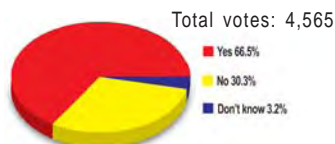


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Weekly Internet Poll # 334

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



Weekly Internet Poll # 335: To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Did Girija Prasad Koirala go far enough to address madhesi grievances?

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Moderate madhesis are being drowned out by radicals

Plain speaking

LOUDER THAN WORDS: NC member Irshad Ansari gets ready to burn an effigy of Pushpa Kamal Dahal at a madhesi rights rally in Rajbiraj on Sunday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

The seven-party alliance and the Maoists had a good chance this week to address the madhesi grievances fuelling the tarai unrest. And they blew it.

EYES WIDE SHUT
Sheetal Kumar

On Wednesday, instead of acknowledging genuine grievances and saying sorry to the families of those killed, and despite emotional references to his own mortality, Prime Minister Koirala delivered a lecture: your protests

are delaying the constituent assembly election. Let's talk, but stop the violence.

Madhesi compared it to the 'concession' speech given by Gyanendra last April when he went only half-way in meeting the demands of pro-democracy forces. The parties kept up the pressure until the king capitulated. Something similar could happen now, and the tarai violence could intensify.

The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF), a hitherto moderate pan-madhesi group, has become increasingly radical during the

course of the protests. It not only kept shifting the goalposts, making it impossible for the government to meet its demands, but also attacked police posts and media organisations. Hours after Koirala's speech, MJF activists kidnapped policemen in Biratnagar and killed one officer.

The NSP-A may pull out of the government just to maintain legitimacy in madhesi eyes. One of its ministers resigned this week, others could follow.

The Maoists' own Madhesi Rastriya Mukti Morcha has warned the government of nasty

consequences if madhesi demands are not met. Its leader Matrika Yadav is clearly under pressure from constituents to go against the Maoist high command.

The two ex-Maoist factions of the JTMM were the original radicals, but find themselves competing with the MJF, Matrika's group, and even the NSP-A. The seven parties and the Maoists had a chance to check this radicalism before it was too late. But except for the NSP-A, they failed to grasp the gravity of the situation. No one understood that the tarai clamour is as much about identity as fair representation and justice.

Out of this muddle emerged Koirala's lame-duck speech. He announced the government was committed to federal rule based on population and geography through the constituent assembly. Electoral constituencies would be redrawn without a reduction in the number of constituencies in each district. This will presumably give the tarai a few more constituencies, but not reduce the number in the hills, taking the total number of CA members to more than 425.

Moderate madhesi may still accept Koirala's concessions, seeing it as an incremental step in the right direction. But they will likely be drowned out or cowed down by radicals.

Not one madhesi group or individual has welcomed the prime minister's speech.

Tarai pahadis are now feeling threatened by the gathering storm. People want to get out but the roads are blocked. ●

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Bar none

The Nepal Bar Association has a chance to reinvent itself

KEEP TALKING

Everyone is talking about talking, but no one is actually talking. Even so, that is better than saying they won't talk. So all is not yet lost.

There is still a window of opportunity to address the three main madhesi demands: a federal state, proportional representation, and re-demarcation of electoral constituencies to take into account population density in the tarai.

Prime Minister Koirala's much-anticipated address to the nation on Wednesday was supposed to do the trick. But the grieving and unwell PM came across as blasé, and his omissions turned out to be critical. The seven-party alliance has completely misjudged the anger in the south, and even among madhesi cadre within their own parties.

But it is the Maoists who are most to blame for sparking off the current agitation by shooting dead an activist in Lahan and then preventing the prime minister from going further than he finally did to meet madhesi demands. They are so blinded by their rage at the breakaway JTMM that they see the tarai fire as just an internal party issue. And it doesn't help that at a time like this the interim parliament is on a 10-day recess. If it had reconvened for an emergency session to issue a multi-party declaration, the situation in the plains wouldn't have spiralled out of control.

Another casualty of the crisis is the constituent assembly election. There is no way it can now be held as scheduled. Madhesi demands have escalated and proportional representation may be moot as radical activists ratchet up their demand for a re-census.

There are three factors in the current tarai flareup: political, administrative, and structural. On the political level, the prime minister's promises about a federal setup, delineation of constituencies on the basis of population and offer of talks to all concerned needs to be interpreted in the most generous way. The state doesn't stand to lose anything by involving as many people as possible in decision-making leading up to elections. Rather than a site of contestation, negotiations can in fact become participatory if handled carefully.

Administrative steps are needed to engender trust and prepare the ground for political negotiations. This can be done by probing police and Maoist lapses in Lahan and Nepalganj and punishing the guilty.

Much more difficult are long-term structural changes. Proportionate representation in the state structure is a time-consuming affair. Even with the best of intentions, it will be a while before we begin to see an adequate number of madhesi in the army, dalits in academia, or janajatis in administration. The wrongs of history take time to be corrected.

Still, demonstrated political will and a transparent display of sincerity and magnanimity can take dialogue forward. It's time for the parties to start looking at the tarai as more than just a vote bank, and to seriously begin to redress historical wrongs.

The newly-elected leadership is in place at the Nepal Bar Association (NBA). These new officers have come in at a critical juncture in the transitional period and will have a major—but not always easy—role to play in the days



GUEST COLUMN
Sabita B Baral

ahead. The job ahead for the NBA now is to create an independent and efficient judiciary, provide vital support for the constituent assembly election, and uphold human rights.

Lawyers can play a special role in helping create a legislature that, by including representatives of all zones, classes, languages, and gender, promotes a competitive, decentralised, and inclusive political system.

Despite the new political environment, human rights remain a vulnerable issue. The association has to be vigilant that Nepal follows all UN human rights agreements and respects all the international conventions to which we are party. It is the responsibility of everyone in the legal profession to remain unbiased, and the challenge before the NBA is to ensure that

no individual's right to freedom is violated or encroached upon.

One of the most daunting tasks ahead for the association is to make the judiciary genuinely independent and efficient. A judiciary that is independent, efficient, and not directed, can protect the rights of citizens and help steer the country in the right direction when faced with a political dilemma. The association also needs to be represented at the judicial council when judges are nominated, as the relationship

between the bar and the bench must be cordial, and law professionals duly recognised as officers of the court.

Other tasks the NBA will have to do justice to include protecting the professional integrity of law professionals and producing efficient manpower. The association needs to include women, janajatis, and new law professionals.

In order to meet these various and important challenges, the association needs to evolve, just as Nepal itself is changing and reconstructing itself. There will be considerable negative consequences if the NBA cannot reinvent itself. It needs to advocate the rights of madhesi, janajati, and women lawyers. Regular trainings and seminars need to be offered so they can hone their skills, the welfare fund needs to be augmented and made to function better, and the human rights and women's interest sections should be more efficient so there is proportional representation.

By producing efficient law professionals, the NBA can expand the salubrious influence of the legal field. For example, the association can play an important role in developing and implementing laws relating to intellectual property, meeting the legal challenges put forward by international conferences, and training legal manpower which can compete with international law professionals. ●

Sabita Bhandari Baral is an advocate and the new treasurer of the Nepal Bar Association.

(A version of this article appeared in Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 January.)



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Hour of reckoning

From the fallout of his ill-judged address Koirala must salvage the last chance

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala didn't make the address to the nation as anticipated. He read a statement thrust into his hands into the full glare of tv cameras. Though he looked frail, his voice was steely and he seemed in no mood to listen. The signs of Koirala's fabled inflexibility are portentous.

Contestations over the controversial provisions of the interim constitution were anticipated. In negotiations preceding the April Uprising, different parties had contradictory positions on the country's



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

post-autocracy politics. Elections to a constituent assembly became an agenda of compromise, but all signatories to the common minimum program continue to hold a grudge against a document they signed under difficult circumstances.

The lack of trust between coalition

partners was reflected in the draft of the interim constitution. Instead of being a charter of consensus, the statute turned out to be contentious. NC leaders are unhappy because leftists dominate the interim legislature. The UML is sore it couldn't check the rise of the Maoists. Royalists are alarmed that the king has been sidelined.

The interim constitution isn't even a compromise—it's a deed of compulsion that the eight-party alliance was forced to commit, in order to salvage the legitimacy of the coalition. Thus the paradox: all parties in the alliance want the interim constitution but none are willing to defend it.

The vulnerability of the statute is what prompted the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum activists to burn copies of it last month. Law enforcement agencies handled the exigency in their usual ham-handed way, protestors were booked and those in authority realised too late that this would have serious consequences. Madhesi protestors were out on the streets in Siraha, the prime site of vote-bank politics in the eastern tarai.

The way the government has handled the situation since strengthens the impression that no matter what the system, the state of Nepal is completely insensitive to the concerns of madhesi.

Loss of life during any agitation becomes the rallying cry of the masses, and political honchos use innocent deaths to inflame passions. But a head of government is expected to condemn violence, offer his condolences, and promise an investigation to bring the guilty to book. This is what a government routinely does in a functioning democracy. Koirala did no such thing in his Wednesday address. Maybe it was an oversight, but it gave madhesi an unambiguous message that their own prime minister showed a callous disregard for their feelings.

Koirala has been a consummate politician all his life. More than anyone else in government now, he knows the significance of gestures. It's unlikely that he doesn't know the consequences of his rigidity on madhesi political demands. Does

he have a magic wand to make the problem disappear, or does he really not have a clue? We can only hope he knows something we don't.

The octogenarian prime minister is under tremendous pressure from all kinds of interest groups. The stress of heading an embattled party, an embittered coalition, and a beleaguered government besieged by fierce transitional contestations must be overpowering. And he is grieving the loss of close relative and longtime party companion, Nona Koirala. But the task of being head of state as well as head of government is not for the obstinate or the feeble.

