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Weekly Internet Poll # 335

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

Total votes: 4,574

Weekly Internet Poll # 336. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you agree that the price of fuel needs to be raised?

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Fuelling change

It may be too early to expect a dramatic return to normal



WAITING GAME: Valley motorists, such as these amassed around Bhadrakali on Tuesday afternoon, have had up to 10-hour waits for small rations of fuel.

KIRAN PANDAY

SHIVA GAUNLE

Just like King Gyanendra nine months ago, Girija Prasad Koirala made a second midnight address. This may be enough for now.

The response from madhesi activists to the Wednesday address is cautiously positive. The prime minister, flanked by Madhab Nepal and Pushpa Kamal Dahal, agreed to redraw tarai constituencies to reflect population and geography, and committed to a federal system. The pressure came as much from the virtual blockade of Kathmandu and

the long queues for fuel, as from the rising death toll in the plains.

Many madhesi community leaders say this is the first time a historically subjugated region will have a balanced say in governance. "Kathmandu had to give in to madhesi demands," senior Janakpur journalist Ram Bharos Kapadi told us.

If Wednesday's proposals for tarai representation and federalism push through it will be a dramatic shift in Nepal's state structure. The tarai will no longer be seen just as a strategic strip of plains bordering India, but a vital political, economic,

and social component of the state.

But it might be too early to rejoice. None of the other militant tarai groups such as the ex-Maoist factions of the JTMM have made a statement. Curfews remain in place in Biratnagar, and Birganj and Janakpur saw none of the traditional victory rallies.

The MJF, which on Thursday evening welcomed the speech, is said to have withheld comment until it had considered the implication of the proposal for the tarai's dalits and indigenous groups. Of the 31 people killed in the protests over the last three weeks, most were from indigenous and dalit groups. The tarai has 1 million plains dalits and 500,000 hill dalits. Saptari has the highest proportion of dalits of any district.

Emboldened perhaps by the

successful tarai uprising, a whole new pandora's box of new autonomy demands have erupted. The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, the Indigenous Nationalities' Joint Struggle Committee, the Nepal Backward Community Association, and the Janajati Student Union encircled Singha Darbar on Thursday, calling Koirala's speech "insufficient". An indefinite blockade is on in the tarai called by the Tharuwan, who differentiate themselves from the madhesi. In the east, a broad-based federalism activist group has declared a shutdown of the eastern region on Sunday.

Tensions in the tarai will de-escalate, but disruptions of the highways will continue. ●

Editorial p2
Walk the talk

SUCCESS KEEPS YOU ON YOUR TOES

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Why now?

From melting pot to meltdown

WALK THE TALK

What we are seeing now is another peace process, one that is as important as last year's tripartite deal. The prime minister's late night speech was an improvement on his last one, not least in terms of tone. The coming days will show if it is acceptable to not just the plains Nepalis but also the hill Nepalis. It is, finally, a step in the right direction.

Thirty-one people are dead in three weeks of protests. Life in some parts of the tarai is slowly recovering, but travellers remain stranded, there is an acute shortage of daily necessities. Schools, offices, factories, shops, and highways remain closed. The 7+1 parties only woke up to the crisis when the fuel shortage hit Kathmandu. This dilly-dallying has cost the country, but the crisis gives us the opportunity to treat and heal this wound.

The mass protests have been on the scale of an uprising, even though competing groups seem to be involved for their own interests. It is possible some are bent upon undermining the gains of the April Uprising. Many may be out in the streets just for the heck of it—nobody wants to be left out when they see history being made. But none of this should ever have detracted from the need to address a historical neglect.

The issues being raised by the different tarai groups are often incoherent or unclear. After Wednesday night's speech, the tarai activists will have to be more inclusive. Some of their demands are common: the excesses of the administration and police must be accounted for and the guilty punished, the constituent assembly elections can't be rigged, marginalised population groups must have an equal voice in national decision-making. For other marginalised groups, too, the credibility of the interim legislature and executive depends on how these are carried through.

These demands can't be addressed to universal satisfaction in one go. But to put out the fire in the tarai and defuse a parallel janajati agitation, some steps need to be taken very soon.

- The interim constitution needs to be amended quickly to reflect the promised constituency re-delineation according to population and geography and open the door for the constituent assembly to design a federal structure for the country.
- The Nepalganj and Lahan reports must be made public, and guilty officers prosecuted immediately. The morale of the government machinery can't be more important than justice.
- A high-level commission must be formed to investigate and prosecute culprits, infiltrators, and instigators of violence.

To prevent another cycle of violence we need concrete gestures that ensure a just future for all Nepalis.

The turmoil in the tarai in the past month has been led, among others, by militant parties that used to be part of the larger Maoist fraternity whose demands included ethnically defined sub-national federal governance.



GUEST COLUMN
Bihari K Shrestha

While the operational contours of ethnically-based federalism have never been accurately laid out by its political or academic protagonists, particularly in Nepal's context of a multitude of caste and ethnic groups living mostly in mixed settlements, it is nonetheless flaunted as a political tool to emotively persuade those who would be persuaded by it. The political parties, which had free rein over the country after 1990, did next to nothing to address the known grievances of various ethnic groups. But now they have suddenly found it opportune to

raise the issue of discrimination against the madhes.

Like other ethnic groups the madhesis are far from being a homogenous group and are probably the most stratified in the country. There is unequal land distribution, pronounced landlessness, caste segregation, inter-caste exploitation and uneven distribution of political power based on caste and economic status. In fact, madhesi zamindars have more in common with pahadi zamindars than between, say, the madhesi elite and the Paswans or Musahars. The dalit struggle for rights in the tarai in many ways supercedes the madhesi struggle for autonomy.

Despite claims to the contrary, representation of madhesi people in the bureaucracy is at an all-time high and is higher than those enjoyed by other ethnic and geographical groups such as the Tharus, Tamangs, Karnali people and not to mention Chepang, Danuwar, Thami, Hayu, and so on.

