace process.

There is a lot of evidence to suggest that the structure of the parties is as feudal as anything in Nepal. Perhaps they should set their own houses in order before they address big social change. They should discipline cadres who display discriminatory behaviour and restructure their parties to be more inclusive. This way, we can see the changes they promise in action. Can the parties start doing their bit to dismantle feudal practices before the elections to the constituent assembly?

The problems of dalits are unique and complicated by poverty, illiteracy, and exclusion. The idea that Nepal is moving towards a post-feudal state is meaningless until such critical issues are tackled. There will be no durable peace or democracy without that. ●

Uday Pariyar works in Kathmandu for an international agency.

Lament for Lahan

After a decade of violence, people must still die to be heard

The mayhem in the madhes has already claimed innocent lives and many more, critically injured, are undergoing treatment. There is no telling when the turmoil in the tarai will end. But the list of victims of the violence in Siraha makes horrific reading.

Ramesh Kumar Mahato, a 16-year-old student allegedly shot by a Maoist, was from an underprivileged background. Vijay Kumar Sahani, 32, and Pramod Sada, 15, both shot by the police, were madhesi



STATE OF THE STATE C K Lal

dalits, the most oppressed of all in the country. Muhammad Alam, 18, another victim of police firing, was a Musalman, a category that needs no explanation to show its exclusion. Thirty two-year-old Bechan from the Yadav community also succumbed to a bullet injury. All died in their prime for a cause they were probably not even fully aware of. That's the tragedy of all violent

protests: they devour the weakest and the most inarticulate first.

The cause behind the death and destruction is consonant with universal democratic values. "We want a federal government structure and regional autonomy for the tarai ... We want the elimination of discrimination against the people of the tarai, including racial, lingual, cultural and economic," Madhesi Janadhikar Forum president Upendra Yadav told a news agency after the tragedy in Lahan. On Wednesday Janakpur burned, where is this fire going to spread next?

The Maoists were ostensibly fighting for these very rights. The seven-party alliance swears by similar democratic values. For democracy to take root, popular aspirations for the institutionalisation of local autonomy and an end to discrimination must be addressed. The ambivalence of Sher Bahadur Deuba or Madhab Nepal towards democratic norms has been well known since they were co-opted by Gyanendra's autocratic regime.

But the indifference of the Maoists to the plight of madhesi defies logic. The

mainstream parties took years to degenerate into their unresponsive state. The Maoists seem to have acquired that trait within days of entering the interim legislature.

This deafening silence will delegitimise Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai faster than their slip-ups in implementing the comprehensive peace accord. And if Deb Gurung and Krishna Bahadur Mahara harp on about a rightwing conspiracy without sufficient substantiation, that may turn out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. The extremists on the right are as adroit at exploiting genuine grievances as those on the left.

The country must face disturbing questions. Why do protestors against institutional injustice have to die to make themselves heard? How many deaths does it take to shake a government from its complacency? The government has formed a commission to investigate the violence in Lahan.

The eight-party alliance has called some groups for 'talks'. But why did it take so long for the NC to respond when

Sushil Koirala has seen first-hand the anti-madhesi prejudices of government machinery in his hometown?

By choosing to ignore madhesi demands, the NC is handing over half the country to extremists of the left and right. The decline of the centrist politics championed by the party doesn't augur well for the future of peace in the country.

In asymmetric confrontations, terrorism is the weapon of the weak. The inarticulate voice their demand with mindless violence and propagate their achievements through the 'propaganda of deeds'. But the head honchos of armed rebellions seldom die, it is people like Mahato and Sada who get killed for causes they don't understand.

Last week it appeared as if we had learnt very little from a decade of violent conflicts. The seven parties and their Maoist partners must realise that it's never too late to make amends. Those who died aren't going to come back. But if their death helps make Nepal a somewhat better place—tolerant of diversity, responsive to grievances, accountable to the public—those who survive can learn to live with their losses. ●

LETTERS

MADHESI IDENTITY

Many thanks to Prashant Jha. 'Nepali Too' (Guest Column, #332) is one of the best things I've read in recent weeks. His tone, his empathy, and his self-awareness are admirable. Apart from other things, he reminds us not to be too quick to represent those whose realities we have barely imagined, let alone experienced.

Subha Ghale, Kathmandu

● In response to Prashant Jha ('Nepali too', #332), I would like to add a few things. The social, cultural, religious identity, what shapes Nepali nationalism, is pahadi-defined.

Pahadi nationalism uses fear to keep the madhesi community from access to power, claiming it is untrustworthy and pro-Indian. The fear that nationalism will die if madhesi have equal access to power is true—if you fall into the popular trap of believing pahadi nationalism is the only kind there is.

As a pahadi, I see the current madhesi movement not as an overturning of pahadi nationalism or privilege, but a way to bring together pahadi nationalism with the sensitivity and riches of the madhes.

I blame our education system for nurturing and sustaining the poisonous, untrusting environment between the two communities, which pahadis use to dominate politics. We are simply not taught enough about the importance and resourcefulness of the madhesi community. Real social inclusion starts from education. It's not too late for the state to alter the curriculum to allow the next generation to understand how important the madhes is in Nepal's geopolitical development, and for us to respect to each other, recognise to each other's values, and be equal citizens.

Jagannath Lamichhane, email

● My thanks and appreciation for Prashant Jha's 'Nepali too'. While his piece was timely in light of the current madhesi-pahadi clashes in the tarai, it should strike a chord with anyone who has ever had to justify calling themselves a Nepali, with anyone who has been told that they are too light, or too dark, or too slant-eyed, or have ancestors from the wrong place, or speak with too much of an accent to be a 'real' Nepali. Bravo.

Diku Sherpa, email

● There's no doubt that the genuine demands of madhesi should be addressed by the new loktantrik

government. Now that the citizenship issue seems to be heading towards a resolution, the most important thing would be the redistribution of land among poor madhesi.

But when the demands skyrocket and look like a call for breaking up the nation, the word 'enough' must appear. And, when madhesi leaders talk about madhesi, do they mean 'dhoti-clad, paan-eating, Bihari-looking' people only ('Nepali too', #332) or do they also include 'topi-wearing, flat-nosed, Bahadur-type' people who've been living in the tarai for many years?

A continuous recitation of 'pahadibad' by well-off madhesi doesn't help when many pahadis in the tarai are flocking to Kathmandu because of the same treatment from madhesi that the latter are complaining of. And Prasant Jha shouldn't be flaunting his inability to speak Nepali properly. When he can speak three languages fluently, one wonder why he can't learn Nepali.

Biplab Nepali, email

● It is true there haven't been equal opportunities for all Nepalis in the past. But it is not true that madhesi are the most discriminated against. Look at those in Kalikot or Humla—they don't even get enough food. And what about dalits in both pahadi and madhesi communities? We never had a proper democratic system in the past. Now, we shouldn't block our way into new territory by raising communal issues. There will be plenty of time to sit together and solve our age-old problems in the new Nepal.

M Kaphle, email

● I can't agree with Anand Jha ('Tarai demands', Letters, #332) about the treatment of madhesi people. I'm from an area where all the teachers and traders were madhesi. They enjoyed a lot of influence and were not discriminated against. I remember the days when most staff in the district agriculture office and departments of roads and irrigation were madhesi. Nobody complained about that. The ruler of Nepal were *samants*, not really representative of pahadis. The problem lies with the samants of the tarai, not with pahadis, and the Maoists will be haunted for a long time by the divisive ethnic issues they've raised.

There can be some discrimination among various communities in any country (look how Biharis are hated in other states in India) but it is not that serious. In fact, the discrimination between upper caste and lower caste members of the madhesi community is much worse. People are making opportunistic arguments with no ideological basis.

Abhi, New Delhi

● It's heartbreaking to see our tarai rice-bowl in flames. Communal hatred and mistrust are turning into something like a civil war, with the Maoists rather than the government taking charge. It's ridiculous to blame the monarchy and a vague 'foreign force' for the whole episode. The same duo is accused no matter what happens. Our 'constitutionally strong', but bedridden PM is letting the country cry its bloody tears and the eight parties only show up at the Reporters' Club or on tv screens. This is surely not loktantrik governance. This is hypocrisy and anarchy.

P Sharma, Mumbai



UN LESSONS

The analogy Sheetal Kumar draws between the Rwandan genocide and the lessons learned in Nepal's context seems a bit premature ('Farewell to Annan', Eyes wide shut, #331). One cannot draw parallels between what the UN or Kofi Annan did or did not do 13 years ago without understanding the geopolitical situation in 1994 and its implications for the actors involved.