Ironically, Koirala is the most popular mainstream politician in the tarai—and the opposite in the hills, valleys, and mountains of Nepal. At the end of his momentous political career, he faces a moment of truth. The way he handles this crisis will set the course of the country for the years, if not decades, to come, and make or mar his place in history. ●

LETTERS

TARAI TROUBLES

The governing alliance in Nepal has woken up albeit very late ('Shadow of a gun', #333). We can cautiously welcome the parties agreeing to state restructuring through federalism, but the issue of proportional representation requires in-depth and holistic consideration. This is because people occupy diverse topological territories vis-a-vis comforts and adversaries of life, in general. And in Nepal, we have heterogenous populations in the mountains, hills, and tarai. So proportional representation today shouldn't land in possible ethnic imbalance tomorrow. Let's hope the 7+1 parties can douse the flames for the time being.

About charges that former royal ministers have infiltrated the tarai agitation, the government must provide valid evidence. But if it is just a 'cetamol' step to keep down the tarai fever it may lead to another embarrassing fiasco. So, why not act genuinely to identify covert culprits rather than highlighting tainted royal faces as scapegoats every time?

Pradeepa Sharma, Mumbai

- There is strong resentment among sections of the community that the current composition of the parliament is not inclusive and proportionate to the ethnic composition of the country. The interim parliament must be reconstituted by revising the representation of the main parties based on ethnicity. This is the time for party leaders to show statesmanship by making way for communities that are under-represented. The four main parties should in consultation with each other accommodate various ethnicities in their quotas.

Meanwhile, the tarai is ablaze and our firefighters are in a trance. The leadership must act fast, not procrastinate. The demands of the Madhesi community are straightforward and legitimate. Firstly, the 20 tarai districts should be delinked from the hills for electoral purposes and be consolidated into these five units, taking into consideration their areas, languages, and populations:

1. Kanchanpur, Kailali, Bardiya, and Dang
2. Kapilbastu, Rupandehi, Nawalparasi, and Chitwan
3. Parsa, Bara, Rautahat, and Sarlahi
4. Mahottara, Shanthu, Siraha, and Saptari
5. Sunsari, Morang, and Jhapa

The second madhesi demand for one seat in parliament per 100,000 population is also reasonable and can easily be implemented. The third demand of federalism coincides with what all sections of society have been asking for. Nepal has to ultimately evolve its own kind of governance with significant authority to local units. So why wait?

GN Rimal, email

- Responsible intellectual and professional madhesi can't shirk from their duty by keeping mum and taking double advantage. While anyone with even a little sense of justice would hardly disagree that the madhesi have not been included in the Nepali nation state since its inception, no one should forget that the Nepali people are already fed up with violence. They've not only been discriminated against by the state mechanism but also by ordinary hill people. A child in Kathmandu calling out "O bhaiya, eta aaija" to madhesi vendors is an example. The government has already been directed by the eight parties and other civil bodies to implement all necessary measures to tackle the issues of citizenship and proportional representation. Now the responsibility lies with the madhesi to stop letting others taking undue advantage. Those spreading communal hatred against pahadis are not the older madhesi inhabitants of the tarai but fake "freedom fighters" who've infiltrated the border to take advantage of their dual citizenship. This is going to harm Nepali madhesi much more in the long run. Instead of voicing their legitimate demands through legitimate means, the movement is taking the path of violent communalism. Still, if the current movement opens the eyes of the madhesi themselves about caste, faith, and gender discrimination within their own community, it may be a good thing. Social equality and justice are far more important than artificial national unity.

Divas Sarma, Kathmandu

- Kunda Dixit hit the nail on the head by pointing out that the Maoists can't put the genie of ethnicity and communalism back in the bottle ('Shadow of a gun', #333). The Maoist influence on the seven party

apparatus has now become the single biggest obstacle to addressing the genuine demands of the Nepali madhesi who have been discriminated against for so long. The Maoists calling the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum "criminals" and "bullies" is like the pot calling the kettle black.

Gyan Subba, email

- I must say if Nepal's rulers had been reading editorials in your paper and columns by CK Lal in the past four years they'd have seen the tarai crisis coming. Now it's too late to do anything about it. May Lord Pashupatinath save us all.

Tilak Sharma, email

- I don't know how you did your arithmetic in your editorial ('Search for common ground', #333) about tarai groups having only 41 seats in the last parliament when they should ostensibly have 112. But even if that were true, and was addressed by proportional representation in future it would be naïve to believe that it would solve the problem. Madhesi activism has now been hijacked by royal Hindus and nothing will satisfy them.

Name withheld, email



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In the central and eastern tarai, rage, determination, and grief

CAP ON IDENTITY: Student leaders of the seven-party alliance and the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum burn a dhaka topi in Rajbiraj on Sunday.



ALL PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA

CHARLES HAVILAND in LAHAN

Rano Devi Mahato's cries rend the air. She weeps, sobs uncontrollably, her breath faltering. She cries for her lost 16-year-old son whose cheery image stares out of the photo she holds.

She and her grey-haired husband Ravi sit in their dusty yard in a village an hour from Lahan, their palms clasped together humbly. Ravi is composed but seems utterly beaten down by the death of their fourth child, Ramesh, whose shooting in Lahan on 19 January sparked much more violence related to the madhesi cause.

"Ramesh went to Lahan to shop for me and sit his exam," weeps Rano Devi. "Then I heard someone else had been shot but Ramesh was safe. But I went to the clinic and saw his body. People say Maoists killed him, but how would I know?"

There are the usual jumbled accounts of what happened. A man stops us near the Mahato home, saying he witnessed a Maoist firing at Ramesh out of a bus window even as a separate demonstrator tried to drag the Maoist out of the vehicle. More have since died at the hands of the police.



NOW YOU SEE IT: The streets of the central and eastern tarai, such as this stretch just outside Lahan, are deserted—until they come alive with demonstrators.

The highways and tatty streets of the eastern and central tarai are periodically overrun with demonstrators, almost entirely men and boys. By the time of our visit last weekend the demonstrations in Lahan itself had become ritualised and much of the violence had been sucked out of them.

"The pahadis say a madhesi can't be prime minister," bellows Krishna Bahadur Yadav of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF). "Well, I challenge them. They've run the country for 238 years. We'll run it for 1,000 years."

The crowd loves it. Yadav enjoys breathing the fiery rhetoric, egging them on with continual swipes of his arm. He is humorous rather than threatening, but he means it when he says madhesis are treated as "stepsons" and that federal government is needed now.

At the time of our visit, the demos could only happen outside curfew hours. When there was no curfew, there was a banda—and still is. South of the central chok there are shards of glass scattered all around. Away to the right are burnt-out hulks of perhaps a dozen buses. Nearer, on the left, are massed armed police, ready in their riot gear and looking nervous. Crows and bicycle rickshaws provide the main sign of life in a town which is replaying its own version of last year's April Uprising.

Perhaps the most wretched of Lahan are its marooned travellers. Hanging around the yard of Hotel Bishal, smiling amiably but sadly, is Amar Kumar Jaiswal. He has been stranded 11 days, and counting. He was simply trying to make the short journey from Birtamod to Janakpur. Government helicopters evacuated some people, he says, but only to Kathmandu. Two cousins, JD and Binod Aggrawal, heading to Biratnagar and Kathmandu respectively, have been there six days and say their only option has been getting on a cement truck which would take them a little further along the highway. They decided to stay put in Lahan, and pay tribute to the kindness of local people in feeding and sheltering them.

Nothing is moving on the highway, and there are not even vehicles parked by its sides. It is the realm of ox-carts, cycles, boys playing cricket, walkers. In our vehicle plastered with BBC stickers, we are an oddity. On our initial journey from Biratnagar there are many fallen trees

across the road, and demonstrations with burning tyres. Villagers show us the detours. On our way back two days later there are considerably more barriers but fewer demonstrations. That, though, was before Tuesday's flare-up in Biratnagar.

There is no one single type of rally. On our first day, at Inaruwa, we are led into a village meeting by the Madhesi Intellectuals' Forum, whose leaders greet us courteously. Reassuringly, they insist the madhesi movement is not ethnic but includes brahmins and dalits, speakers of Hindi, Urdu, Tharu, Bhojpuri, Maithili, and more. But later that day at Mirchaiya, west of Lahan, the mood is darker. Although most are happy to see us, even in a vehicle, one person smashes our back windscreen to smithereens. The others apologise, but the mood is volatile.

There is far worse elsewhere. Madhesis, with their very real political grievances, have died. But people of pahadi origin are now fleeing their tarai homes, being threatened in what seem like acts of revenge, having their doors and windows smashed, and journalists are having to quit their workplaces after death threats. The responsible madhesi leaders clearly abhor such violence. But the madhes is burning, and people are scared. ●



STOP AND GO: Vehicles going from east to west Nepal, such as this one carrying human rights monitors, still encounter scores of blockage, and have to be escorted to the Kosi Barrage by the Armed Police Force.

Chequeing in



Under license from Nepal Rastra Bank, International Money Express (IME) has started providing traveller's cheques and US dollars at its Kantipath branch. The IME has been in the foreign currency exchange business since 2000 and began remittance services in 2002.

Air agreements

Amravati Travels has signed a general sales agency agreement with Cathay Pacific Airways and Hong Kong Dragon Airlines (Dragonair). Amravati Travels has been Cathay's general sales agent in Nepal since 1978, and was also a passenger sales agent for Dragonair. Following the integration of Dragonair into Cathay Pacific in September 2006, Amravati now represents both airlines in their first combined office in the Indian subcontinent.



Face of the month

Fem Bleach India's new Fem Face of the Month competition gives contestants a chance to win lifesize photo prints from Digi Plus and a Haier washing machine. Entrants must place a photograph with their name, address, and phone number in one of the various drop boxes around the Valley.