True, there are many pahadi officials in government in the tarai. But it is not uncommon to find madhesi officials in Kathmandu and across the hills, either.

Pejorative name-calling is not reserved for madhesis, there is similar racist labelling of other ethnic groups including hill-dwellers.

Nepal has evolved as a melting pot of its rich ethnic diversity, and integration has accelerated, particularly in the last decade-and-a-half. If the grievances concerning discrimination against madhesis were in fact this severe, then the issue should have erupted in 1990 when the country had just come out of 30 years of Panchayat autocracy, and not in 2007, after we had enjoyed free-for-all freedom.

The synthetic nature of madhesi demands, as presently couched, is underscored by having on the one hand inclusive peace rallies, and on the other, ethnic riots. The developments have a copycat resemblance to what is called Jana Andolan II, and the anger seems to be directed especially against the Maoists.

While Indian left leader Sitaram Yechuri & Co cobbled together the coalition of the seven parties and Maoists in November 2005, the Jai Krishan Goit, Jwala Singh, and Upendra Yadav outfits felt left out of the process. The fact that the Maoists shot dead a young protestor in Lahan three weeks ago only stoked the anger.

As things stand, Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his comrades are more advantageously positioned to mainstream their erstwhile brothers-at-arms and save Nepal's melting pot from meltdown. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Muharram in madhes

The population of the plains is united by Kathmandu's neglect

Last week, it was Muharram. It is observed in mourning to commemorate the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain, the younger grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, in Karbala over 1,400 years ago. The influence of Sufism has transformed this solemn occasion into a symbol of the eternal conflict between forces of virtue and evil.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

On the tenth day of Muharram, the Tazia, also called Dahan in the vicinity of Janakpur, is taken around town in procession with mourners beating their chests and shouting 'Ha Hussain, Ho Hussain'. In the evening, the Dahan is buried. Just as Muslims participate enthusiastically in Holi, Hindus share the pangs of the Muharram commemorations.

As a boy, I went around my village with

the Dahan procession for five years to fulfil a vow made by my parents for my good health. The string of bells around my waist would tinkle wildly whenever I jumped to the wails for Imam Hussain. Though the processions of, say, the Jolahas (weavers) and Dhobis (washermen) never mingled, I could accompany whichever Dahan I chose.

Muharram was marked with traditional fervour this year too. The VDC contributed Rs 10,000 to the kitty and Hindu volunteers controlled the crowd that poured in from surrounding villages.

But Dahan this year went beyond traditional practices and became an occasion for political mobilisation. Muslims are angry at the way the police and administration have behaved in Janakpur and they are with the majority Hindus in demanding their rightful place in Nepal's polity.

Janakpur's Muslims came with the Maharani of Tikamgarh to build the Janaki temple. Many of these *rajmistris*, or royal

masons, settled down behind the building they had constructed. As Janakpur has become a magnet for rural migrants, land prices have shot through the roof. While most of the original settlers around the temple have sold their property and moved out to cheaper locations nearby, some still remain. They were the targets of police atrocities last week.

A civil society fact-finding team last week heard harrowing tales of police brutality. At least four Muslims have died, and when this uprising is viewed with an objective eye they will be noted as the first Muslims to lay down their lives for a secular Nepal.

Muslims are a significant minority in Nepal, and comprise between four (say census figures) and eight (say community leaders) percent of the population. They live in almost every tarai district, and Nepal has more Muslims than some of the smaller west Asian sultanates such as Bahrain (586,000) or Qatar (885,000). A

'New Nepal' can't be built without including them in nation-building.

Forward-looking states promote national solidarity and harmony between diverse groups by establishing impartial institutions, constructing a shared history, collective memory, and common heroes. Sometimes camaraderie developed in the trenches helps cement bonds. But nothing builds a sense of citizenship as effectively as participation in a freedom struggle.

During the April Uprising, for the first time in Nepali history, people from every background rose up together. This laid the groundwork of consensual nation-building. The ongoing protests in the madhes which build on that foundation have involved Musahars, Chamars, Kurmis, Khatabes, Doms, Dusadhs, and Muslims.

Hindu mythical agents of virtue always win and truth prevails. In Islamic traditions, victory is known only on Judgement Day, each struggle is important. This Muharram will not be forgotten. ●

LETTERS

PREPOSTEROUS

The article 'Past, present similar' by Daniel Lak (Here and There, #334) is utterly preposterous and deeply offensive.

● Under the provisions of Thailand's constitutional monarchy, His Majesty the King is above politics. At midnight of 19 September 2006, the Council for Democratic Reform (CDR) who undertook the political change in Thailand sought an audience with His Majesty the King to report on their action and on the situation as His Majesty the King is the Head of State of the Kingdom of Thailand. The photographs that were published of the audience show how the whole event was unanticipated. One should not be reading too much into the Royal Command recognising General Sonthi Boonyaratghm as Leader of the CDR. His Majesty's role as constitutional Monarch was to take note and give authority to an accomplished fact.

● Thailand's lese majeste law is in practice rarely used. Moreover, His Majesty said that he himself welcomes constructive criticism during his annual address to the nation on the occasion of His Majesty's Birthday Anniversary in 2005. The Thai people's deep reverence for the Royal Family is because of respect, loyalty, love, and adoration, not because of fear.

● The current civilian Royal Thai Government and the National Legislative Assembly are trying their best to steer Thailand back to parliament democracy as soon as possible. The new Constitution is being drafted by the independent Constitutional Drafting Assembly, and is expected to be completed within six months. The Thai people continue to enjoy a broad range of civil rights and liberties such as freedom of expression and freedom of movement.

● The Royal Thai Government places great importance on the freedom of the press, a key sector in the Thai society. Over the past few months, even with the enforcement of martial law, the media has been exercising their freedom of expression liberally. The speculation that the Royal Thai Government is to extend the lese majeste law to cover criticism of authorities in general is entirely faulty.