To discern the role of the UN in the genocide, one needs to first understand that the UN is not an entity without its member states. UNAMIR (the United Nations Mission in Rwanda) did not intervene in the genocide that was taking place because it was not mandated to do so. Its actions were limited because (among other issues) the United States simply refused to use the term 'genocide' to describe the situation and pressured the Security Council to veto any actions taken to expand UNAMIR's role in Rwanda. The Clinton administration was not ready to drag itself into another bloody confrontation in Africa six months after 18 US soldiers' bodies were paraded across the streets of Mogadishu. It took a year after the events in Rwanda for the White House press secretary to refer to the killings in

Rwanda as 'genocide' and another four before the president offered his half-apology to the country at the airport in Kigali.

I agree with Kumar that we should 'think for ourselves'. But it is misleading to compare different situations without a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

AN, email

PM WATCH

This brief summary of Girija Prasad Koirala's health may be of interest:

Skin: very thick, insensitive.

Skull: thick.

Brain: clever, but with total amnesia for past mistakes and misdeeds.

Mouth: sharp teeth, forked tongue.

Nose: insensitive to the stench of corruption surrounding him.

Ears: deaf to Nepali voices but responsive to orders in American English or Hindi.

Lungs: capable of generating immense quantities of hot air.

Heart: calcified, turned to stone.

Intestines: nonfunctional.

Arms and hands: good at grasping and manipulating.

Legs and feet: good at sidestepping responsibility and evading consequences.

Spine: degenerated, no stability.

Bina Shrestha, Kathmandu

PP'S BIG MOTORCYCLE

I wait every week just to read the Backside column by the Ass. I understood Under My Hat columns better. The Ass is full of people or places unknown to me. That doesn't mean the Ass should be sacked, though. I am writing about PP the CP. On my second day in Kathmandu a year-and-a-half ago, I saw this strange figure on a Harley Davidson driving down Darbar Marg, swaying left and right, like they do in Formula One to heat up the tyres. My first thought: "What a jerk". I then noticed that the show-off had a police escort and found out who he was. Later bike riding became impossible, I guess, because there are no bulletproof bikes, hence the Jag for him and pops.

What is PP doing these days. We came up with the following possibilities:

1. He starts the bike in his garage and goes vroom, vroom.

2. He rides round and round his house without escorts.

3. He has his friends make videos of drives around Kathmandu and its outskirts. He watches these on a huge TV screen in his garage. With the engine running, he 'virtual' rides through.

Lorenzo Locatelli-Rossi, email

SUNSILK



Goodbye

wet hair.



This winter, get an attractive hair dryer free, with every 400ml SunsilK Black Shine Shampoo.

Lahan's losers

As it roils the nation, the madhes is roiling itself

In the wake of this week's Lahan violence, the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum rejected calls by the government to sit down for dialogue. Many other groups however, both madhesi and pahadi, have urged the MJF to talk.

The MJF may or may not talk in the end, depending on how the situation evolves. For now though, it is in the driver's seat and its recent behaviour shows just how strong it has become in the post-Lahan scene. As Nepalganj before it, Lahan signifies the deep resentment in the tarai against a pahadi state structure that has treated madhesis as second-class citizens. The MJF emerged practically out of nowhere to capitalise on this situation.

This new dynamic in the volatile tarai politics is roiling the madhes as much as it is roiling national politics. It is no

secret that various madhesi groups today are locked in a struggle to lead the madhes agenda. They are in competition for influence across the tarai with a single-minded purpose: each wants to show that it is the indisputable leader of the madhesi community. This is why December and January have witnessed more bandas and strikes in the tarai than at any other time.

Lahan arrives just at this point and hands the MJF a clear victory. The biggest loser in all this have been the Maoists, the seven mainstream parties, and Nepal's Kathmandu-centric civil society who can think of nothing more original than holding goodwill rallies at the Maitighar Mandala.



EYES WIDE SHUT
Sheetal Kumar



AJIT TIWARI

SCENES FROM A RIOT: Wednesday evening in Janakpur showed how many sides are competing for supremacy in madhes politics.

If there is one single person who has emerged as the biggest loser, it is the Maoists' madhesi leader Matrika Prasad Yadav. It was bad enough that his party disregarded a banda for a genuine madhesi cause by trying to bulldoze through a blockade in Lahan. He then showed extreme stupidity by forcibly body-snatching the dead boy, thus insulting madhesi sensitivities. His pahadi leader, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, made matters even worse by stating: "there should be no talks with the MJF because talks can only be held with political forces, not criminals and gangsters."

The MJF must be laughing all the way to the vote bank, at the expense of the Maoists and every other tarai group.

If this is the dynamic in the madhes, what is the country to do? Anyone who has followed tarai politics in recent months will know that madhesi-pahadi violence there was waiting to erupt. Yesterday it was Nepalgunj. Today it is Lahan. Tomorrow it could be the dozens of other towns and villages that dot the tarai landscape. Ethnic politics is here to stay, and we cannot be blind to it.

But we have been blind to it, especially the pahadi dominated mainstream parties and civil society. Their belief that the constituent assembly election will resolve all problems has been shattered by this violence. They failed to see that the assembly was the problem, not the solution that they hoped it would be.

The eight political parties who run Nepal today probably don't realise it, but their peace process (the Comprehensive Peace Accord, interim constitution, constituent assembly, etc.) is seen by almost everyone as an eight-party process. It is perceived as exclusionary and elitist, and reinforcing a pahadi ethos—this view is particularly strong among madhesis and janajatis.

Correct this view, now. It must start with a public acceptance by the eight parties that the peace process is flawed, that they have not acknowledged—let alone resolved—the grievances of the many communities struggling to be heard. They should lead a national conversation with all marginalised groups. That process must be rounded up by amendments to the interim constitution that at least provides for fair representation in the coming assembly.

I am sure there are plenty of moderate madhesis willing to give the parties a chance if the parties accept their mistake. ●



PICS: SWARNIM WAGLE

The view from Rolpa

The Maoist heartland might slowly be turning into its hinterland

SWARNIM WAGLE in ROLPA

At the end of a recent 11-day trek and tour around Rolpa, Pyuthan, Dang, Chitwan, and Gorkha, one thing was clear. The questions about what motivated the Maoists' dramatic transition can only be answered over time. Did they realise the People's War was going nowhere, and that they could beat the bungling parties at their own game?

The Maoist heartland of Rolpa doesn't tell much about their mood. The villages are safe and quiet, sparsely populated with mostly women and children like before. The victory gates are rundown (*above*) and the fighters interned in depressing makeshift camps in Dahaban and Tila. Even the graffiti is dated and conspicuous for its lack of revolutionary fervour. The scare tactics are not subtle: fighters in Dahaban leave their camps to buy toothpaste from nearby shops, but they still carry guns. Onlookers whisper: even the fiercest fighters need to brush their teeth, but how do guns help hygiene?

When my local travelling companion wanted to introduce me to his acquaintances in the

former 'people's government', all were said to be away in the capital. In Pyuthan—a district with no blacktopped road—a four-wheel drive parked in the premises that used to belong to the Jhimruk hydroelectricity project now belongs to district level Maoist leaders. Newspapers had better keep an eye on the spending habits, and the already discussed sartorial tastes of the Maoist top brass.

In and around the cantonments, there are fighters who look like children. UN staff quip that "there is not a single 17-year-old in the camps"—all those awaiting verification have been instructed to say they are at least 18—the UN's credibility is at stake if their screening of combatants is not rigorous.

The need to save face, a consistent theme during the peace negotiations, will guide how free and fair the constituent assembly election will be. The Maoists are under tremendous pressure to match their large negotiated share in the interim parliament with an equally impressive electoral performance.

Memories of Maoist harassment are so fresh, the median voter remains

unsympathetic to them. Of the 15 seats the districts I toured will directly vote for, locals predict the Maoists are unlikely to gain more than five. There is no doubt, though, that there will be widespread mobilisation of their cadres, and they could do reasonably well in the 204 seats that will be proportionally allocated based on votes cast nationwide.

The Maoist campaigns over the past ten years have been spectacularly propagandist. Their barely functional dirt road, some 20km long from Nuagaon to Tila in Rolpa, is quite a statement. The Martyr's Road was built with mandatory 10-day contributions of labour and cash from families in Rolpa and neighbouring districts. These schemes will not be viable in an open society where unpaid work under coercion would be legally contested.

Do the 83 faces the Maoists sent to the interim parliament project the kind of representative Nepal people wish to see? The Maoists have certainly nudged Nepal on a path of absolute inclusiveness. But to emerge as a credible political force, the Maoists still need to shed crucial sets of regressive credentials—from their discredited economic outlook still grounded in the denunciation of Deng Xiaoping and his building of a triumphant post-Mao China, to their intolerance of political pluralism that damns all dissent with an inane bonanza of labels.