NEW PRODUCTS

HIGH CALIBRE: Anurag International's latest offerings, Calibre whiskey and gin, are mix high quality Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA) with imported malt spirits. The Calibre line is available in full, half, and quarter pack sizes, for Rs 246, Rs 124, and Rs 63.75 respectively.



Thirsty for change

Why contracting out Kathmandu's water supply management is the only option left

Even in the early 1980s, as schoolchildren trudging through slippery lanes, my friends and I sensed something was wrong with the Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC). Each monsoon, the NWSC would inconvenience pedestrians by digging trenches on narrow roads to lay down its pipes.

Twenty-five years later, the corporation is still doing the same. Kathmandu's residents, more in number today,



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

actually pay the corporation for the water it pretends to supply.

But there is a glimmer of hope. After 49 years of the same thing, the Kathmandu segment of the corporation might be run differently. If, that is, a six-year performance-based management contract goes to a private party with international experience.

Predictably, the five politically-affiliated NWSC workers' unions, with a total membership base of about 2,000, are unhappy. Fearing that they will lose both jobs and influence, they are staging protest rallies, and calling for support. In doing so, they present an opportunity to think about broad and specific economic issues.

The broad issue is this. At a time when Maoists' stance against private property reigns unchallenged, what nature of policies should Nepal adopt, for everything from delivering essential public services to enabling entrepreneurs to turn ideas into profits? Should the government keep the NWSC afloat with soft loans worth Rs 130 million a year even when the corporation appears to be literally throwing the money down the drain? Isn't the government better off outsourcing to a private party the core task of collecting, distributing, and billing for water?

The answers are not clear-cut. But what is increasingly so is that the new Nepal will emerge not through tiresome

andolan-drunk rhetoric from political parties, but through the means politicians use to provide water, electricity, education, health care, and jobs to millions of voters.

Take the provision of water. The state created NWSC's predecessor as a utility, whose utility during Panchayat was in pleasing its political masters. The post-1990 era turned it into an employment agency for MPs, desperate to dole out jobs to loyalists. As overheads ballooned, the NWSC's quality of service fell further.

Meantime, rising urban populations coupled with low infrastructure-related investments to maintain the pipes to stop leakage meant that the number of tap connections grew little. As of 2003, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur had a total of about 180,000 connections; while 27 other locations, mostly the tarai towns, have about 84,000. What's the point of taking Mahendra Mala-imbued pride in our vast water resources if we can never harness them for accessible and affordable benefits for all Nepalis?

As a landlocked country blessed with glacier-fed rivers, Nepal doesn't lack sources of liquid assets. What it lacks are ways of accessing bodies of water, laying down the pipes for transport, filtering, storing, and distributing potable water, and enforcing a system for charging users for what they consume, while not neglecting the poor who can't pay the full price of water. Doing all these requires a sound management of money, technology, and expert personnel, none of which the NWSC is known for.

To meet Kathmandu's daily demand of about 220 million litres, it's critical to connect the Valley to new sources of water. But before doing that, it's urgent to restructure the NWSC management. If the NWSC hasn't changed for the better in the last 50 years, it's time we stopped wishing it would, and handed a management contract to a private party answerable to customers and investors. At the least, the streets won't look like canals when next monsoon's rains come pelting down. ●



हामी...

सबै आखिर नेपाली नै त हौं नि !

Restive MJF

Upendra Yadav

Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 January

“Nepal can be a Hindu state only if we are committed to Hindutva.” Those were the words spoken from the podium of a RSS Hindu extremist conference in Gorakhpur on 19 December by none other than Upendra Yadav of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF). In November 2006, Yadav took part in a meeting in Raxaul of the BJP’s fraternal organisation, Sima Jagaran Manch. The MJF was set up soon after the Gorakhpur meeting and included such personalities as Laxmanlal Karna of the royalist NSP as well as republican activists. There is now uneasiness about Yadav within the MJF. “We can’t deny that our Forum is slipping into regression,” says ex-general secretary and current member of MJF, Jaya Prakash Gupta. Royalists have lately become prominent in the MJF and are given to spouting radical rhetoric. Sources say the Indian Embassy is worried about India being dragged into the controversy, and diplomats admit privately that the BJP could be involved. The JTMM’s Goit faction is said to be supported by BJP’s Raj Kishore Singh, while Jwala Singh is being egged on by Pappu Yadav. The fact that Upendra Yadav’s appeal not to use violence is not being heeded seems to show the MJF is now out of the control of the leadership. Says madhesi activist Vijay Kanta Karma: “If the parties and civil society don’t take leadership, this movement will be hijacked by reactionaries and could disrupt communal harmony.”



KIRAN PANDAY

Sanghu, 29 January

The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) led by its showcase chairman, Upendra Yadav, is currently engaged in violent unrest in the tarai. Who is this man forcing the country to backtrack on the gains of People Power 2006? Sanghu has learnt that he is a flipflop who has never stayed with any one cause and is probably a front for someone else. He was involved in politics since his student days in Sunsari, but showed instability and opportunistic traits. He joined the Maoists and was in its district leadership. His erstwhile Maoist colleagues recall that he used to say madhesi shouldn’t sacrifice their lives for the ‘People’s War’, but should sacrifice pahadi lives. The Maoist headquarters now suspect that Yadav provided the information to Indian police which lead to the arrests of Matrika Yadav and Suresh Ale Magar in 2004. Yadav was also arrested but mysteriously freed. He didn’t survive for long in the Maoist movement. In December 2006, he attended a conference of Indian Hindu extremists in Gorakhpur during which he publicly spoke about turning Nepal back into a Hindu nation. But barely a month later, he is now leading a movement for a secular, federal republic. Along with Yadav, the Forum consists of discredited individuals like Sitananda Rai, who was expelled from the UML, corrupt NC leader Jaya Prakash Gupta, royalist Ramchandra Rai, nominated member of the interim parliament Amaresh Kumar Singh, and Manoj Singh, the son of pro-Indian leader Ramraja Prasad Singh.

No USAID

Abhiyan, 29 January

The United States suspended all aid programs in Nepal after the Maoists entered the interim parliament. The Maoists are still on the Americans’ terrorist list. On 18 January, four days after the interim parliament was convened, USAID wrote to the government and NGOs informing them of the suspension. US officials told Abhiyan that when the Maoists enter the government, additional curbs would be announced. The letter says: “Since the Maoists are now in parliament, you may not provide services or assistance to any ministry, agency, commission, department, court, local government, or other institution of the government of Nepal.” The letter says it is expecting further clarification from the US government about the definition of ‘services and assistance’. The agency has verbally warned its partners that if they have any dealings with the Maoists, future aid could be suspended. The \$5.6 million ARD Rule of Law Project is now in limbo, as are support for Transparency International, the Law Society, Sawtee, and Rimek. “We never imagined that activities would be terminated even before they are completed,” said a CIAA official. US assistance had not been suspended even when other European donors stopped aid to protest King

Gyanendra’s takeover. Aid suspension will also affect the National Democratic Institute which had been helping the political parties and the parliament secretariat.

Dark deeds

Bikash Thapa in Kantipur, 30 January

By next year we will live in darkness for 12 hours a day. Loadshedding will certainly have a negative effect on Nepal’s economy and our lifestyle. But things have not come to this pass because of some natural calamity. This is a situation of our own making, and the king’s direct rule, inconsistent government policies, and bad financial decisions have only pushed us further into darkness. In addition, the unwillingness of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) to purchase power from the private sector is one of the main reasons for loadshedding. The NEA is ready to buy electricity at a higher commercial rate, but doesn’t trust the private sector enough to buy it from them. It seems pretty clear that the authority is not interested in Power Purchase Agreements (PPA). Nepal’s annual demand for electricity is 60MW [sic]. If the private sector can produce half, or even a quarter of this, the NEA will not have to make large investments. But instead of creating a situation where the

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हिमाल संग सिताैमा	Times संग सिताैमा	WAVE संग सिताैमा
<p>तीन वर्ष (नाडी घडी वा होटल प्याकेज)***</p>	<p>तीन वर्ष (होटल प्याकेज)***</p>	<p>तीन वर्ष (भित्ते घडी)</p>
<p>दुई वर्ष (भित्ते घडी)</p>	<p>दुई वर्ष (नाडी घडी वा होटल प्याकेज)***</p>	<p>दुई वर्ष (नेपाली म्युजिक दुईवटा सिडी)</p>
<p>एक वर्ष (नेपाली म्युजिक दुईवटा सिडी)</p>	<p>एक वर्ष (नेपाली म्युजिक एउटा सिडी)</p>	<p>एक वर्ष (नेपाली म्युजिक एउटा सिडी)</p>
<p>* सर्व लागू हुनेछ । ** एक जनालाई एक रात दुई दिन खाबे-बस्ने सुकिया । *** एक जनालाई दुई रात तीन दिन अथवा दुई जनालाई एक रात दुई दिन खाबे-बस्ने सुकिया ।</p>	<p>* सर्व लागू हुनेछ । ** एक जनालाई एक रात दुई दिन खाबे-बस्ने सुकिया । *** एक जनालाई दुई रात तीन दिन अथवा दुई जनालाई एक रात दुई दिन खाबे-बस्ने सुकिया ।</p>	<p>* सर्व लागू हुनेछ । ** एक जनालाई एक रात दुई दिन खाबे-बस्ने सुकिया । *** एक जनालाई दुई रात तीन दिन अथवा दुई जनालाई एक रात दुई दिन खाबे-बस्ने सुकिया ।</p>
Actual Rate	Discount Rate	Actual Rate
3 Years	2520	2100
2 Years	1680	1450
1 Year	840	750

Actual Rate	Discount Rate	Actual Rate
3 Years	4590	3500
2 Years	3060	2500
1 Years	1530	1350

Actual Rate	Discount rate	Actual Rate
3 Years	1260	1100
2 Years	840	750
1 Years	420	380



KIRAN PANDAY

private sector and the NEA could share the burden, the authority, which itself cannot invest because of its outstanding debts, firmly kept the private sector out of the game too. The result is the mess we have now.