● The Royal Thai Government has never 'blamed' Singapore for meddling with Thailand's internal affairs. It, however, recently protested that the deputy prime minister of Singapore invited Thaksin Sinawatra, the ousted Thai prime minister, to a meeting, and allowed him to attack the current government in international media, which caused disunity among the Thai people.

I strongly protest the using of groundless accusations and preposterous rumours regarding the political developments in Thailand to support a particular political agenda on Nepal's internal politics. The inaccurate information in the article is perhaps the result of a lack of true understanding about Thai politics. The situation in Thailand is unique and completely different from that in Nepal. These groundless accusations regarding His Majesty the King of Thailand, who is strongly revered by all Thai people, could seriously damage cordial relations between Thailand and Nepal.

Vanvisa Thamrongnavasawat,
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand

INACCURATE

The article ('No USAID', From the Nepali Press, #334) translated from another publication is wrong. The United States has not suspended—and has no intention of suspending—"all aid programs in Nepal after the Maoists entered the interim government," as the article wildly

asserts. In fact, just one USAID/Nepal contractor has suspended a small component of its project, valued at \$58,000, working with Nepal's judicial system. The article also quotes an alleged letter of instruction from USAID to its partners. No such letter was written.

The contractor, who continues to work in Nepal under a \$5.6 million USAID contract, informed us that it took this step given US prohibitions against aiding terrorist organisations. Because the Maoists continue using violence, extortion, and intimidation, the US Government designates them as terrorists. The determination to suspend work is the contractor's decision, based on its perception of legal liability under US law.

The United States is committed to helping the Nepali people and the ongoing peace process. USAID development assistance for Nepal this fiscal year is currently projected to approach \$37 million. The United States provides most of its development assistance in Nepal through NGOs. Yet some does go through the Government of Nepal. If the Maoists join the interim cabinet without abandoning violence, the US mission to Nepal will work to ensure that it does not provide assistance that Maoist ministers can claim credit for.

The United States supports a peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Nepal. USAID funding—development assistance provided by the American people—has been helping Nepalis for 56 years. We can assure your readers such support will continue.

Robert L Hugins,
Public Affairs Officer, US Embassy

PLAIN SPEAKING

I'd like to thank *Nepali Times* for highlighting madhesi issues. Its recurrent editorials and write-ups have extended

solidarity for madhesi' movement for their fundamental rights via peaceful means. Bandas, vandalism, and violent measures are not appropriate ways of fulfilling demands, but the media and the intelligentsia must highlight these issues to pressurise the government to bring the marginalised, excluded, and discriminated into the national mainstream.

Dhananjay Shah, TU

● It is distressing to hear about the land we love being trashed and destroyed. Demonstrators are so keen on claiming their 'rights' as Nepalis. How about our duties? What's going to happen when other groups want the same rights? How do the few sincere Nepalis who pay taxes feel when the tyre burners and destroyers scream about their rights?

KA Tamang, Middlesborough

BLASPHEMY

The news that Nepal Rastra Bank is planning to place images of Lord Gautama Buddha on Nepali banknotes is disturbing. This totally un-religious act will draw criticism from all Buddhist countries. According to teachings of Buddhism, images of the Buddha are not be traded and touched by dirty hands, or spread around in public toilets and shops. If the Buddha's image were deemed fit to be used on currency notes, countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, and Japan would have done so long ago.

Pravin Rajbahak, Birganj

ASS

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Nirmal Niroula, email

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Acute hearing

Don't forget other groups when you sit down to talk

One wonders what the government must do before the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) comes forward for dialogue. Upendra Yadav's group resolutely refused to talk until Home Minister Krishna Sitaula was fired. The MJF has also demanded that Nepal be declared a federal republic, and that electoral constituencies be redrawn on the basis of population.

After marathon sessions at Baluwatar with his allies, Prime Minister Koirala put on a sober face Wednesday night (*pictured*) and said what he had failed to say the first time round: sorry for the deaths, we shall compensate the victims,



EYES WIDE SHUT
Sheetal Kumar

your grievances are genuine and we shall meet your legitimate demands. Then he spelt out the eight parties' commitment to a federal government, and promised that electoral constituencies would be

redrawn to give the tarai 49 percent of parliamentary seats. Exactly how these will be done remains to be negotiated.

Whether this is seen by madhesi protestors as enough of a climbdown by a haughty pahadi-dominated government, we shall see in due course. But the more important point is that momentous political declarations have a way of separating the moderates from the radicals. Something like that is likely now.

The first indications from the tarai are that most moderate madhesi leaders and politicians, though not fully satisfied, are leaning towards accepting Koirala's concessions. One prominent madhesi journalist told me by phone: "the prime minister could have gone further, but we think what he said is good enough. The fight will move off the streets and into parliament and negotiations committees."

Another madhesi civil society leader said Kathmandu's concessions could split the madhesis because there will always be some who are unsatisfied. "The onus is now on the MJF. We all want to see whether it truly represents the broad sentiments of the madhes or is just another spoiler," he says.

The MJF can keep fighting if it wants to, since Koirala did not fire his Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula. But Upendra Yadav and his MJF will be missing a critical point if they continue to refuse talks: With each day's delay in dialogue, they become as much responsible as the police for the needless deaths in the tarai. At least 15 lives could have been saved in the past two weeks if Yadav had only talked.



BHASWOR OJHA

MAKING AMENDS: (l-r) NC-D's Gopal Man Shrestha, UML's Madhab Kumar Nepal, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, Maoist Chairman Puspa Kamal Dahal, Deputy Prime Minister Amik Sherchan, and Nepal Workers and Peasant Party's Narayan Man Bijuckhe stand together after Koirala's address to the nation following an eight-party meeting on the tarai situation on Wednesday night.

Having said that, are Yadav and the MJF the true interlocutors of the madhes? Let's hear madhesis themselves answer this question. With all due respect for the MJF, it must be said that the slogans it is raising today were first raised by Nepal Sadbhavana Party, back in 1990. The truth is, the MJF happened to be in the right place at the right time by one of those quirky accidents of history. There is no question about the legitimacy of madhesi grievances, but there are many questions about whether the MJF really represents all the tarai constituencies. It would be a travesty, then, if the government focussed all its negotiating energies on the MJF alone.