As top Maoists migrate to the capital, the only hope that the beautiful slate-roofed villages in Rolpa have is that they will not become an abandoned museum to a sold-out cause. ●



QUIET AGAIN: Rolpa's district headquarter Libang has gone back to being calm and forgotten.

Swarnim Waglé made this trip between 5 and 15 January.

Dis-service charge

You may pay your monthly cable fee, but it doesn't buy you trouble-free viewing. Forget interruptions due to power outages, a certain cable operator won't even allow you to watch what is available in peace, superimposing ads on the lower half of your screen no matter what the channel, obliterating your view of the news and sports scores tickers.

The same goes for just about everything else: compensation for flights delayed or cancelled; high taxes, but no paved roads or reliable water supply.

Consumer rights are a joke here, a fact which helps businesses and the government to get away with shoddy goods and substandard service. An almost-militant labour force only compounds the problem.

A cause and consequence is that we do not believe in differential services or pricing. The essence of a market-based economy is that the



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

consumer has the choice in a regulated market. Consumer choice is a right. It's up to a consumer to decide whether they want to pay differential pricing or a service charge. Five long years ago when there was a half-hearted debate about the levying of a service charge, the Beed argued in a number of columns that businesses and entrepreneurs should decide for themselves ('Service charged' in #18, 'Playing hard to get' in #31, and 'Essential acts' in #35, all Economic Sense).

A month ago, the very same industry-people, probably trying to find a way around the new players in parliamentary politics, decided to introduce a service charge, with a quiet share going to the owners and probably a bit trickling back to the Hotel Association of Nepal. Another cartel, another syndicate the consumers need to put up with.

In a country where a disappointed consumer has nowhere to go, to pay for service regardless of quality is ridiculous. Yes, it's traditional to pay a 'service charge' to the meter reader or the cop who tries to pull you over right before dasain, but our euphoric labour leadership wants to extend this to every single human interface that exists for a service—healthcare, education, construction, anything.

We have embraced the market economy, the government is not only cutting back on new businesses, it is even thinking of exiting fields in which it is in business. Consumers will be paying more for services rendered by private enterprises, whether for telecommunications or electricity. It is therefore more important than ever that the regulatory framework governing the rights of the consumer are strengthened. Consumer rights must balance out the domination of service owners and providers. People like Sudeep Shrestha of *Kantipur* have been working hard to this end. We need more people like him. ●

www.arthabeed.com

New Mama

Mama Noodles are now available in a new chicken curry flavour and new package. Mama, which is another product of Wai Wai-makers, the Chaudhary Group, is offering a special price of Rs 25 for three packets.

Branching out

Bank of Kathmandu recently opened a new branch in Janakpur, bringing its outlets around the country to a total of 13. The Janakpur branch offers BoK's full range of services including remittances, money transfers, foreign currency accounts, and will serve clients in Dhanusa, Mahottari, Sarlahi, Siraha, and Saptari.

To Malaysia

GMG Airlines, Bangladesh's only private airline, is expanding its international network to Malaysia. Other international destinations GMG has added in the last three months are Kathmandu, Delhi, and Bangkok. GMG will fly to Kuala Lumpur on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, and offers a special Kathmandu-Kuala Lumpur fare.

Destination Hong Kong

Gorkha Beer, the flagship brand of Gorkha Brewery is to be exported to Hong Kong, through Nepal Food Services and will be sold in restaurants and bars in Hong Kong. Launched in 2006, Gorkha Beer was aimed at tourists in Nepal and for the export market.

Management

The South Asian Institute of Management (SAIM), a regional learning centre, has just started operations in Kathmandu. SAIM, in collaboration with Kathmandu University, offers a two-year Masters in Management (MM) program. The institute says its MM program is an improvement on the MBA degree as it focuses on strategic management and leadership development. The institute will also offer counselling and placement services for its graduates.

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Irresponsible

Editorial in Kantipur, 23 January

काँतिपुर

There will be serious consequences if the dissatisfaction of many communities and groups [madhesi and others] against the interim constitution are not addressed. Many Nepalis are panicking about the growing violence in the tarai. The situation is worsening as regressive forces take advantage of the disorder.

But despite the gravity of the situation [and the grievances voiced by madhesi groups], the human rights community and citizens group are keeping quiet and not doing much to control the damage. The lack of a fact-finding mission and the inability of independent institutions to hold people accountable can sow the seeds of a political culture of impunity and anarchy.



KIRAN PANDAY

There is a danger now that the conflict will intensify, and the government will not be able to control the situation. The credibility of human rights organisations is in question now—they have kept quiet even though things have come to a head, with the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum calling a ten-day banda. This is not the time for the citizens groups and the human rights groups to be toothless and fail in their duties. They need to be vigilant, and actively monitor the situation. Human rights defenders should be raising their voices against injustice no matter who is involved in violations. They must realise how volatile the situation can become during a transitional phase and they have to start visiting the places where incidents occur, collect information, and name violators.

The human rights activists and organisations have failed in their responsibility to put pressure on the government, to hear the appeals of the Forum, the madhesi community, and other neglected groups. Their silence over the continuing anarchy and impunity does nothing for the chances of a peaceful resolution between the government and the protestors.

Undiplomatic

Navin Singh Khadka, in
BBC Nepali Service



In recent months, accusations have been made that the government is providing political security to rhino poachers. Amidst this controversy, accusations have been made against two foreign ambassadors, which suggest that they are involved in the poaching and smuggling of rhino horns. The authorities say that they have been trying to take action against the smugglers and our source at the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Reserves says they even have proof. They say that though they would like to catch the diplomats red-handed, they lack the resources to go after them. The officials did say, however, that they are coordinating with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take appropriate action.

The Vienna Convention does not allow diplomats working in foreign countries to be involved in any kind of business or employment. Experts say that with enough proof of their illegal activities, Nepal can deport these diplomats anytime. The department says that in the last nine months 13 rhinos from Chitwan National Park have been killed and in the last eight years, 190 rhinos have been poached from the Chitwan and Bardia national parks.

Koirala's call

Bimarsa, 19-25 January



As the interim constitution was in the process of curtailing his rights, the king was so depressed that he reportedly asked palace secretary Pashupati Bhakta Maharjan to announce that he was ready to let go of all his powers. According to a highly placed source, the king invited Koirala to talk before the interim constitution was promulgated, but Koirala refused to meet him. However, when he heard that the king was about to make an announcement, Koirala hurriedly called the palace and advised the king to wait until the elections.

Royalists have reportedly given the king three options: abdicate from the throne and install his grandson Hridayendra instead, knock on the army's door again and prepare for a coup, or wait and see. The first option was rejected by Koirala and the second won't work because the king knows there is no international support for a coup. Which is why Gyanendra is compelled to choose the third option, waiting until the constituent assembly election.

Meanwhile royalists are hoping for the US to again pay attention to Nepal. They think the Americans will support the role of king in Nepal and that the monarchy will eventually be saved. They want Nepal to be like the Nordic countries which still have ceremonial monarchies.

Royalists are seeing reasons for hope in the recent incidents in the tarai against the government, and the possibility that the elections may be delayed.

Pushing posts

Sanghu, 22 January



Secretaries from various ministries are eying the two vacant secretary positions at the National Planning Commission, but vice chairman Jagdish Chandra Pokhrel and chief secretary Bhojraj Ghimire say they still have not found the appropriate people. Lobbying hard are Bhairabraj Kaini who is joint secretary at the Ministry of Agriculture, Ram Kumar Shrestha from Finance, and Ramhari Aryal from Health.

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat is said to be looking for people loyal to the Nepali Congress to fill the two secretary positions at the ministry. Mahat dismisses all recommendations made to him saying that he needs senior officers with experience.

Deep Basnet is acting secretary at the Finance Ministry, and Binod Gyawali acting secretary at the Ministry of Health, but both are eager to be regional administrators instead. Sushil Samsher JB Rana, acting secretary at the Maoist cantonment organisation office, wants to move to the Election Commission, while Ram Kumar Shrestha from Finance is

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Source: Gurung, 1998.