The NEA’s official reason for not singing PPAs is the absence of transmission lines. However, the laws state that the NEA is responsible for laying transmission lines.

Many people within the authority are always looking to bilateral and multilateral agencies and companies for investments. The NEA needs to change the perception that it is not interested in rupee investment, and can do so by issuing a whitepaper explaining the methods, models, and transmission corridors through which the electricity generated by the private sector could be purchased.

There is talk of setting up a diesel plant. If that PPA is approved, electricity could become as expensive as Rs 31 per unit. The NEA is especially interested in this plant because here it can, with local agents, procure a hefty commission.

The NEA must change its traditional, narrow attitude towards private investment. For any project, capital is the most important issue, and it can be obtained from Nepali banks and

financial institutions. The NEA has to join hands with private institutions to address power scarcity.

Graft and riots

Deshantar, 28 January

देशान्तर साप्ताहिक

The government has not yet taken action against the people identified by the Rayamajhi Commission as having been involved in suppressing Jana Andolan II. In the meantime, those accused by the Commission have been found to be involved in communal, ethnic, and religious violence. While Kamal Thapa has been arrested for inciting violence in the tarai, we understood that royalist Badri Prasad Mandal, royal chief secretary Lokman Singh Karki, and advisor to the king Satchit Shamshere Rana were also actively involved in stirring the violence in the tarai.

Karki is said to have used his sources at the Finance Ministry to raise the money needed to organise the riots. Karki apparently receives commissions on evaded custom’s duties for successful smuggling deals. He also gathers funds using the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works (via commission on contracts) and the Supreme Court (via revenue-related cases).

Our source tells us that those accused by the Rayamajhi

Commission regularly meet in Kathmandu and have been planning their moves for a long time. They began by implementing them in Nepalganj and have since successfully and systematically moved in to other regions in the tarai.

Money talks

Dristi, 30 January



The king surprised the nation by showing up to Basanta Panchami celebrations with a moustache. The Finance Ministry and National Treasury are also surprised, wondering why the palace is not interested in collecting the royal allowance.

The government has allocated Rs 32.7 million in allowances to the royal family, and another Rs 200 million has been allocated for their ‘general expenditure’. Officers at the National Treasury have sent numerous messages to the palace, asking them to collect their allowance, but no one has showed up so far. Our source at the Finance Ministry tells us that the treasury is perturbed by the almost six-month delay—until now, the palace has been in the habit of collecting its allowance in mid-July.

Some speculate that this is because the king is dissatisfied with the interim constitution. Initially, the palace said it would collect the money after the promulgation of the interim constitution. It’s been two weeks since the interim parliament was put in place, but the money is still uncollected.

Others say that the king told the prime minister that since he is going to only be a ceremonial king anyway, the money should be distributed to victims of the Maoists. However, the prime minister did not agree, and the money remains unclaimed.



Smoke: Madhesi dissatisfaction
Gagro: Pahadi nationalism

हिमाल Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 January - 12 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ We are still climbing Mt Everest, it’s just that we are taking a slightly roundabout way by going into the interim parliament. ”

- Baburam Bhattarai at the Maoist National Training Camp in Chitwan on 20 January



Clockwise from top left:

Parvati, age six, always has a refreshing perspective. She often takes pictures of tourists and has a striking and amusing series of this woman in her glittery kurta and shiny handbag. With the white World Peace Pagoda and blue sky in stark contrast behind her (and Parvati right at her feet) this is a great contemporary image.

Belmaya was thinking of home, she says, when Kamala snapped this candid picture of her lost in thought.

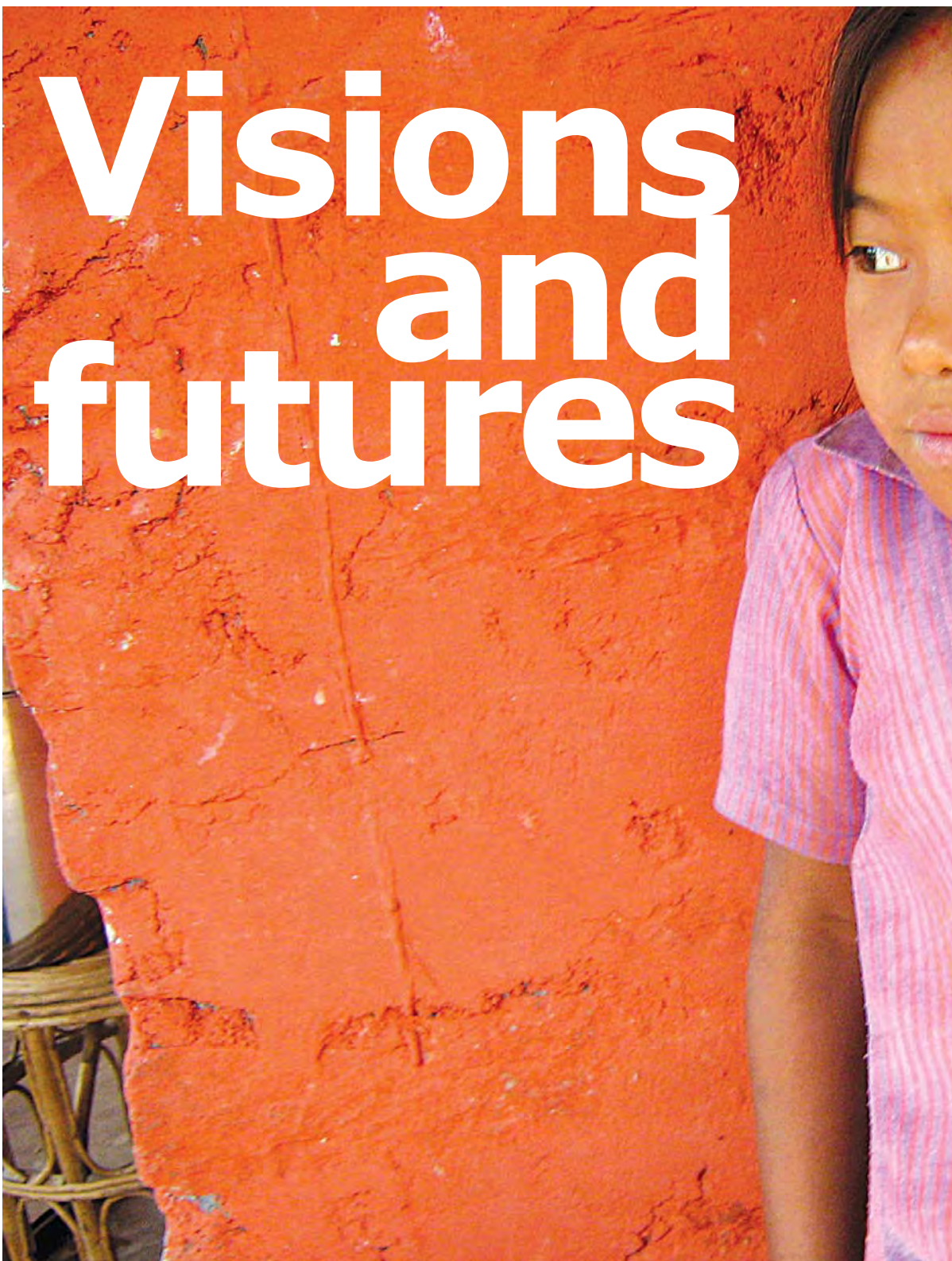
With her quiet, unassuming nature, Sunita N, 14, captures candid shots when the subject is unaware of the camera, such as this one of Belmaya.

Anju's shot of Sunita G is captivating. The colour of her kurtha and the earth-red background, along with Sunita's gaze out of the frame, make this a picture you can keep turning to. Anju is slightly physically disabled and her early shots were of heads and ceilings, so her achievement is all the greater.

Young Parvati again and again gets in close to the action and comes up with an original, winning shot. Because she is so small, people often overlook her, which adds to her ability to take natural, candid shots of people like this one of Sue with Belmaya, left, and Sunita N, right.

Laxmi, 12, was part of the group that went on assignment to Pokhara's Bindyabasini temple during Dasain sacrifices and came back with great reportage, having shot the temple-goers, incense sticks, idols, and offerings.

The girls love doing close-ups—of existing photos, posters, flowers, food, as well as still lifes like this one by Parvati of the personal items of a fellow SOS Bahini girl and her mother.



SUE CARPENTER

Inspired by the documentary *Born into Brothels*, which explores how the lives of children from Calcutta's red light district were transformed through learning photography, with the help of Asha-Nepal, a UK charity working for women's and children's rights in Nepal, I decided to run a similar project here.

We started in September last year in Pokhara. My first students were 22 girls, aged six to 16, from SOS Bahini, which looks after girls from desperate situations, housing them with families and

putting them through local schools. All are from poor backgrounds; most have lost one or both parents; one was found in rags, barely able to walk or talk.

At SOS Bahini they have blossomed, but, unlike girls brought up in more equal societies, they find it difficult to form or verbalise opinions. Photography encourages creativity and self-expression largely because it is so simple and so immediate. As soon as they got the cameras, the girls snapped away excitedly.

One type of shot prevailed at the beginning: a full-length photo of friends standing to attention.

But *My World, My View* aims to encourage children to explore and capture their world in all its reality, good and bad. The girls soon began to photograph their daily lives, with 'najik' and 'natural' as their watchwords.