There will be talks, eventually. But should the table be occupied by only the government and madhesi groups? What about the pahadis who have lived in the madhes for years? Should they not get a seat at the table? History's lessons have shown that excluding groups whose fates are decided by others inevitably leads to future conflicts. If the madhesi leadership is wise, it will reach out to tarai pahadis now.

And of course, since any dialogue will resolve around questions of identity, exclusion, representation, federation, and affirmative action, it would be equally wise to invite representative janajati, dalit, women and every other marginalised group in the nation to the dialogue table. All these groups are demanding the same fundamental things.

If Peace Process II has to happen—and it must—let it happen in its entirety. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Where are they?

Disappearances from children's homes in Kathmandu give rise to fears of trafficking

It didn't take long for teachers and administrators at RIMS School and Eyelense School in the Valley to realise something was deeply wrong. Last year, Pavitra Samaj Sewa Sangha, a children's home in Jorpati, enrolled 88 students in Eyelense and 35 in RIMS; however, less than a month later, the children started dropping out, often with new ones arriving in their place. To date, 88 children have gone missing from Pavitra Samaj.

"Pavitra Samaj enrolled the students with us in May. By June, most were nowhere to be seen. We didn't get an explanation, instead they started enrolling new children every week," says Balmukunda Karki, vice principal at RIMS, where only 11 of the original students are still attending classes. The home's chairman, Sitadevi Gautam, was defensive when the schools started asking questions, and made vague excuses about the children being taken home by relatives. "When we tried to probe deeper, we were told to do our job and not poke around in other people's business," says principal Anil Parajuli, adding that on admissions forms the details of each child's parents or guardians were left blank.

Rajesh Bista, Eyelense's principal, describes a similar experience. "Only 24 of the 88 students originally enrolled by Pavitra Samaj still attend school," he says. He never got concrete answers from the organisation about where the children went either. "When we

asked the other students, they said 'uncles and aunties come to pick them up; if we ask about them, they say they will hang us'." Some children were enrolled as orphans but later said to have been sent back to their parents' care.

The two-year-old Pavitra Samaj Sewa Sangha runs on donations, and had 126 orphaned and destitute children listed in its care, mostly from Rolpa, Rukum, Dhading, Dang, and Makwanpur. Gautam admits children have disappeared, but places blames the organisation's financial manager Dhruba Adhikari, who hasn't been to work since 28 August last year. "He did everything; I just signed papers that said how many children had arrived and how long they would be staying. I have no idea what he used to do or how much money he used to make," says Gautam.

In addition to the home in Jorpati, Pavitra Samaj also has branches that collect donations and care for children. Eleven children are said to have been receiving aid at their premises in Balkhu, but none are still there. Narayan Funyal, chairman of the branch, says four of them returned to their parents in Dhading, and the remaining seven were taken away by a middleman over Dasain. He claims he was away when this happened and denies all knowledge of the children's whereabouts, adding, "The children were brought here from all over by middlemen. The parents don't know anything, just that we provide them with food,

UNCERTAIN FUTURES: These children were rescued from Pavitra Samaj Sewa Sangha's home in Jorpati and placed in government care after 88 others disappeared.

shelter, clothing, and education until SLC."

Pavitra Samaj has also been 'transferring' children to other organisations. In early 2007, five girls were sent to Malai Nabirsyau, a children's home. Gautam says this was done in the girls' "best interests", but admits that she received Rs 12,000 for the deal.

Gyanu Lama of Kathmandu's District Administration Office's Child Welfare Council says such monetary transactions are illegal. A total of 1,048 centres for orphans or destitute children operate in Nepal, with 366 centres and 615 children's welfare organisations in the capital alone. Lama says that 50 of these, including Malai Nabirsyau, are blacklisted. In mid-January, the government intervened, and took the remaining children from Pavitra Samaj into government care.

Executive director of central Child Welfare Council Dipak Raj Sapkota says "We've seen repeatedly that children are being smuggled both inside and outside the country for household employment, sexual abuse, circus labour, or organ transplants. If society keeps turning a blind eye to this, it will have unimaginable consequences in the years to come." ●

Himal Khabarpatrika

नेपाल कृषिप्रधान मुलुक हो । यहाँका ८० प्रतिशतभन्दा बढी जनता कृषि पेशामा आधारित छन् । कुल राष्ट्रिय आयको कण्डै ४० प्रतिशत हिस्सा अहिले पनि कृषि क्षेत्रले नै ओगटेको छ । सिङ्गो मुलुकको आर्थिक, सामाजिक मेरुदण्डको रूपमा रहेको कृषिक्षेत्र उपेक्षित हुनुहुँदैन । कृषकहरू देशका वास्तविक नायक हुन् । उनीहरूलाई सम्मान र कदर गर्नुपर्छ । कृषकहरूले पनि आफ्नो पसिनामाथि विश्वास गर्नुपर्छ । नयाँ-नयाँ कृषि प्रणाली अवलम्बन गर्नुपर्छ । पढ्दैमा खेती गर्न नहुने होइन । कृषिक्षेत्रलाई आधुनिकीकरण गर्न शिक्षित र सचेत कृषकको खाँचो छ । त्यसैले कृषि पेशालाई आदर गरौं, कृषकलाई सम्मान गरौं ।

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सूचना विभाग

New chief

Kamran Bakr is the managing director of Unilever Nepal. Bakr has been with Unilever Bangladesh for 16 years and was last there as supply chain director. He holds an MBA from Georgetown University and is a graduate of the Advanced Management program at INSEAD, France. Bakr replaces Rakesh Mohan who now moves to Unilever Bangladesh as chairman and managing director.