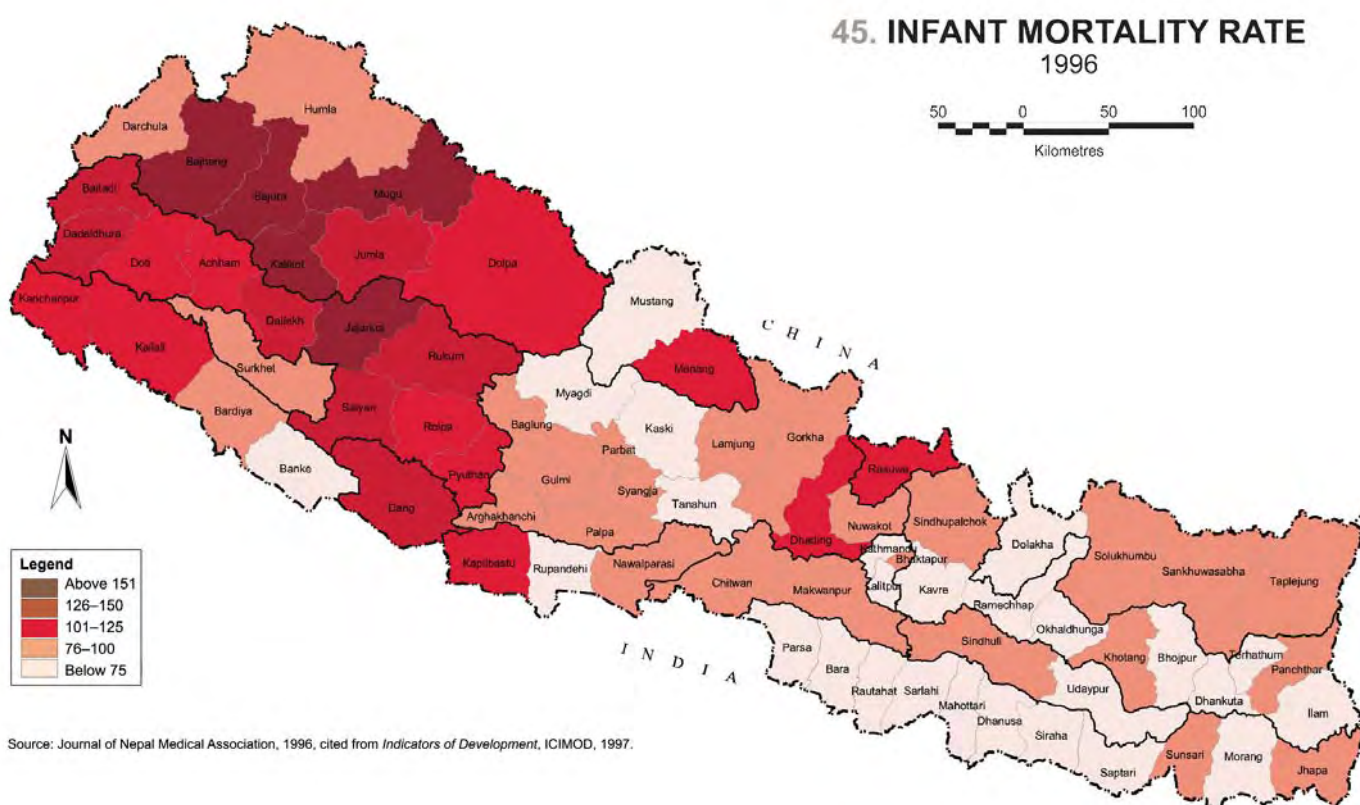
MARK TURIN

For those interested in the mapping of Nepal, 2006 was a tragic year in which we lost Dr Harka Gurung, one of the foremost exponents of social demography. But 2006 was also the year in which three atlases based on data from the 2001 Census of Nepal were published, each with Dr Gurung as principal author or editor. Each of them tells us about the unique and changing nature of modern Nepal.

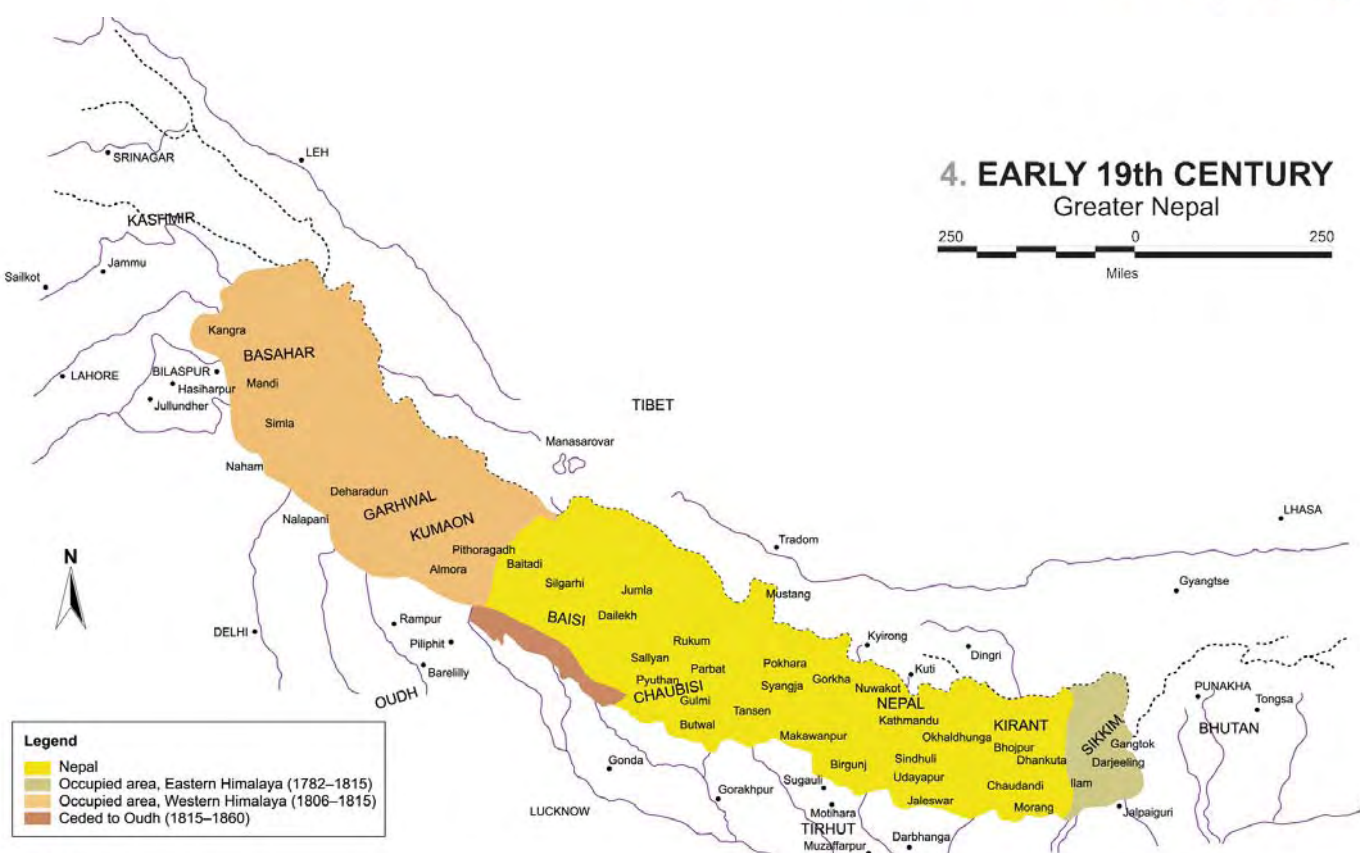
Cartography is a curious discipline, highlighting relations between data sets in two- or three-dimensional space. Maps, and the statistics which underlie them, can provide a visually rich snapshot of reality in a manner words can rarely achieve. But maps can also be deceptive and inaccurate, or manipulated for political effect. Poorly constructed or inexact maps are potentially dangerous when they enter the public domain, precisely because of their immediately definitive power as markers of spatial reality.

The *Nepal Atlas of Ethnic and Caste Groups* and the *Nepal Atlas of Language Groups*, both published in 2006, were the swansong of the outgoing Chairman of the National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN), Professor Sant Bahadur Gurung, who also wrote the Foreword to each. Both priced at Rs 500, these publications should be thought of as one atlas in two volumes, providing district level information on 103 officially recognised ethnic groups and 93 officially recognised languages. The difference between these two figures is already worth some thought, for in Nepal there is no one-to-one correlation between language and ethnic group.

Combining the analytical insights of Harka Gurung with census data analysis by Yogendra Gurung and the map-making skills of Chhabhi Lal Chidi, these two volumes offer the kind of baseline data that policy makers, development workers, and academics need for their work. The black and white maps are not by themselves scintillating, but they do provide the relevant census data on the left hand page with a visual representation on the right. Pages 227 to 266 are particularly helpful, providing population counts by language



Source: Journal of Nepal Medical Association, 1996, cited from *Indicators of Development*, ICIMOD, 1997.