We initially used conventional cameras, but 36 frames and a fixed wide-angle lens were too limiting. Once we moved onto digital cameras with zoom lenses, there was no stopping them. Parvati, who is just six, would return from assignments with 300 shots. She and some of her friends will be here next week to see their remarkable work on show at the British Council. The exhibition is



one of the important outcomes of the project, to validate the students' talents and worth.

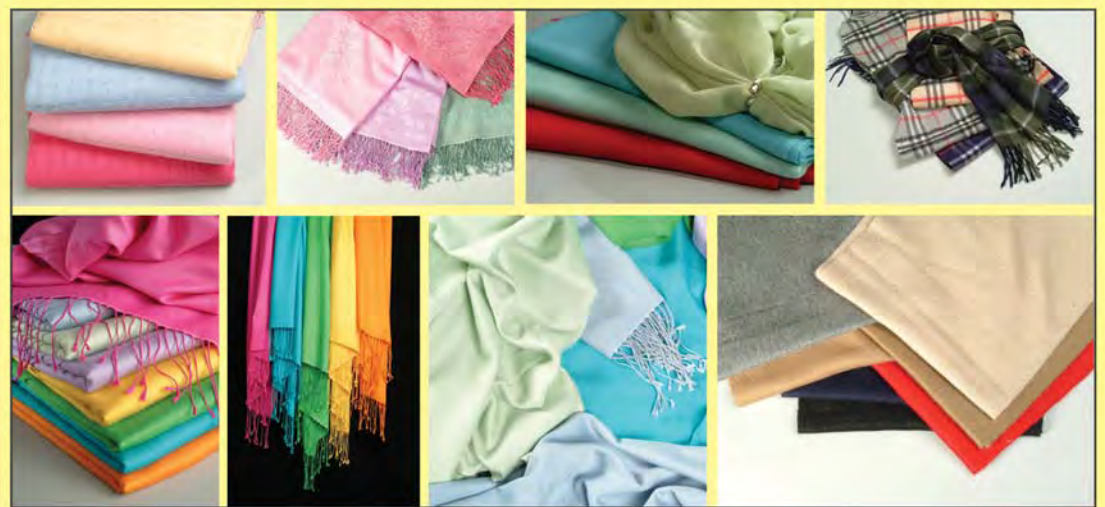
I hope they won't stop here. As Belmaya, 14, says: "Boys say, this is a girl, she can't do anything. But I want to lead my life independently and show them I can do something. I'd like to photograph women to show the injustices against them—bringing wood from the forests and carrying heavy loads, while men sit and give orders." These girls are set to be the next generation of photojournalists. ●

Sue Carpenter is a journalist and photographer.



More information on and images from the project are at www.ashanepal.org.

My World, My View 1 runs from 6-13 February at the British Council, Lainchaur. Prints are on sale at the exhibition.



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But can Thailand avoid echoing Nepal's current mess?

Past, present similar

Nepal shares much with Thailand. Neither was colonised by European powers. In both places, unique courtly rituals and religious practices have thrived. Thai Buddhism is an effortless synthesis of aspects of Hinduism, a mirror image to faith in Nepal. And then there's royalty: once both countries had well-regarded constitutional monarchies. Now—with even Nepali banknotes ready to see the last of Gyanendra Shah—only the Thai royal dynasty has the respect of most citizens.

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

That situation may be changing rapidly. King Bhumibol Adulyadej is a popular, even beloved, head of state. But the military coup in Thailand last year that dislodged Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has so far been a political, public relations, and economic disaster. Thais know King Bhumibol gave the takeover his tacit support. Some even say his court encouraged the generals to step in to what was admittedly a messy, corrupt, and increasingly unstable situation.

In the past, the Thai king had been renowned for staving off military takeovers, or condemning army brutality against protestors. Back in the days when only military strongmen could run Thailand, the king occasionally mediated between



opposing camps of putative dictators. Like Tribhuban in Nepal, King Bhumibol is also credited with helping establish the democratic system that has since been wiped out in Thailand.

Other eerie parallels abound. The Crown Prince of Thailand, Maha Vajiralongkorn, has long been seen as a wayward, thuggish womaniser, although he's apparently burnishing his image as his father grows frail. The same Thai public that loves Bhumibol is troubled by the prospect of his son ascending the throne. Of course, Thais have to keep these fears to



MIN BAJRACHARYA

themselves as strict lese majeste laws punish perceived insults to the Crown with heavy fines and jail terms. Here's one area where Nepal never got so absurd over monarchy.

So what about this new government in Bangkok? Has it managed to make the trains run on time? Fascism is supposed to be good at such things. Alas, it seems that the corrupt and crazy democrats actually ran the country more adroitly than the generals and palace placemen currently in cabinet. Thailand is a mess and all the new ministers can do is look for external

sources to blame.

Remember how Gyanendra's governments went after the press and human rights groups? So too Thailand's coup leaders. They're reportedly looking at how to extend lese majeste to cover criticism of the authorities in general, not just the royals. And they've found a foreign hand as well. It's... wait for it... Singapore! That's right. A tiny city-state of 4.5 million people threatens a regional power with 15 times the population and a far bigger military.

What's also becoming increasingly obvious in Thailand is that the rural and urban poor are at odds with a traditional elite and new business classes in the capital. Corrupt and capricious as he was, the ousted prime minister was a raging populist who retains the support of the countryside. In city salons and counting rooms, they sing the praises of monarchy and military takeover. There's growing inequality and frustration.

It all sounds depressingly familiar to anyone who's lived through the agonies of recent history here. None of this suggests that the Thais will go through the same travails as Nepal. But their country faces an uncertain future where the sureties of monarchy and centuries of tradition may no longer be enough to keep fear and despair at bay.

Nepal knows that feeling only too well. ●

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SPO	SPORTS NEWS
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Select

Option

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Send

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Select Message

Go to New Message

Type News

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FOREX

Keyword	Result
FOREX SELL	SELLING RATES
FOREX BUY	BUYING RATES
FOREX currency code*	CURRENCY RATE

*To get currency codes type FOREX HELP or visit www.thehimalayanimes.com/2722

For example, to get the selling rate on your cellphone:

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Select

Option

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Go to Menu

Select Message

Go to New Message

Type Forex sell

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GAMES

Keyword	Result
GTTT	Tic Tac Toe
GHH	Hangman
GTTT HELP	TTT Manual
GHH HELP	GHH Manual

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Option

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Send

Go to Menu

Select Message

Go to New Message

Type GHH

Send to 2722

WEATHER

Keyword	Result
CLI Jumla	Forecast for Jumla
CLI Butwal	Forecast for Butwal
CLI Dharan	Forecast for Dharan
CLI Hetauda	Forecast for Hetauda
CLI Janakpur	Forecast for Janakpur
CLI Lalipur	Forecast for Lalipur
CLI Pokhara	Forecast for Pokhara
CLI Bhairawa	Forecast for Bhairawa
CLI Surkhet	Forecast for Surkhet
CLI Dhangarhi	Forecast for Dhangarhi
CLI Bhaktapur	Forecast for Bhaktapur
CLI Bharatpur	Forecast for Bharatpur
CLI Biratnagar	Forecast for Biratnagar
CLI Kathmandu	Forecast for Kathmandu
CLI Mahendranagar	Forecast for Mahendranagar

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Go to Menu

Select Message

Go to New Message

Type cli Kathmandu

Send to 2722

STOCKS

Keyword	Result
NEPSE	INDEX
SHG	TOP 5 GAINERS
SHL	TOP 5 LOSERS

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HOROSCOPES

Weekly Keyword	Result	Daily Keyword
WEEK ARI	ARIES	AST ARI
WEEK TAU	TAURUS	AST TAU
WEEK GEM	GEMINI	AST GEM
WEEK CAN	CANCER	AST CAN
WEEK LEO	LEO	AST LEO
WEEK VIR	VIRGO	AST VIR
WEEK LIB	LIBRA	AST LIB
WEEK SCO	SCORPIO	AST SCO
WEEK SAG	SAGITTARIUS	AST SAG
WEEK CAP	CAPRICORN	AST CAP
WEEK AQU	AQUARIUS	AST AQU
WEEK PIS	PISCES	AST PIS

For example, to get daily horoscope of Aries on your cellphone:

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Select Message

Go to New Message

Type week ari

Send to 2722

For example, to get weekly horoscope of Aries on your cellphone:

Menu

Message

New Message

Select

Option

2722

Send

Go to Menu

Select Message

Go to New Message

Type week ari

Send to 2722

JOKES

Keyword	Result
JOKE	JOKES
JOKE SANTA	JOKES ON SANTA
JOKE DOC	JOKES ON DOCTORS
JOKE SILLY	SILLY JOKES
JOKE ONE	ONE-LINER JOKES
JOKE LAWYER	JOKES ON LAWYERS
JOKE OFFICE	OFFICE JOKES
JOKE COMP	COMPUTER JOKES
JOKE BLONDE	JOKES ON BLONDES
JOKE AJIT	JOKES ON AJIT

For example, to get a joke on your cellphone:

Menu

Message

New Message

Select

Option

2722

Send

Go to Menu

Select Message

Go to New Message

Type joke

Send to 2722

THOUGHT

Keyword	Result
THOUGHT	Thought for the day

For example, to get thought for the day on your cellphone:

Menu

Message

New Message

Select

Option

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Send

Go to Menu

Select Message

Go to New Message

Type thought

Send to 2722

DICTIONARY

Keyword	Result
DICT word	MEANING OF REQUESTED WORD

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thumb ta thumb thumb !

GNU Stand by for the Great National Unravelling

Even professional pessimists never expected such a meltdown. Lulled by the peace deal and fairytale of Maoist incorporation into what passes for civilised politics around here, we were happily distracted from the next series of disasters just waiting to happen.