Himalayan Visa

Himalayan Bank launched its new Visa debit card this week. All account holders with a savings or current account with the bank are eligible for the card, which is accepted at over 300,000 Visa merchant outlets and more than 20,000 Visa ATMs throughout Nepal and India. Added perks include chances to win all-expenses paid trips to Bangkok, Singapore and Switzerland.



Guangzhou calling

China's largest airline, China Southern, has added Kathmandu to its list of destinations. The flight connects Kathmandu with



Guangzhou, China. The service, which will use Boeing 757s, will operate on Mondays and Fridays. China Southern links more than 80 destinations around the globe.

Zero percent

Cosmic Motorcycle, manufacturer of the first Nepali motorcycle, is offering a zero percent down payment scheme. The offer is open to Kathmandu Valley residents for every Cosmic model at the company's Tripureswor showroom. The company also offers old-for-new exchange deals.

Help on the road

Hansraj Hulaschand, sole authorised distributor for Bajaj motorcycles in Nepal, is offering a new road assistance service for owners of Bajaj bikes. Bajaj Help-On-Road Assistance offers on-the-spot repairs of breakdowns or, if this is not possible, transport of motorcycles back to its workshop in Gyaneswor. The service is initially on offer from 8AM-8PM, and will later be 24 hours.



The long view

We know planning ahead is key, but we still don't do it

SINGAPORE — The government of Singapore is embarking on a couple of major long-term projects—blocking off the country's rivers before they get to the sea to reduce its dependence on water from neighbouring Malaysia and, in view of the tourism boom in Macau because of gamblers from mainland China,



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

a \$3.2 billion casino and entertainment project. The Las Vegas builder commissioned must have the complex up and running in less than three years, which means an average monthly expenditure of \$100 million. That, dear readers, is being proactive.

In Nepal, perhaps due to traditional social conditioning, we are often merely reactive, thinking only of getting through the immediate future. We're hunkering down to live in darkness for the next couple of years because we didn't think a decade ago to allow the private sector in hydropower. Despite the harsh consequences with which we must now live, it seems we are still not thinking ahead to a solution. The same goes for water.

You might think, looking at how families plan dowries and the race to have sons who will light funeral pyres in the future that Nepalis can, in fact be proactive. But consider the realities of the decision-making here: politicians and, by extension, bureaucrats can only think for their short terms in power. Even the private sector is far from blameless—leaders work to be elected to the higher offices



of chambers of commerce but, once there, have no plan of action. All of these players are supported by individuals in bilateral and multilateral agencies who themselves have short tenures.

So it happens that people spend more fuel getting to the queues and inching forward than getting anywhere productive. This is so simple, it's incredible we don't get it: petroleum prices are dependent on global markets, and petroleum is not something Nepal has. So why on earth don't we allow a regulated market to take care of demand and supply? Similarly, why can't private firms take the risk to build the plants and trade the power, when Power Purchase Agreements and Survey Licenses and all of that mess clearly doesn't work well enough?

It is also no wonder that most people, wary of trade unions, have given up on the idea of any new large-scale labour-intensive projects.

We know it's possible to do things differently, proactively, and make a big difference in the lives of citizens over a relatively short span of time. In four decades Singapore has become a first world country. Malaysia's vision of 2020 has fast-tracked growth and development. Vietnam is following suit.

We don't need to re-invent the wheel but we do need to be proactive enough to build the road on which wheels can run. And to all the doomsday predictors who earn consulting dollars: please, for once, do some proactive thinking about how we can build a better Nepal. ●

“Expensive does mean better quality”



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Soumitra Roy, chief manager of sales and marketing at Asian Paints Nepal, talked to *Nepali Times* about the challenges and rewards of doing business in Nepal.

Nepali Times: What is Nepal's paints market like?

Soumitra Roy: The total market for paints is over Rs 900 million and Asian Paints' share of that is approximately 33 percent. Our clients range from the general public to big housing complexes to offices.

What are some of the challenges you face?

Paints require a large number of raw materials, and for an international standard paint you need many additives. If there is a shortage of any one, the product suffers. For the last 25 days, the Birganj border has been closed—and this has happened regularly over the last few years—which means we often run out of raw materials.

Countries such as Singapore and the US have stringent laws about discarding paints past their expiration date, but often they are sold to India and Nepal at a cheap rate, pretty much making us their dumping ground. Many importers bring in these products to repack and sell. They are fooling the customers. In fact, it is easy to identify these products—they will have no maximum retail price, be missing the dates of manufacture and expiry, and be cheap.

Another issue is under-invoicing of the finished goods of other companies that come from India or other countries. Most shops in border areas sell these products at a cheaper price, without customs or duties added on. Asian Paints is not licensed to import finished products—we bring in raw materials and manufacture the paints right here at our factory in Hetauda.

You mentioned a new product, Apex Ultima. How is it different from the range you've marketed so far?

Apex Ultima is meant for exterior surfaces, and this is the first time any paint company has offered a seven-year warranty on certain criteria of product use, such as fading (due to ultra violet rays) and flaking, and a five-year warranty on fungus, provided they follow standard instructions. We use high quality chemicals resistant to UV rays and fungus, and issue warranty certificates to our customers along with the bill.

It's a diminishing value warranty—if you face problems with the paint during the first year, we offer a free repainting—the customer does not have to pay for paint or labour. From 13 months on, we bear 80 percent of the cost of repainting, and that drops with time because the customer has already made use of our paint for a certain period of time without any problems. The idea is that while paint is expensive, the labour charge is even more so, so the longer the paint lasts, the more you get out of the paint. Apex Ultima paints cost more than others, but in this case, expensive does mean better quality, because we give value for money.

What are Asian Paints Nepal's future plans?

Next month we're launching a new product, the Asian Exterior Patti, a product to smooth exterior walls and protect the plaster, the exterior paint is applied on top of this. Apart from that, we've been in Nepal for the last 23 years and will be here for a long time to come. We will expand, reach out to customers, and offer the best products.