Source: Shaha, 1996.

maps

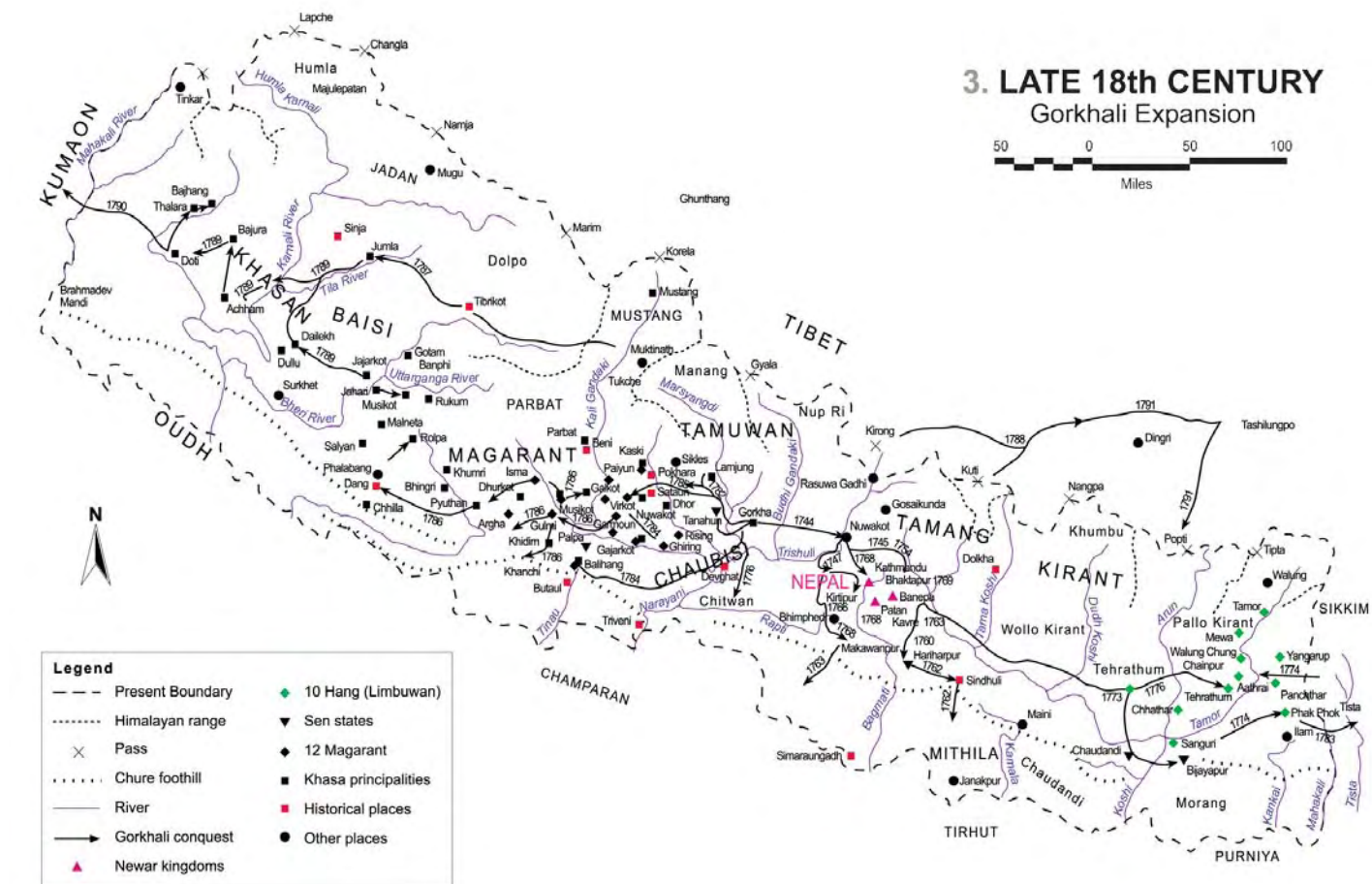
Three new Nepal atlases are as interesting for what they tell as for what they miss

and ethnic group for each of Nepal's 75 districts.

In both his twelve-page introductions, Dr Gurung unpacks the data in his trademark manner, carefully comparing and disaggregating census findings to make interesting points. He is also justifiably sceptical about the underlying data sets, suggesting that "the census data records too many cases of a language population exceeding their related ethnic group population in almost all districts. Such a widespread anomaly could have been due to misreporting and misrecording of ethnic and linguistic data" (page 10). The ever-careful scholar was being generous: the 2001 census, while better than any earlier one, is full of holes, particularly regarding languages and ethnicities. One example of census fallibility records 168,340 speakers of unspecified languages (pages 224-225). This is an unacceptably high number, implying a poor choice of categories used by the enumeration team. Every language has a name!

In all, though, the NFDIN books are strong, data-heavy publications which could also be hosted online or archived on a CD. As with all publications from the foundation, distribution remains the stumbling block, as they are not easily found in bookshops even in Nepal.

Published by Himal Books, *Nepal Atlas and Statistics* is a colourful and varied introduction to a wide range of data sets concerning Nepal. Grouped into categories



Source: Shaha, 1996.

entitled Setting, Physical Basis, Socio-Cultural Aspects, Economic Sectors, and Development Indicators, this atlas is a collection of 95 maps and five diagrams accompanied by related statistical tables. The statistics all derive from government sources, so they are as good and bad as the data in the NFDIN publications. Still, many of the maps are vivid and well-constructed, such as the one depicting the Infant Mortality Rates in 1996 (page 95), in which the western districts of Bajura, Bajhang, Jajarkot, Kalikot, and Mugu show the highest number of deaths. (see facing page, centre).

Intriguing and unexpected maps include one on Registered Legal Cases in 2001 and another on Reported Criminal Cases, both of which show significantly higher numbers in the tarai. Are plains dwellers more litigious, at least on paper, or are lowland cases just better reported? Does higher population density play a role? These are just some of the questions which good maps prompt one to consider. Two other maps which stand out are Map 3

(see above), providing a visual depiction of the Gorkhali expansion of the late 18th century, and Map 4 (see facing page, bottom), which offers the reader a glimpse of a greater Nepal.

Sadly, the rich colours and vividness of some of the maps are also their undoing. Map 51 of Higher Secondary School Enrolment is so dark, that all the shades of blue effectively blend into one, while the varying hues of green in Map 79 on Agricultural Credit cannot be disambiguated from one another, creating an over-saturated mush. I doubt whether

Dr Gurung, being a perfectionist, would have found such maps acceptable for public consumption.

The three books under discussion provide important background data on many aspects of the composition of modern Nepal, and will be essential additions to collections committed to the dissemination and production of knowledge on this country. ●

Mark Turin is director of the Digital Himalaya Project and fieldwork coordinator for the Chintang and Puma Documentation Project (CPDP) based at Tribhuban University.

Gurung, Harka, Yogendra Gurung and Chhabi Lal Chidi. 2006. *Nepal Atlas of Ethnic and Caste Groups*. Kathmandu: National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities. ISBN 99946-823-3-4. Rs 500.

Gurung, Harka, Yogendra Gurung and Chhabi Lal Chidi. 2006. *Nepal Atlas of Language Groups*. Kathmandu: National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities. ISBN 99946-823-4-2. Rs 500.

Gurung, Harka (ed.). 2006. *Nepal Atlas and Statistics*. Kathmandu: Himal Books. ISBN 99933-43-72-2. Rs 700.

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Singha Darbar may be getting more accessible physically, but it has a long way to go.

THE NEW COURT: Singha Darbar may be getting more accessible physically, but it has a long way to go.



HERE AND THERE

Daniel Lak

To me, there doesn't even seem to be a government, as such. Of course, the interim constitution has empowered the prime minister with a level of authority that would have pleased Saddam Hussein, but where is the rest of the governing apparatus? The last cabinet was empowered by the previous parliament. This one is to be appointed by the PM. Has it been? If so, when?

I'm afraid the legal limbo is worse than that. Even if we accept that somehow, seamlessly, the last council of ministers is still in charge, along with His Political Highness the PM, is anyone actually governing this country? For government is about more than simply calling oneself a minister and being ferried around town in a shiny vehicle with a flag fluttering up front.

Governing means leading, forging consensus, finding creative ways to deal with largely unexpected challenges. It means providing inspiration to a people increasingly left out as a new court based at Singha Darbar and political party headquarters takes over from Narayanhiiti. The people launched Jana Andolan II to stake their claim to government, not for a re-division of the spoils of power between discredited old actors and scary new ones. They did it for real change, for economic and social justice, for jobs, healthcare, and security.

The various agreements between Maoists and political parties have certainly changed the face of government here. Grey jacketed young women and a few representatives of civil society now sit in parliament. But in public, little else is changing. Ministers—whether legally empowered or not—seldom seem to do anything about their ministries. Or at least, anything public.