Looming catastrophes are always slightly better than erupting ones, and the Hand was grateful for a break between crises, no matter how brief or illusory.

But there was no time for gratitude when riots engulfed the tarai—madhesis threatening to cleanse the lowlands of outsiders, declare independence, and form yet another impoverished, landlocked, resource-free country. The Great National Unravelling (GNU) is apparently underway.

The acronym is curiously appropriate. The gnu is an awkward beast of the African savannah, a composite of horse, buffalo, and antelope randomly joined in bits, not unlike the dubious nation state patched together by the Shah dynasty.



MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

The many hill principalities dotting the Himalayas grew less viable as the Mughals conquered North India, giving Prithbi Narayan Shah an opportunity to unite them into something

resembling a country. Later, as the British usurped the place of the Mughals, their obsessive need for clearly defined borders led to further consolidation of national boundaries, with little consideration as to who ended up where. The threat of invasion helped the ruling class establish legitimacy and create a desperately needed national mythology centred on the royal family and largely defined by what Nepal is not (ie India). Marginalised janajatis were given subservient roles by the high caste producers of this national creation story and expected to grin and bear it.

Prithbi's famous description of his country as a bountiful garden of various castes and languages fits perfectly into the myth he did so much to create. Being Foreign, the Hand has no sentimental attachment to such poetic images, and suggests the gnu as a more appropriate analogy. What tribe forms which part of the beast is for readers to decide, according to their own ingrained clan prejudices.

National myths are weak, especially when based on spurious claims of god-given caste-based superiority. Lowlanders had no place in the exclusive Bahun-Chhetri-centric Nepali identity and were lumped in with Indians for convenience. The use of the term 'madhesi', though linguistically neutral, often has pejorative overtones implying the suspect 'other' on the fringes of the nation.

The outbreak of violence in the lowlands sparked a rare show of unity between the seven-party alliance and the Maoists, who all feigned similar levels of righteous indignation. The government's stunned and delayed reaction suggests the demands are considered illegitimate. The tired accusations of Palace Intrigue showed that scapegoating is one of the few constants in Nepali politics. Foreign Hand came a close second to royalty, flayed, with ire fit for a king, from the pulpits of Singha Darbar for his alleged meddling.

Having stirred the proverbial nest of vipers with their ethnic-based war and violent politics, the Maoists are shocked that others dare adopt their tactics. The madhesi agitators, whose leaders are all ex-Maoist spin-offs anyway, have learnt their lessons from the Maoists' road to power. We can expect others to follow suit as the threat of GNU gives leverage to any group with a grudge. This spells trouble.

The modern state of Nepal is a marriage of convenience between different ethnic entities and should be recognised as such. Thrown together by geographical and historical fluke there is no escaping each other, which makes co-operation and mutual respect the only option, if only to avoid the dire consequences of collapse.

Fostering that respect is a mandate our politicians, given their abominable record, are unlikely to pull off. Blaming the Palace is the best they can manage so far, which begs the question: who will be left to blame for their mistakes in the republic to come. (Answer: Foreign Hand)

That this conflagration took everyone by surprise is especially troubling, since it suggests that the terrible demons of racial hatred are poorly understood by the ruling class. If the Great National Unravelling isn't arrested soon, through genuine inclusion of minorities into the national polity, choosing which meddler to blame for the ensuing chaos will be the least of our dilemmas. Jai Nepal. ●

Young fighters

NEW YORK — The Maoists should immediately begin releasing the thousands of child soldiers in their ranks and cease recruiting more children, says a new Human Rights Watch report. The 72-page report, *Children in the Ranks: The Maoists' Use of Child Soldiers in Nepal* documents the failure of the Nepali government to attend to the needs of child soldiers, and describes how the Maoists have continued using child soldiers, and recruited more children recently, despite signing the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in November last year.

The report is based on interviews with former Maoist child soldiers and Nepali and international monitors, and documents how children as young as 14 served on the frontlines, received weapons training, and carried out crucial military and logistical support duties. Observers believe that up to 4,500 Maoist soldiers were under 18 when they were recruited to fight in the 'People's War.'

Meanwhile, the Maoists have consistently maintained that they have not recruited or used child soldiers. "Only when the Maoists, from the top leadership down to cadres on the ground, admit how many children are in their ranks and begin releasing them, can Nepalis be confident that their children will no longer be recruited for combat," says Sam Zarifi, Asia research director at Human Rights Watch. The report says the Maoists have used a variety of techniques for recruiting children—kidnapping individuals, abducting large groups from schools, and mounting propaganda campaigns to attract children as 'volunteers.' In areas of the country under their firm control, the Maoists instituted a 'one family, one child' policy that forced at least one child from each family to join the Maoists.

Until the ceasefire, security forces treated children accused of cooperating with the Maoists with the same brutality that they used against



JB PUN

adults suspected of having Maoist ties, says the report. "Release from the Maoists' ranks is only the first step for thousands of children who have missed out on their education or learning how to earn a living," writes Jo Becker, child rights advocate at Human Rights Watch.

Since 2002, the Maoists have been named in three consecutive reports by the UN secretary-general to the Security Council for violating international standards prohibiting the use and recruitment of child soldiers. On 9 February, a UN Security Council working group on children and armed conflict, is scheduled to consider reported violations against children by all parties to Nepal's conflict. The working group will make recommendations for Security Council action. ●

Children in the Ranks: The Maoists' Use of Child Soldiers in Nepal, is available at: <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/nepal0207/>

Primate business



MIN BAJRACHARYA

The battle between animal rights groups and organisations trying to export monkeys to the US for biomedical research is set to heat up again. The Nepal Biomedical Centre is trying to obtain permission to export a sampling of Nepali monkeys, both bred in captivity and from the wild.

There's strong opposition—almost 1,200 people from 21 countries signed a petition against the plans last year. The International

Primate Protection League, Animal Nepal, PETA, and Wildlife Watch Group (WWG) are all lobbying hard to reverse the Nepal government's 2004 wildlife farming policy. The policy allows the Washington National Primate Centre and Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research and their Nepali partners Nepal Biomedical Centre to catch, breed, and export Nepali monkeys to Washington and Texas.

WWG and other groups say they will use community pressure and legal action to counter the policy, which WWG Chairman Mangal Man Shakya says, "contradicts the 1973 National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act, and was announced without any consultation with local communities or conservationists, or even within the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation."

Nepal is one of the few countries in the world that still allows the use of great apes for biomedical research. Next door, India banned primate exports in 1977 when the state realised its monkeys were being used in gruesome radiation experiments. ●

Jemima Sherpa



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Not-so-united nations

Ban Ki-moon has become Secretary-General of the UN at a time when the prospects for conflict between or among the world's great powers—the United States, China, Japan,



COMMENT
Richard N Haass

Russia, Europe, India—are remote. But the prospects for just about every other sort of conflict are high and the international agenda is crowded and

demanding. Ban needs to begin with a cold, hard assessment of his new position. He is more secretary than general. He cannot command. He possesses more influence than power. Power at the UN is not only divided between the Security Council and the General Assembly, but between the 192 members and the UN itself. The UN comprises sovereign states, but cannot act as if it were sovereign itself. It reflects the ability of the major powers (the

US, China, Russia, France, the UK, the five permanent, veto-wielding members of the Security Council) to agree and back up their agreements with resources. If they won't, the UN can act in the most limited way, if at all. That the world has largely stood by in the face of genocide in Darfur reflects the reality that the major powers are divided. China clings to a notion of sovereignty that allows governments freedom of action within their borders, though today such an unconditional definition of

sovereignty is inadequate. Negotiating in New York will not change this. Ban needs to spend time in Beijing, making the case for the notion that governments have a responsibility to protect their citizens, and that when they fail to do so (as Sudan's government has), they forfeit some advantages normally associated with sovereignty. Ban cannot reform the Security Council to reflect better the realities of this era. But he argues that countries such as Japan, India, Germany, and others deserve an enhanced position in it, one more commensurate with their power and status. He can also loudly and repeatedly make the point that there is no justification in today's world for terror, defined as the intentional harming of civilians for political purposes. Governments and religious, and other leaders must be persuaded to denounce terror, and de-legitimise those who carry it out. Practical changes are achievable and desirable in two other areas: the creation of an international facility that provides governments access to

Ban Ki-moon's position allows him to push for changed attitudes among member states

(but not physical control of) enriched uranium and plutonium for the generation of electrical power. This would help stem the spread of nuclear materials and weapons, and encourage a shift away from the use of oil and gas, thus reducing global warming. The other area is peacekeeping. Establishing a large, standing international force under the UN's control is not feasible and may not be optimal. But providing incentives for governments to maintain such forces at a high level of alert, and setting standards for equipment, training, and professionalism is something the UN can and should do. Any secretary-general's most important asset is his voice. What Ban chooses to say, how and where he says it, can enhance his influence which will enable him to get more things done. All this will be especially important now given the status of the US, which has an often uneasy relationship with the UN. Ban would do well to spend more time in Washington and around the country. The US needs effective multilateralism in a global world in which challenges cannot be met by a country acting alone. It needs effective international cooperation now, when it is stretched militarily, economically, and politically owing to its policies toward Iraq and Afghanistan. Ban's accomplishment could be helping create a more productive relationship between the world's most important international organisation and its most powerful member. ● (Project Syndicate)

Richard N Haass is author of The Opportunity: America's Moment to Alter History's Course.