New quarters

Dhruba Simkhada, *Himal Khabarpatrika*,
29 January

हिमाल

It was evident at the 15 January meeting that plenty of improvisation had been needed to shoehorn everyone into parliament: the many lawmakers, reporters, spectators, and employees of parliament offices. Can this building, once the personal theatre of Prime Minister Chandra Sumshere Rana, handle the load of the interim parliament and then the even larger constituent assembly?

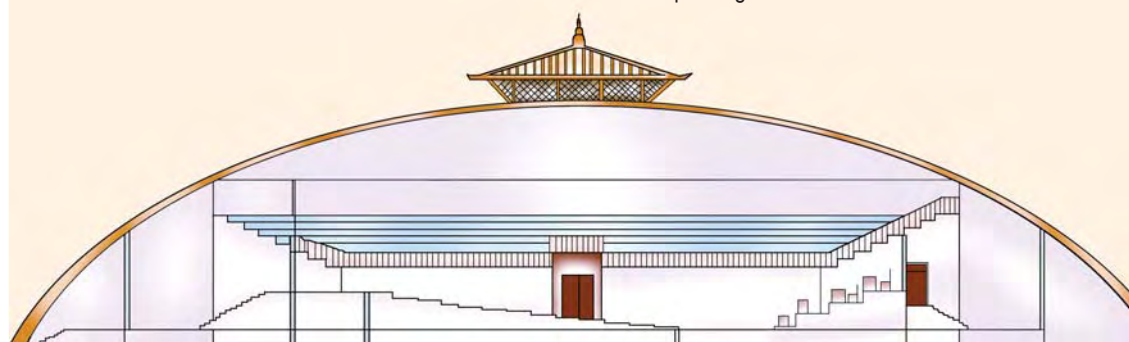
The planned 450-member constituent assembly is to be seated in four rows. The meeting hall currently has 340 seats for the 330 representatives. In January at one point, there were 850 people crammed in, although it has a maximum capacity of 755 only. Representatives were literally shoving their way across, and the old royal gallery was anything but for the diplomats and ambassadors seated there.

The hall is icy in the winter and a cauldron in the summer, and damp year-round, due to leaks all over the building. The Royal Gallery of the current building is now used as a special wing for the special guests, foreign diplomats, and dignitaries. Unfortunately, the gallery proved to be anything but comfortable for the guests. It is served by a makeshift bucket toilet.

A proposal for a new parliament building near Singha Darbar's Putali Bagaicha has been on the cards since 2001. At the request of the government the Singha Darbar Secretariat Reconstruction Committee submitted the proposal, complete with blueprints, and assessed a budget of Rs 2.15 billion for the project. The same year, the government allotted 7.5 hectares (150 ropanis) of land for the complex. Nothing has come of the proposal due to budgetary constraints and political instability.

The new building is hemispherical in shape and echoes the designs of pagoda-style temples. There are six planned blocks: the House of Representatives, the National Assembly, libraries, offices of the various parties, offices of the secretariat, and other sections. The total capacity of the House of Representative would be 1,500 people with the National Assembly 1,000. Pakistan's parliament is housed in a similar building.

The complex is designed to accommodate 332 members of the general public, 114 media personnel, 40 special guests, 43 diplomats, 46 executive government officials, 88 guests of the prime-minister and the speaker of the assembly, 88 guests of representatives. There will be parking for 350 vehicles.



OPRSG

Transparency

Punarjagaran, 6 February

पुनर्जागरण

Maoist leader CP Gajurel claims that the number of Maoist fighters has increased from 10,000 to over 37,000 since the Maoists gave up arms and joined mainstream politics. Such a claim is a direct challenge to Ian Martin and could hamper arms management and the verification of fighters.

On paper, it is clear that those who have joined the Maoist army after 1 June 2006 and 'soldiers' under 18 years of age will not be considered fighters. But this has not happened in practice. The third clause of the 25-point agreement of 1 June between the Maoists and the government states clearly that the PLA will not recruit any more fighters. The Maoists have not only violated the agreement but also the ceasefire code of conduct. Reports

say the Maoists have used force and in many cases threats to get young people to join their army.

When newspapers started reporting that more young people were joining the PLA, lured by promises of a permanent place when it merged with the Nepal Army and a \$100 stipend, the UN said those joining the ranks after 1 June 2006 would not be verified. But even before the November peace agreement, the Maoists had started training new troops in their cantonments.

While the UN team is busy verifying those fighters who joined the army after 1 June, locking up their arms, and giving the keys to the commanders even before the siren has been installed, Gajurel has been threatening a return to armed struggle. He says that if the Maoists feel the process is not going according to plan, they can take up arms and come out into

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2 Years	1680	1450
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2 Years	840	750
1 Years	420	380

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the streets within one hour.

The UN is trying to keep under wraps that the process is not transparent, as many are saying. The verification process started in Shakti Khor, Chitwan (pictured) and has so far covered Dahban in Rolpa, Mansuriya in Kailali, and Gulmi in Surkhet, but there is no information about how many fighters are in the cantonments, how many have been verified etc. Martin says the numbers will be made public once the process is complete.

Hindu fears

Chhalphal, 4 February

It is becoming clear that royalists were involved in inciting violence in the tarai, intending to push back the constituent assembly elections. Meanwhile, Hindu organisations and the royalists are planning a big religious ceremony around Shivaratri.

At a meeting in Gorakhpur, former chairman of the World Hindu Federation, Bharat Kesari Simha, was busy collecting funds to support jogis coming to Nepal for Shivaratri and a seminar in Kathmandu to discuss whether Nepal should have been made secular. Even some ministers are publicly raising funds for the event. Simha reportedly asked for Rs 1 million from minister

Pradeep Gyawali.

A public appeal from the Hindu organisation states that, “by making Nepal a secular state, the newly constituted parliament has deliberately tried to incite communal hatred amongst Nepalis and has hurt the sentiments of Hindus all over the world.” There are fears that Simha’s group might start communal violence in Kathmandu during Shivaratri.

Packing up?