Take water. It's clear that our new court is well and truly behind the idea of developing Nepal's vast water and hydropower potential, even the comrades. We've been here before. It's patently necessary. Yet all the 'new' players seem oblivious to the need for public debate, hearings, discussions, consensus building, and agreement before vital natural resources are exploited. India needs Nepali water and power, that's for sure. Nepal needs the cash and jobs that would come from sensibly developing them. But who's at the controls? If deals are afoot and big plans being hatched, why the secrecy?

Then there's inclusion. The much-heralded interim constitution doesn't seem to have a lot of friends outside of Singha Darbar's private meeting rooms. Janajati groups are burning it, women are unhappy, and parts of the tarai are in flames. Yes, this is all to be expected as long-suppressed grievances boil over in the new atmosphere of freedom. But modern politics is supposed to be about dealing with grievance, providing ways—federalism, for example—for people to feel part of their own government. Either the interim constitution doesn't do that, or no one involved in drafting it has bothered to explain its less obvious strong points to the excluded people.

Nepal has once again produced something unique: a combination of legal limbo and political vacuum. A powerful prime minister is a scary thought. One who forsakes public leadership and openness as the country seethes with impatience is even worse. It's time for the media, civil society, business, lawyers, professionals, and others to issue marching orders to the Eight-Party Court.

Get governing, or else. Make it legal, or else. Or else what? How about Jana Andolan III. ●



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JEMIMA SHERPA

At home, at work

JEMIMA SHERPA in DANG

Maaghi, the start of the new year for the Tharu community, is a time for new ventures. Promises and deals are made good on during the festival, including the decision to send girls to work as kamlaris—girl-child indentured labourers—for the next year.

“The girls have to be rescued during Maaghi, otherwise even a verbal agreement to make them kamlaris has to be honoured,” explains Krishna Kumar Chaudhary, president of Social Welfare Action Nepal (SWAN), a local group working in the Deukhuri area in Dang. Besides active intervention, the project also focuses on education, awareness, and livelihood and income-generating activities, because poverty is a major reason that Tharu girls between eight and 14 are more or less sold into work, mostly as domestic help.

Until this Maaghi on 15 January, over 1,400 girls from Dang were working as kamlaris. Estimates of kamlaris from all five western Tharu districts including Banke, Bardia, Kailali, and Kanchanpur, range from 20,000 to 25,000.

The Nepalese Youth Opportunity Foundation (NYOF), along with PLAN, SWAN, Friends of Needy Children (FNC) and local clubs, is behind a major push to abolish the kamlari practice in Dang. Som Paneru, executive director of NYOF, says over 480 girls have returned to their families this Maaghi. With numbers still coming in from more remote areas, the organisations expect about 200 more.

The challenge is providing community support and opportunities for the girls, as the project only has provisions for about half of them. Still, Paneru is confident that progress is being made. “Within the Deukhuri and Dang valleys, the practice is almost completely gone,” he says, “but it’s still going on in the other four districts”

Even with assistance, breaking the cycle of desperate need and old traditions is an uphill battle. In Pipari, Sisanaya VDC, Sita Chaudhary says her daughter Laxmi (pictured above), now 11, left home at the age of six to become a kamlari without consulting her parents, lured by promises that in exchange for babysitting she’d get Rs 5,000 a year and get to watch tv. Instead, she washed dishes in a hotel in Pyuthan for Rs 2,000. “They didn’t feed her well, her hair had all come out from where they’d pulled it,” says Sita, who herself worked as a kamlari for 12 years from the age of seven.

Forty former kamlaris are enrolled in a 14-month alternative education program in nearby Lalmatiya. However, on a Wednesday two weeks ago, nearly half the older girls hadn’t come to class because the jungles were open for firewood and fodder collection. Seema Chaudhary, 14, and her sisters Sushila, 16, and Basanti, 20, were all sent by their father to work as kamlaris. When asked what they do at home after class, they giggle and say their chores—washing clothes and dishes—are almost the same, but they also have to cut grass and mind their younger siblings. ●

Dirty city

Kathmandu’s growth could be severely compromised unless the tide of environmental degradation resulting from economic and human pressures is stemmed, says a new report by UNEP and ICIMOD.

Kathmandu Valley Environmental Outlook cites growing urbanisation, population growth, unhampered and poorly planned land development, and insufficient coordination among government agencies as major causes of environmental deterioration.

Vehicular emissions are the primary cause of deteriorating air quality—exhaust fumes increased by four times between 1993 and 2001 and the concentration of particulate matter has tripled over the past decade. Solid waste disposal and household and industrial effluents dumped into the rivers are responsible for water-borne diseases such as diarrhoea, dysentery, cholera, and skin disease. A quarter—over 100 tons—of the waste generated daily is left to decay on streets and in rivers. Groundwater has dropped from 9m to 68m in a matter of years.

The report recommends a number of measures to prevent and minimise negative impacts. These include improved planning and zoning, land pooling, better solid waste management, and rainwater harvesting. The report says that community mobilisation is essential if these goals are to be met.

Flu fight

The World Bank last week approved a \$18.2 million grant to support the Nepal government’s efforts to minimise the threat posed to humans by the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). The Avian Influenza Control Project is designed to control such infections among birds, especially domestic poultry, and to control and respond to possible human infections, especially an influenza epidemic and related emergencies.

The project will support prevention, preparedness and planning, and response and containment. “This project is aimed at reducing the burden of disease, the consequent economic losses, the risk of human infection, and the loss of productivity attributable to human infections in Nepal,” said Ken Ohashi, World Bank Country Director for Nepal.

Nepal has not had any cases, human or animal, of avian flu. However, the flu has been recorded in China and India, and Nepal is at high risk because it is on two migration routes for birds that are known carriers of the disease.

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Chased out by dragons

India can't wash its hands of the Bhutani refugees in Nepal for much longer



ANUP KAPHLI

LONG ROAD HOME: Over 100 thousand Bhutani refugees have been living in the camps in Jhapa for over a decade.

No school bus stops here to pick up children. No postman comes here to deliver mail. They are refugees from Bhutan who were sitting for more than a month in front of the United Nations in Kathmandu.



COMMENT
Kuldip Nayar

The UN gives most of them two square meals a day back at their camps in Jhapa, but compassion fatigue is setting in. "That is the maximum we can do," says UNHCR representative Abraham Abraham, "it is, however, criminal to keep them in camps for so long."

The camps have become a base for pro-democracy dissent activity against the Bhutani establishment. The refugees are not radicals. They have never questioned their monarchy, even though their host country might have. But they want to have a future.

It was not any green pasture which attracted them. They were forced to leave their lands and homes. The royal government of Bhutan found them too insistent on the question of democracy and human rights, too restive against laws on language and national dress. They still want to go back to the same setup, confident to overcome the difficulties in Bhutan and work for the country's development. But neither Bhutan, nor any foreign nation, seems bothered about their future.

After deadlocked bilateral

negotiations, the Americans have volunteered to absorb 60,000 of them in the US. The proposal has got mixed responses. Many Bhutani refugee leaders feel that while the offer was welcome, the US should have been exerting pressure on Bhutan to take back its people. Others feel that the proposal is not a long-term solution and could, in fact, act as a destabilising factor within Bhutan and among the refugees.

US ambassador James F Moriarity argues that it is a human problem which required immediate attention. He didn't react to the plea to remonstrate with Bhutan except to say: "We are in touch with India."

New Delhi should have been more proactive. An authoritarian regime which is solely dependent on it for defence should have been pressured to get refugees back to their homes. But New Delhi is afraid to even ask questions lest tiny Bhutan should be annoyed and tilt towards the next door China.

Bhutan sealed its border in 1950 when the Tibetans were running away for refuge. It can't afford to lean on China. But diplomatically and economically, India and Bhutan are close to each other and that is what makes New Delhi's leverage important. The people or organisations with which I interacted in Kathmandu recently expressed an urgent need for India to take an active role in resolving the refugee issue.

With its tradition of multi-party democracy, its pluralistic

society and its role as a leading economic power in the region, India is seen as the only entity which could and should try to seek a solution to this humanitarian crisis. Bhutani refugee leader Teknath Rizal says he is convinced New Delhi will not step in to help. His own experience was not a happy one. When he got to the border after being released from detention in Bhutan, he was jailed and given a choice leave India or spend the rest of his life in jail. He preferred to travel to Nepal because it allowed him to live freely and propagate the cause of refugees.

A report by South Asian Human Rights Forum has put the whole thing in perspective: "A major human rights deficit in the South Asian region is the prolonged exile of Bhutanese refugees living in Nepal and India. Both host governments have often ruthlessly cooperated with the Bhutanese government in forced repatriation, arrest or denial of freedom of association and expression to the refugees. This tri-governmental alliance has demobilised the Bhutanese refugee population. Their visibility is low and all attempted solutions lack coherence."