HSA



Request for Expressions of Interest SENIOR EXPERTS

Mercy Corps, an international development organization since one year active in Nepal, intends to expand its database of senior (not necessarily old) consultants who can assist the organization through short-term assignments. It invites applications from qualified Nepali and Nepal-resident expatriate consultants, who are able to independently conduct sector assessments, develop proposals, train NGOs, monitor and evaluate projects, and can prove such with reports and references. Consultants are sought in the following fields:

1. Humanitarian aid	5. Migration and IDPs	9. Small enterprise development
2. Disaster risk reduction	6. Land reform	10. Microfinance
3. Peace building	7. Nutrition and sanitation	11. Vocational training
4. Good Governance	8. Commercial agriculture	12. HIV/AIDS

Interested consultants (and firms with suitable consultants) meeting the above criteria are requested to send expressions of interest (maximum half page) preferably before February 15, 2007, clearly indicating their main fields of expertise along with a short CV (2-4 pages), to the email and postal addresses below. File names for electronic CVs are preferably of the following type: Nepali_Sita_K_nutrition_feb07.doc

Email: hshrestha@mercycorpsfield.org
Postal Address: The Management, P.O.Box 24374, Kathmandu

Women and candidates from less advantaged communities and the Mid-& Far-western region are encouraged to apply.



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Cyber-tarai

Bloggers offer solutions to the madhes crisis

One day the SPAM government says there is the hand of the royalists behind the tarai turmoil, and the very next day they form a committee to find the cause of the chaos in tarai.

-Anonymous on Nepali Perspectives
<http://nepaliperspectives.blogspot.com>

Step 1: Street action to amend the interim constitution, get electoral constituencies based on population.
Step 2: Win the election.
Step 3: First president of Nepal, a Madhesi.

-Democracy for Nepal (DFN)
<http://demrepubnepal.blogspot.com>

The SPA delayed the peace process in the name of ‘arms management’ and is now paying for it through the conflict in the tarai.

-Rocky on Mero Sansar
<http://www.mysansar.com>

What is the model for political effectiveness in Nepal today? Well, since we have no representation, and no elections, street violence and Maoism seem to tell citizens that the only way to get things done is to take to the streets. Witness the madhesi movement in the tarai. Where is there voice in government? Where is there faith in government that was supposed to be established through elections?

-Blogdai on <http://nepalnow.blogspot.com>

Some are calling the tarai turmoil a “holocaust in the making”, others are calling it “ethnic cleansing” and still others have compared what happened in Lahan to Tiananmen Square. This week’s op-ed in News Blaze (<http://www.newsblaze.com>) comparing the violence in tarai with the 1994 genocide in Rwanda might be precipitately judgmental, but raises valid points. It says Nepali politicians are inflaming the tarai violence by pointing fingers at ‘royalists’ and ‘regressive forces’ instead of trying to understand what they did wrong.

Madhesi-United We Stand has video of the Nepalganj incident, recent news of what is happening in the tarai, a discussion forum, and a hard-to-miss sign flashing on one side that reads, “I am Madhesi, save me from bullets.” Ram Manohar

Sah, a contributor on this forum says solving the tarai turmoil is easy. He says the madhes needs employment opportunities, agriculture infrastructure, and administrative power, but most importantly what madhesis need is acceptance and confidence in them as people of Nepal. He says by calling them ‘madhesi’ the rest of Nepal is alienating them.

What were the mistakes committed by the madhesis? Why are their own countrymen against them? Sometimes I consider the foreigners who come to Nepal luckier than us because they are here for work and they do not regard this country as theirs. But what about us? Have we ever said Nepal is not our country? Have we never fought for Nepal?

-Nitesh Thakur on Madhesi-United We Stand
<http://madhesi.wordpress.com>

Maila Baje is not surprised that although it has been a week since the prime minister invited madhesi leaders for talks on regional grievances fuelling the unrest, dialogue remains as elusive as ever. He says that the seven-party alliance’s doggedness in dismissing the violence in the tarai as a plot hatched by reactionary royalists to subvert the constituent assembly elections is disgraceful. But bloggers like AP_blazeofglory on Nepalnews do believe that India and the royalists are fuelling the turmoil.

This is racism and the factors that are causing this violence are—India and BJP, Hindu extremists like the Shiv Sena, and the royalists. This war will prove more dangerous than the ‘People’s War’.

-AP_blazeofglory on Nepalnews
<http://www.nepalnews.com>

At Blogdai’s forum an anonymous poster is calling the Maoists a modern reincarnation of colonialists who believe in “divide and conquer”. This post says the Maoists are responsible for inciting hatred between madhesis and pahadis as a way to keep themselves in power. The post also says that the new interim parliament protects Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and his friends and that they will never have to answer for the decade long violence and killing because the onus has been put on the people to forgive and forget the actions of their leaders.



Running rings

Saturn’s dark gleam returns, as does flighty little Mercury

The month’s headliner is Saturn, the second largest planet in the solar system. For several months, there were no bright planets well placed in the evening sky. The ringed planet is returning to easy visibility in February when it reaches opposition on 10 February—that is, when it is located opposite the sun in the sky. When the sun sets in the west, Saturn will rise in the east. A planet is closest to the earth when in opposition, and so makes for good viewing.

Saturn is near the Sickle of Leo, which imparts an exotic aspect to this well-known asterism. Unlike dazzling Venus and Jupiter, Saturn is faint enough to be mistaken for a normal star though it outshines nearby Regulus, Leo’s brightest, by a factor of three or four.

The ringed world rises at sunset and is out all night, shining at a bright, though not dazzling, magnitude zero. Small telescopes work well to see the rings, which are more edgewise now than they have been in several years, a circumstance that makes Saturn appear only half as brilliant as in recent oppositions. When Saturn rises on the evening of 2 February, the full moon will appear close above it, and the two objects will stay close together through the night.

NASA’s Cassini spacecraft is sending back some incredible pictures of swirling clouds and thunderstorms from its current trip around the Saturnian system.

Also early in February, don’t miss the solar system’s two inner planets at once: the elusive Mercury will be to the lower right of Venus in the twilight. As darkness falls, though, Mercury will set, so make sure you catch it early.

The central landmark of the winter evening sky is the bright constellation Orion, which is currently high in the southeast to south. In its middle is the eye-catching diagonal, three-star row forming Orion’s Belt. The lower left of the Belt towards the brilliant Sirius, or Dog Star, the brightest star in the night sky and, at a distance of 8.6 light-years or 50 trillion miles, the closest star.

Other February highlights:

The Sun is in the constellation of Capricornus at the start of February and moves into Aquarius on the 16 February.

Mercury reaches its greatest elongation east of the Sun on 7 February, so there is a chance to see this elusive little planet in the early-evening sky. After this, Mercury disappears into the glare of the Sun again, at inferior conjunction (in front of the Sun) on 23 February.

Venus is now a brilliant Evening Star, and will put on a spectacular show every evening from now right through to summer. On the evening of 19 February, the young crescent Moon will appear close above Venus.

Mars rises in the south-east just as the sky brightens towards dawn, which will make it difficult to see until much later in the year.

Jupiter is coming up in the south-east much earlier than Mars. At the start of February it rises at about 4.30 AM, and will be an hour-and-a-half earlier by the end of the month. By dawn, Jupiter is well up in the south-eastern sky.

Meteors: There are no significant meteor showers in February, and it is a quiet time for sporadic meteors too. ●



STAR GAZING
Kedar S Badu

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **My World, My View 1** exhibition of photos by underprivileged children, 6-13 February at the British Council. 4410798
- ❖ **Mixed media art** by Manish Lal Shrestha, until 7 February, 10-6PM at the Newa Chhen Gallery
- ❖ **Homage to My Country** Exhibition of digital prints by Impress Singh at Siddhartha Art Gallery, until 7 February, from 11-6PM. 4218048
- ❖ **Portfolio presentations** by various photographers, at the Sundhara Bakery Café, 10AM on 3 February

EVENTS

- ❖ **Youth Initiative** discussion on 'Madhes – the burning issue', 2 February, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107599
- ❖ **Australian Big Day Out** experience Australian cuisine at Nepal Academy Hall, Kamaladi, 3 February at 11-6PM
- ❖ **Vipassana** meditation for today, talk program, 3 February at 1PM at the Mind Body Library, Tripureswor. 4279712
- ❖ **Krishnamurti** dialogue session on love, 3 February at 2.30 PM at the Mind Body Library, Tripureswor. 4279712
- ❖ **Aaitabare Discussion Series** on *Sukaratka Pailaharu*, a novel by Govinda Raj Bhattarai on 4 February at 3PM, Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Mangalbare Discussion Series** on the representation of women in the interim parliament, 6 February at 5PM, Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **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 4.30 PM at the Gurukul theatre. 4466956
- ❖ **Learn German** by playing games with native speakers, every Wednesday, 3PM at the German Info and Culture Centre, Thamel. 9841241290
- ❖ **Salsa workshop** with Binayek and Katia. 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

- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Classical fusion music** at Jatra, every Saturday, 7PM onwards
- ❖ **Gaine (Gandarphas)** 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

- ❖ **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, minimum of four guests at Rs 450 per person, two hours order in advance.
- ❖ **Retro brunch barbecue** with the Crossfire Band at The Poolside, Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12 noon-4PM, Rs 1,000 inclusive of swimming and complimentary drink.
- ❖ **International Brunch** weekends 11AM-3PM for Rs 499 per person (Rs 299 for children) at Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- ❖ **Te** Tibetan delicacies at Nepal's first noodle bar, Bluebird Mall Food Court.
- ❖ **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** live music from Side B every Friday at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's. Rs 799 includes BBQ dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **Soul Warmers** Inner Groove live at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's, Rs 599 includes a Fusion platter and cocktail. 4479488
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768, Bhatbhateni 4426587 and Pulchok. 5521755
- ❖ **AKA Pizza** at Moksh, delivery available. 5526212
- ❖ **Momo and Sekuwa Revolution** Saturdays at the Tea House Inn, Nagarkot. 6680048
- ❖ **Happy Hour** Lost Horizon Bar, Hotel Shangri-la, from 5-7PM. 4412999
- ❖ **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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YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU

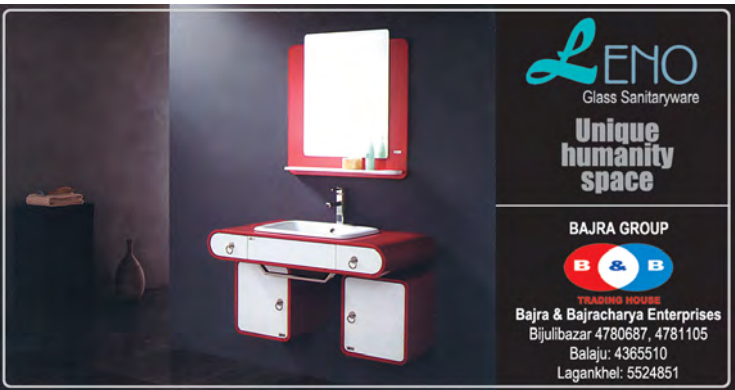


Quest Entertainment

Salaam-e-Ishq

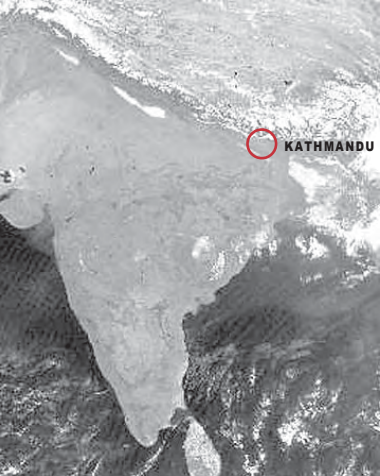
Salaam-e-Ishq is a film about six couples from different parts of the world and different walks of life, unaware of each other's existence but bound together by fate and love. Whether it's the glamorous love story of Kkamini (Priyanka Chopra) and Rahul (Salman Khan) or the intercultural chemistry between Raju Taxiwalla (Govinda) and his blonde dream girl, love is in the air.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com



NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



KATHMANDU VALLEY



The long winter drought could end in time for Shivaratri mid-month, bringing Valley farmers some much-needed rain. The westerlies responsible for the dry January were weak and for the most part didn't reach us. The northwesterly that is visible in Thursday afternoon's satellite picture is coming at us fairly strongly, drawn in by a plummeting pressure bar in the western Himalaya. This will also mean a drop in temperatures, though. The low pressure that had built up over Nepal late last week pulled in warm air from the south, raising temperatures by as much as five degrees. It's back to business this week—cold winter nights, though the days remain on the warm side.



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KIRAN PANDAY

CUT DOWN: A woman chops up a tree stump for firewood on the sidewalk near Sahid Gate on Martyr's Day last Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

EXHAUSTING: A sea of bike riders are stuck at the Thapathali bridge on Friday as traffic ground to a halt because of a Rastriya Janamukti Party rally from Jawalakhel to Ratna Park on Friday.



HEARTWARMING: Ang Bahadur Lama of Humla receiving the first lot of 90 packets of clothing for children from schools and families in Kathmandu under the Nyanopan initiative ('I'm a Nepali first', #328). Nepal Airlines captain Vijay Lama is seen handing over the consignment at Simkot airport.

Nothing too knotty



KIRAN PANDAY

crochet," Shrestha says.

In the early eighties, the handicraft business barely existed in Kathmandu. Shrestha taught herself and, in 1984, started Nepal Knotcraft Centre with two young women she had trained. "When I started the showroom, my intention was to teach, encourage, and give employment to women. I wanted them to learn skills they could use to support themselves," Shrestha explains. Eighty-four people, for the most part women, are employed at Nepal Knotcraft Centre's factory in Patan Industrial Estate.

The business has never been static, evolving as Shrestha learnt more. She used to import raw materials from India. Faced with the trade embargo in 1989, Shrestha travelled extensively around Nepal and realised the enormous potential various local materials have. "I found that there are 42 varieties of local plant materials that we can use!" she says gleefully.

Nepal Knotcraft has produced everything from cornhusk dolls to elegant, minimalist steel and paper lamps. Shrestha's designs and finished products draw on local traditions, but debunk the unfortunately often true image that products of well-intentioned skill development projects have sloppy workmanship and unattractive patterns.

In 2003, Shrestha started the Nepal Resource Development Centre to study natural resources, work with experts to develop technology to turn wastage into commercially viable materials, train women in rural Nepal, and find new markets. If you walk into Knotcraft's showroom on Kopundole these days, you're unlikely to see Shrestha. This energetic, positive woman is at work, behind the scenes, studying new fibres, designs, colours, and patterns. ●

Mallika Aryal

Shyam Badan Shrestha is not afraid of working hard or of taking chances. She's been doing both since she was a child.

After Shrestha lost her father and most male relatives, she and her mother made the decision, unconventional 50 years ago, to live by themselves in Patan. Shrestha would spend the day at school and, because she was good with her hands and money was tight, sew clothes for the neighbours at night. "Sometimes I'd

work till two in the morning," Shrestha remembers. "I had no books, no time to do my homework, I don't know how I managed to do okay in school."

Shrestha breezed through school and college and in 1972, won a scholarship to study in the UK. She returned a year later to teach at a Kathmandu school. On the side, she devoured the craft books at her school library. "I read everything I could find on handicraft, knot work, macramé,

MISS NEPAL

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Tantrik vs Loktantrik

Profound apologies for having cast unhygienic aspersions (Backside, # 332) on Nepal's stellar five-star establishments and implicating them in the epidemic of jaundice among our **movers** and **shakers**.

A quick round of the wards of Teaching Hospital this week revealed Foreign Minister KP Oli in Room 601 with a bad case of hepatitis. Down the hall was Education Minister Mangal Siddhi Manandhar with typhoid and who knows what. Recuperating at home are Labour Minister Ramesh Lekhak (he barely made it to the meeting with the visiting Korean Labour Minister on Sunday) and Tourism Minister Pradeep Gyawali. All were suffering from the **Yellow Peril**, as was Supplies Minister Hridayesh Tripathi, who seems to have been miraculously cured after resigning from his post on Sunday. (As Supplies Minister, he is resigning just as his government is about to be dismantled anyway and before he gets all the blame for failing to ensure oil supply, electricity supply, and water supply. You have to hand it to the guy for his great sense of timing.)

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Since some Maoist stalwarts in the negotiating team were also afflicted with jaundice, the Ass put two and two together and concluded that they were infected at the venue of the peace talks between the seven parties and the Maoists. The fact that most senior government

secretaries who attend cabinet meetings have also all turned yellow lends credence to this hypothesis. The firm that has the catering contract for Baluwatar is obviously trying to save money washing the salad in the waters of the Tukucha that flows past the prime minister's official residence.

If he was conspiracy-minded, the Ass would say this is all part of a deliberate attempt by reactionaries to poison the entire eight-party government. Faecal contamination could be almost as effective as radioactive **Polonium 210**.

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King Gyanendra re-painted his palace pink and shaved his beard on advice from tantriks and is given to inspecting the palace's peacocks clad in kurta pajamas. The 7+1 parties are removing his head from bank notes anyway, but that's probably not why he has been meeting bankers lately. After last week's scare on the Ring Road when tyre-burning followed Prince Hridayendra's motorcade's non-fatal collision with a motorcyclist, Crown Prince Paras has moved lock stock and barrel to Gokarna. The royals are taking it easy as their **fundo** hangers-on use the restive tarai as a weapon to get back at the loktantriks.

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Taking his cue from the paintjob on Narayanhiti, Pushpa Kamal Dahal has also painted his three-storey rented

house in Balaju, but olive green. We don't know who advised Brother Number One on the choice of colour, but the camouflage does seem to prove that the military wing of the party is still calling the shots. These are the same comrades who **bamboozled** the seven parties into allowing them to keep 180 of their choice weapons for the "personal security" of senior leaders. That is why only 300 guns made it into the container in Shaktikhor, and they're mostly muskets and .303s. The Fierce One's personal bodyguard is his own son Comrade Prakash who carries the guerrillas' only snub-nosed Colt Commando M-16, which they captured from the Rangers two years ago.


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Maoist members of the interim parliament are now seen at embassy gatherings and they are always followed by swarthy looking chaps with bulging hip pockets. Marshals at Singha Darbar know the grey suits are carrying pistols inside parliament but look the other way.

Half the Maoists who went in to be registered at the Chitwan cantonment turned out to be under 15 and were rejected. But about 30 percent of them, many girls, managed to sneak in saying they were 18. And on that happy note, **hee-haw** till next week.

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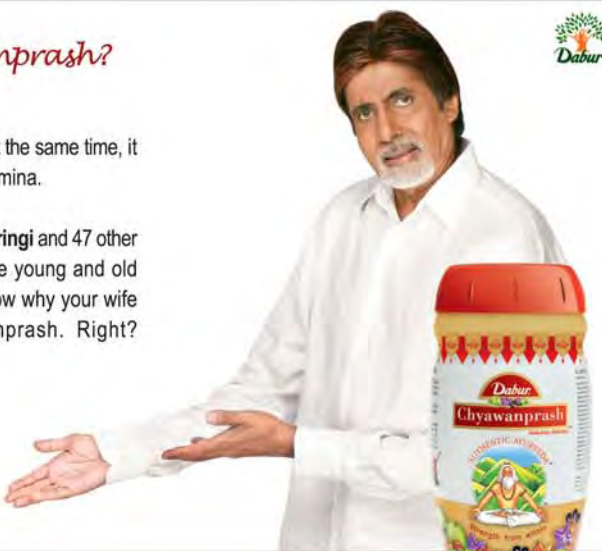
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