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 7 February

News is, the king is thinking about packing his bags and leaving the country. A source says the king is busy meeting with his relatives, usually at Nirmal Niwas or the Nagarjuna palace. He meets political or semi-political people in the afternoons, and goes out at night to meet family members. So far he has visited Surya Bahadur Thapa, Rajendra Devkota, Pashupati Shamsher Rana, and Biswo Bandhu Thapa.

At these meetings, he says repeatedly that he is tired and wants to take a break. Sources say that in the last few weeks the king has been talking about acceding the throne to Prince Hridayendra and going abroad with the queen to spend some time alone. Talking about his 1 February 2005 takeover, he says,

“I took the step thinking it would be good for the country. It did not turn out that way, but I have no regrets.”

He is said to be consulting his advisors about giving the young prince all power, saying that the monarchy is much more important and powerful than a king. Apparently the king has even tried to share his ideas with Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal. In a statement two weeks ago in Chitwan, Dahal said, “The king invited me to talk and said he is willing to let go of his powers under certain conditions, but I refused to meet him.” The king has also reportedly tried to meet Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who has also refused. The palace is now expressing interest in meeting with NC-D leader Gopalman Shrestha.

This is not the first time that the king has suggested making over all his powers to Hridayendra. He has not said anything about what will happen to Prince Paras. Apparently, the king’s visitors are strictly advised not to mention the 1 February takeover or say that the monarchy is in trouble as such statements may ‘irritate’ the king. Some say the king’s decision to give up his powers is just another way for royalists to divert attention from real issues. Others say that the king is angling for sympathy from the Nepali people.

Petty MPs

Annapurna Post, 7 February

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

The tarai is burning, yet it does not seem as if the new interim parliament will be ready to meet any time soon. Where the much-hyped MPs are hiding at this critical point in Nepal’s history is anyone’s guess. Although over two dozen people have died in the violence, parliament seems not be showing the slightest bit of interest. First impressions mean a lot and this parliament has already failed miserably. It looks as if the only person worried about what is happening in the tarai is the home minister. By looking the other way, the political leadership is sending a clear message that it is not interested in finding a political solution.

It is said that the parliament has not met because

House regulations have not been finalised. The parties are said to be discussing petty issues which are in no way related to what is happening in the tarai. The parties that have three seats in the parliament are asking the positions of for whip, chief whip, and a parliamentary leader. The perks and parliamentary privileges of such positions include official cars etc.

Parliament’s attention is simply not where it should be. The draft of the regulation could not be finalised because of disputes over these issues and now a 17-member committee has been set up to give the regulation its final shape. The committee has decided that the three positions will go to parties with a 10 percent membership in parliament, but Jana Morcha disagrees, saying this excludes them.

The eight parties cannot use this as an excuse for not doing anything about the tarai issue. Obviously new regulations were needed when the Maoists joined parliament, but this delay is a real problem. All eight parties are responsible, but those currently fighting over petty issues need to stop before it is too late.



Fish: Tarai residents
Wok: Tarai protests

“What are their demands?”
“Wait! Wait! We have to investigate whether they are royalists first.”

नेपाल Nepal, 5-11 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The Nepal and Maoist army should think twice before deploying their personnel. What will they do if tomorrow the tarai takes up weapons and rises against them?”

Upendra Yadav in Kantipur on 4 Febraury.

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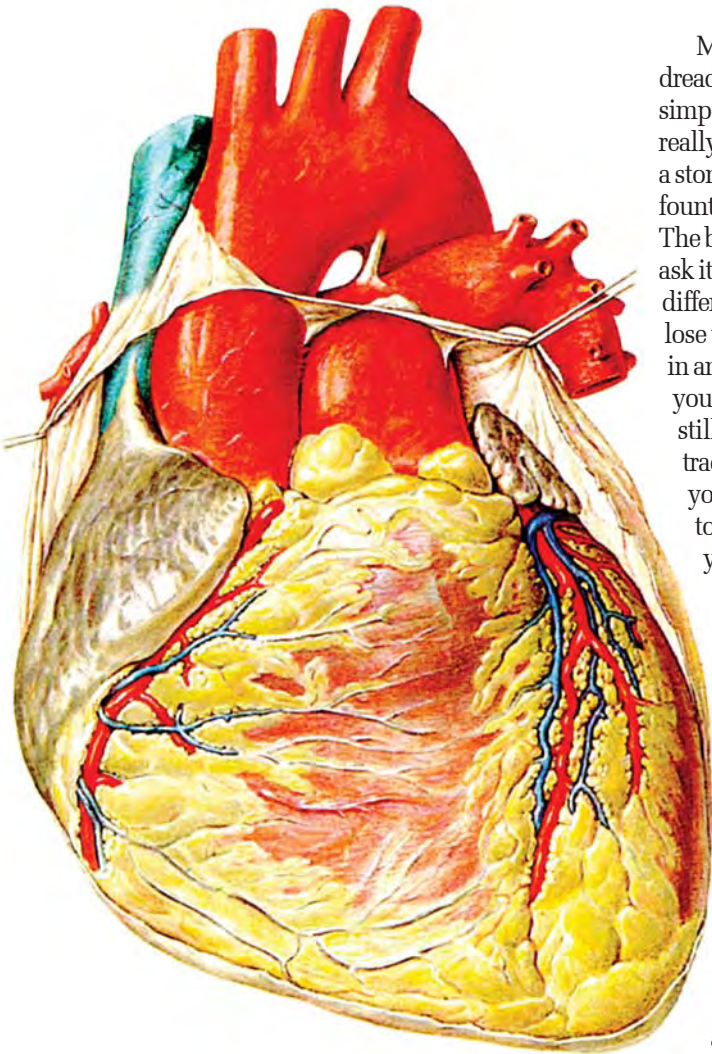
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What's love got to do with it?