One of the consequences of allowing the problem to fester is the possibility that dissatisfaction and unrest among refugees could overtime drive them to extremism. This could create new conflicts in the region and India could experience negative fallout. ●



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An old hippie returns to Kathmandu after 25 years

Follow the drugs, the money, the past

The Devil's Road, a novel by Tom Vater, is a great read. It's the story of three 1970s hippies driving a rickety bus overland from Europe through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India to Kathmandu. Long on naivet , short on funds, they get involved with a couple of young women, a

mysterious Frenchman, a set of Siamese twins who work as cabaret singers, some holy men,

and drugs. Big time drugs. The deal they strike in Pakistan, they think, is their opportunity to pay for the entire trip. But get in trouble when it all goes terribly wrong in Kathmandu and the money disappears.

Twenty-five years later the hippies return to Nepal, back on the trail of the lost drug money. One is travelling with his son. I won't tell you what happens next, nor the story's climax, only that it's a riveting read all the way from Hanuman Dhoka to Khumbu.

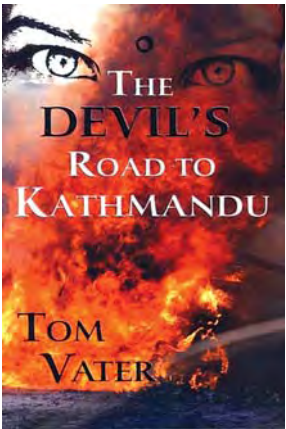
Vater is a good writer with an eye for detail and the ability to set a scene with authentic dialogue and evocative description. Somewhere east of Peshawar boy meets girl: "On the wide veranda that extended past the four guestrooms facing the valley, two western girls in their twenties were lounging on deep pillows, a freshly split watermelon on a steel tray in front of them. The younger one rose. Dressed in tight orange pants, flared at the bottom, and an Indian-looking white pyjama top, that seemed to have most of its buttons missing, she offered a glimpse of her tanned breasts to Dan, the first arrival to stumble through the door. Her shortly cropped hair showed off a long row of finely crafted Afghani silverware arranged along her right earlobe. The heavy jewellery emphasised her strong cheekbones and

beautiful red lips. He noticed all this in less than three seconds..." In Kathmandu, father and son converse in a taxi, comparing Nepal then and now: "So has it changed, Dad?" Dan stared through the window, unable to take his eyes off the chaotic traffic they headed into. Trucks, buses, cars, motor and cycle rickshaws, motorbikes, scooters, ox carts [sic], hand-pulled carts, bicycles, cows and pedestrians jostled for space on a narrow two-lane street. Chattering rooftop monkeys applauded the confusion... "Yes, it has changed. No, it hasn't. I don't know. But they do have a real airport now. And slightly better roads. And far more traffic... And internet, supermarkets, air-con hotel rooms, bars, nightclubs. In Thamel... you can get anything you want. Even Marmite..."

Tom Vater first came to Asia in 1993 on assignment for the British Library. He was captivated, and stayed on as a travel-journalist, criss-crossing south and southeast on various assignments. He writes in English and German and specialises in strange tales and happenings. Among his feature articles on Nepal is an encounter with Maoists in the hills, a description of animal sacrifice at Dakshinkali, and an interview with the serial killer Charles Sobhraj (firmly ensconced in a Kathmandu prison).

Vater has also published a well-received travel book, *Beyond The Pancake Trench: Road Tales from the Wild East* (Orchid Press, Bangkok, 2004). It has been described as "a wholly enjoyable book, free of the pomposity that dogs many travelogues and... the antithesis of the coffee table book" (The South China Morning Post).

The Devil's Road is available at Mandala Bookpoint and Vajra Books in Kathmandu, at Orchid Books in Bangkok, and online at orchidbooks.com or amazon.com.



The Devil's Road to Kathmandu, Dragon's Mouth Press, Hong Kong, 2006, 366 pp, Rs 860



KIRAN NEPAL

Federalism or death

If you hated the war you'll despise the justification

One factor that makes the Hand so Foreign is his affliction with the 'logic syndrome'. Despite a long, meddlesome career in the mysterious East, part of him still expects things to ultimately make sense. In a country like Nepal this need can be quite a burden, especially when faced with a civil war completely bereft of rationale.

Imagine his relief when the latest bahun to stalk the corridors of power explained it was all about achieving Federalism. Since previous justifications for this tragic conflict were so mired in



MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

outdated jargon as to be nonsensical, the Hand seized upon this interpretation as a way of finally putting the nagging question to rest. Within moments, though, the logic

syndrome flared up again: was it really necessary to launch a devastating revolution to establish a federalist government?

This current excuse for the Pupil's War, lame though it may be, establishes another first for Nepal, as the only nation in history to institute federalism through mayhem and terror.

It lies beyond the scope of this diatribe to debate the merits of various systems of governance but well within its range to call a spade a spade.

When the fledgling Maoist party saw its demands ignored in 1996, they declared war in a pique against a democratically-elected government. Ten years and 14,000 deaths later they join the same government, ironically composed of the same individuals and parties they went to war with, proving the entire exercise was a disastrous, ego-driven waste of time.

Wanton destruction of infrastructure, torture, murder, coercion and massive extortion has nothing to do with federalism versus centralism. No one attacks police posts with human waves of hapless villagers to establish a series of ethnically-based states, nor do they shut down schools, slaughter teachers or kidnap children for such a cause.

In the hard-bitten world of international meddling, speculation as to how 'it might have been' has no place. Nevertheless, the Hand indulges in the occasional wistful moment (usually on national holidays) between interfering in the country's internal affairs.

A recent daydream took him through the lost decade of conflict, amazed at the amount of energy expended on wrecking the state. Impressive organisational skills were displayed in targeting and destroying the nation's infrastructure, setting up chains of command, safe houses, munitions supply, kangaroo courts, bomb factories, and propaganda centres. The extensive network of spies and informers established to suppress dissent and gather intelligence is notable, exemplified by the highly detailed research conducted before embarking on their recent Kathmandu based extortion drive. The Maoists spent months collecting information on the assets of potential targets (anyone with anything). This required vitality, and paid off to the tune of billions of rupees.

The daydream grew more surreal with the insight these very skills and high levels of motivation could have been used to build the country instead. The extraordinary energy required to conduct a war and terrorise the people might have been used to build bridges instead of demolishing them.

An impossible dream, of course, shattered by the tawdry realisation that this war has never been about benefiting the impoverished masses, through federalism or anything else. Nepal's political class across the spectrum has always treated the people as expendable, a medium to be manipulated while grabbing at the throne. This particular power struggle has proven to be no different—just another attempt by a wannabe aristocracy to seize power. Once again, the elite have pitted the sons of poor men against each other in pursuit of their narrow, self-serving agenda.

Imagine: if ten years of reckless destruction got the Maoists 30 percent of the seats in parliament, a decade of constructive activity might have earned them the respect and votes of the majority. Too late for that now. ●

Auntie dearest

In the course of their daily investigations, *Nepali Times* staffers are often on the receiving end of confessions and questions about all spheres of adult behaviour—sticky office issues and messy relationships, bad habits and crises of creativity. As a service to our readers, we now refer all quandaries of a grown-up nature to Auntie, a waspish spinster whose colourful past, scepticism, and inexhaustible wealth of put-downs make her a good source of advice and wake-up calls. Please address all queries to auntie@nepalitimes.com.

I have been thinking about being a nun for a long time, but I often have evil, dirty thoughts. Do you think there is still hope for me?

Chaste and chafing

Dear C&C, First, may we compliment you on your devotion. To persist in wanting to take your vows in the face of powerful fantasies is noble indeed. But is it wise? There's no point becoming a nun if your only meditations are going to be on the strong limbs of the carpenter. If you have such doubts now, consider carefully whether you will be able to stop yourself from making inappropriate lunges in the direction of the milkman, a fellow traveller on the path of righteousness or, worse, a barnyard animal. (This has a more established pedigree than you might imagine—Sufi poet Rumi once wrote of an otherwise pious woman whose downfall included a donkey and a gourd.) There is only one way to find out if the life of the cloister is for you. Go forth and indulge. If, after a steady diet of Bad Behaviour and Bacchanalia, you find yourself still feeling strangely empty, so to speak, you will have to grit your teeth, shave your head, and don the robes. Sometimes, delayed—even permanently so—gratification is the best kind there is.



ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Mixed media art** by Manish Lal Shrestha, until 31 January from 10-6PM, at Newa Chhen Gallery.
- ❖ **Homage to My Country** Exhibition of digital prints by Impress Singh at Siddhartha Art Gallery, 24 January-7 February, from 11-6PM. 4218048



EVENTS

- ❖ **Vipassana** meditation talk program at the Mind Body Library, Tripureswor, 1PM on 27 January. 4279712
- ❖ **Krishnamurti dialogue session** exploring human problems at the Mind Body Library, 2.30PM on 27 January. 4279712
- ❖ **British Film Festival 2007** until 28 January in Pokhara.
- ❖ **Kathmandu Chorale** Rehearsals at the British School, every Monday 7-9 PM from 29 January. 5534737
- ❖ **Singing bowl demonstration and concert** CSGN Annual Membership Event at the Shankar Hotel, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM on 31 January.
- ❖ **Civic Concerns** Youth Initiative workshop on 3 February, 10.30-5.30PM at PIC, Heritage Plaza, Registration Rs 100 by 1 February. 4107599
- ❖ **Eco Walk** to Changu Narayan, fund-raiser for Antardristi Nepal on 10 February, 10-4PM, Rs 700 for admissions, including lunch and transport. 4424017
- ❖ **Aarohan Natak Mahotsav 2063** seven plays for three days each until 12 February at 4.30PM at the Gurukul theatre. 4466956
- ❖ **Salsa workshop** Weekday and weekend classes available for Rs 1,000 per person or Rs 1,800 per couple at Salsa Dance Academy, Bhatbhateni. 4422019
- ❖ **Hata yoga classes**, 7.30-8.30 AM and 5-6PM, Sunday to Friday, 40 percent discount at The Self Awakening Centre, Baber Mahal Revisited. 4256618

MUSIC

- ❖ **Live music** by Rashmi Singh and group at the Absolut Bar, Hotel Narayani, 26 January, 7PM onwards. 5521408
- ❖ **Robin and the New Revolution** live at Moksh on 27 January, 8.30PM onwards, Rs 200. 5526212
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Classical fusion music** at Jatra, every Saturday, 7PM onwards
- ❖ **Gaine (Gandarbhas)** perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680080
- ❖ **Fusion and classical Nepali music** by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien, Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800.

DINING

- ❖ **Walk and lunch** every Saturday until 27 January at Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel (4262768), Bhatbhateni (4426587), and Pulchok (5521755).
- ❖ **Light nouvelle snacks** and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La'Soon, Pulchowk, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- ❖ **Continental cuisine** and wine by the fire place at Kilroy's, Thamel. 4250440.
- ❖ **Shop Talk** Drink and dine at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Radisson Hotel.
- ❖ **Café Bahal** at Kathmandu Guest House. 4700632.
- ❖ **Smorgasbord** lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- ❖ **Gyakok** lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, four guest minimum at Rs 450 per person. 4412999
- ❖ **Retro brunch barbecue** with the Crossfire Band at The Poolside, Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort. 12 noon-4PM for Rs 1,000, including swimming and complimentary drink.
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Japanese Food** at the Coffee Shop at Hotel Shangri-la, 12 noon-3PM, Rs 499 per person. 4412999
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Some Like It Hot** Winter cocktails with live music from Side B every Wednesday at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's.
- ❖ **AKA Pizza** at Moksh, delivery available. 5526212
- ❖ **Momo and Sekuwa Revolution** Saturdays at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048
- ❖ **Cocktails and Mocktails** Daily happy hour, 4-7PM at Kathmandu Revolving Restaurant, Ratna Plaza, New Road

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Weekend package** at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4451212
- ❖ **Winter retreat** Three days and two nights at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, Rs 7,499. 4412999
- ❖ **Harmony** of the mind, body, and soul at Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Aesthetic living** with nature at Park Village. 4375279
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** at Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 4361500

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by MIKU



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by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



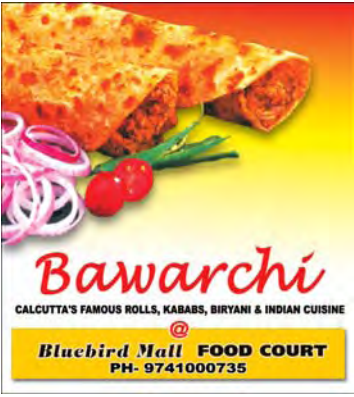
There's not much respite from the winter this coming week. A westerly is making its way across and will descend on us over the weekend, bringing clouds and a sprinkling of snow at higher altitudes. Kathmandu will remain smog-bound, temperatures will remain low, and flights will continue to be disrupted.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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

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WANTED
This camera belonging to a *Nepali Times* contributor was stolen in a restaurant in Thamel last week. The photographer is offering compensation in return for his property. If you have bought a similar camera in the last week please contact editors@nepalitimes.com.



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MIN BAJRACHARYA

TROUBLE IN THE TARAI: Violence spread through the tarai despite curfews, leading to incidents like this one in Inaruwa, Sunsari, on Thursday morning, when Madhesi Janadhikar Forum activists torched a vehicle used by the assistant CDO.



KIRAN PANDAY

NO AMNESTY: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour speaking to the press during her six-day visit to Nepal on issues including impunity and the tension in the tarai. She urged that there should be no amnesty for perpetrators of human rights abuses.



ANUP PRAKASH

ALL HITS: (r-l) Veteran Nepali actress Tripti Natkar and movie director Shambu Pradhan present the award for best vocal collaboration to Da 69, Aid Ray (holding award), Mausami Gurung, and Kranti Ale for their version of Gopal Yonjan's *Chyangba hoi chyangba* at the 10th Hits FM Music Awards on Friday.



KIRAN PANDAY

SOARING: A paraglider practices over Fewa Taal in Pokhara on Sunday for the eighth Nepal Open Paragliding Competition.



Happy Hrs.





Cocktail

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Kingdom for a horse

Right. We have it on good authoritarians that the disappearance of rhinos in the once-royal Chitwan National Park bears a direct correlation to the arrival of loktantra and the **Girija Restoration**. In fact, the rhinos started being killed as soon as two notorious poachers were released from jail by the seven-party alliance in September last year.

Now, conservationists at Kasara tell the BBC Nepali Service that envoys of two "developing country embassies" in Kathmandu are directly involved in paying middlemen for rhino horns at important five-star venues in the capital. Under CITES, envoys enjoy no diplomatic immunity when it comes to poaching endangered species. But that doesn't seem to deter these dogged diplomats.

The allegation has sent tongues wagging all over town about who the likely culprits may be. Narrowing down the search to "developing countries" has made the job considerably easier. Those who remember how street dogs suddenly started disappearing in the Dhobi Ghaut area in the 1980s recall that it coincided with a certain developing country embassy moving into the neighbourhood. This gave the word **hotdog** a whole new meaning. But with horny ambassadors now smuggling rhino spare parts into their checked-in luggage, there isn't much of a future for what could five years hence be posthumously declared Nepal Extinct National Animal.



Two famous **Aishwaryas** plighted their troth within a span of a week in India. One of them is a Miss World and the other tied the knot with our very own Devyani. What a coincidence that Devyani's husband's name is Aishwarya, a name that could easily have been her mother-in-law's if fate hadn't so cruelly intervened. Arjun Singh pulled out all the stops for his son's semi-royal wedding. He can afford to, since he is old money and new money all rolled into one thick wad. So what if Nepal is getting rid of its royalty, the Republicans of India are clinging on to theirs. And how come Bhutan's ex-king Jigme got an invite but our ex-majesty didn't? Devyani's Daddy had over 2,000 people on his invitee list but alas the Ass was not on it either.

The Nepali animals that did get to go to the festivities in Delhi were wild boars in the form of **bandel ko bath**. Bollywood glitterati and assorted Indo-Nepalese royalty were seen digging into the stuff. The proceedings were strictly out of bounds for Delhi-based paparazzi but our mole heard there were 450 Indian princelings at the Gwalior House function and the talk there was all about how the commies are taking over Nepal and what is the left-leaning Government of India doing about it?



So, what's with the moustache, Kingji? Maybe it is just as well that the monarch is not going to grace our bank notes from this year. Too little too late: the **royal carcade** to Hanuman Dhoka on Basanta Panchami didn't bring all traffic to a halt at New Road for two hours as used to be the practice. Emissaries have been sent to gauge the mood of the political forces about keeping at least a token monarchy. Even the Fierce One got a feeler and reportedly sent word back that His Majesty missed the bus. So, Plan B has been activated: a pro-monarchy julus of nange babas on Shivaratri which is guaranteed to send shivers down the spines of even die-hard republicans.



OK, so the Ass overdid it a bit last week with all that stuff on the UN but that's no reason to stop talking to him at the neighbourhood watering hole is it? C'mon, I was just **horsing around**. If you'd rather drop dead than be seen consorting with the backside donkey then go right ahead.



ass@nepalitimes.com



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