A Valentine's Day special edition from Auntie



Matters get complicated when a questioner mutters the dreaded phrase with a Genuinely Nice Smile™. If you simper, you might be answering a question you have not really even been asked. If, on the other hand, your retort is a stony look, you might be shutting off forever the fountains of love that lie behind a socially-inept exterior. The best course of action is to ask the question back. He'll ask it back again. So will you. Both of you will try on different expressions each time, and after a while you'll lose track of what it is you want to know and just keep on in an endless loop, and your throats will be parched and you'll want to throw heavy things at his head, and you still won't know what it's all about. Then, in the best tradition of Katharine Hepburn-Spencer Tracy films, you'll find this whole exchange terribly sexy and get together. Unlike the films, this will end badly. Why, yes, Auntie does speak from experience.

On a recent naughty weekend to Nagarkot, my girlfriend and I realised that the hotel we were in had amazing acoustics. We overheard a number of things revealing specific and rather strange preferences from the adjacent room. Imagine our mortification when we realised that the loud couple are from our close social circle. Now not only am I worried I'll never be able to look them in the eye when we meet again (which is sure to be soon), but my partner is expressing an excessive interest in duplicating their activities. Am I being too prudish?

What is the appropriate response when a man that you've been exchanging meaningful glances and light banter with all evening fills a pause in a conversation with "ani... ke chha?" This has happened on more than one occasion, and I'm beginning to wonder if this is some Kathmandu male-testing-the-waters question. Am I meant to respond with "[husband/boyfriend/empty apartment/other noun] chha/chhaina" to signal my willingness or unwillingness to proceed?

Ke Bhanne

Dear Ke Bhanne,
You raise an interesting question and one that Auntie has had some years to ponder over. Clearly, if you are over 15,

the answer is not "akas nilo chha" or "timro pyant chus chha". If the question is asked looking straight at you with a mild expression, you can get away with a polite smile and no answer (as in, an ambiguous "if you have to ask..." look). As with all such things, often it comes down to the eyebrows. If you get a distinct wiggle of the eyebrows, the man wants a simple answer: "kei chhaina", "gharma buda kurira chha", or the opposite. Now any man who wiggles his eyebrows at you is probably a short step away from leering, but sometimes we cannot be choosy.

Don't wanna know

Dear Don't wanna know,
The answer is yes. Prudishness and prurience share more than just the first syllable, you know. Such judgmental 'questions' sound like that arch-conservative self-righteous man who every young woman in the vicinity knows is a groping ogler. Do you really want to be like the gossip who spreads malicious rumours in the guise of helpfully warning neighbours about immoral elements in their

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midst? The gleaming eyes and spittle-flecked lips are a dead giveaway. Auntie says let he who has never had a 'naughty weekend' cast the first stone. Let it go. As for what your partner wants: if the idea doesn't endanger your life, why not give it a shot? You know you want to.

How does a girl in Kathmandu get some simple lovin' when every man seems hell bent on fulfilling mummy's dreams of a daughter-in-law? Recently I thought all my prayers had been answered when I began seeing a man who my friends had warned me against. This one, I was sure, wouldn't have gentlemanly ambitions of making an honest woman of me. Two weeks later, he wanted me to meet his family. Where have all the good cads gone?

Louche Lady

Dear LL,
You cut through right to the heart of the matter. The boys are so used to behaving in this manner, I suspect it threatens them to see a woman do it. Any woman who does not want to automatically cuddle right after, or who treats them the way they've often treated the ladies becomes a mission that must be accomplished. It's a little humiliating to be used casually by the kind of intelligent, witty, and ravishing woman you doubtless are. The men are skilled tacticians trying to kill with kindness. Treat invitations to take tea with the grannies as a test. If you fall into the trap, they get their chance to behave as they often wish to, and you may as well have insisted on snuggling and baby talk right at the outset. Hold firm to your principles, and if your cad is a true bounder, as they were back in the day, you can establish a fulfilling short- to medium term relationship for some simple lovin'.
PS—Consider changing your initials to stand for Love'Em Leave'Em.



Auntie offers advice and wake-up calls on all kinds of grown-up problems: sticky office issues, messy relationships, bad habits, crises of creativity, ennui. auntie@nepalitimes.com.

Heart of the matter

Valentine's Day is all about the heart: broken, bloodied, bruised, burnt, or beloved, shot through, stomped on, speared, or satisfied.

The myocardium may be the strongest muscle in the human body, but it wasn't its durability and r that led the heart to represent love and romance as it does today. The ancients figured out early on that the heart was fairly vital. Still, while the ancient Egyptians may have aced architecture, by today's standards their grasp on biology was a little sketchy: they attributed most of the functions that we now associate with the brain—intellect, reasoning, will, and emotion—to the heart. Because of this, the heart was the only organ not removed from the body during mummification, as it had to travel with the corpse to be weighed against a feather by Anubis in the underworld—a heart heavy with sin would not pass the test. The brain, on the other hand, was considered to only be responsible for mucous production and so was liquefied, drained through the nostrils, and thrown away.

Philosophers, including Aristotle, tended to agree with the Egyptians, seeing the heart as the seat of the soul and the centre for thought and emotion.

However, it wasn't until the Middle Ages that the heart became associated with love and romance. The stylised heart shape was particularly connected to romantic poetry of the period. Though the symbol predates Christianity, it became popular with the rise of the church and depictions of the sacred heart of Christ, representing the love he had for mankind.

How the stylised heart took on this particular form is a matter of some debate. It bears little resemblance to an actual human heart, so some theories say it's a representation of other body parts—the curve of a woman's buttocks or breasts being the most popular guess. However, another theory is that the heart shape comes from the shape of silphium seed, a type of fennel that's been extinct for over two millennia. It only grew on the costal plateaus of Kyrenaika, and was believed by ancient Greeks to be a gift from Apollo. However, there's evidence it was used before that in Egypt and Libya as well. It was rare, resisted cultivation attempts, and so expensive that it was harvested to extinction. Its use: silphium was the main ingredient for the most effective natural birth-control medicine of its time. ●

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It's all good

What's happening here is positive, though it doesn't always take good forms

From afar, Nepal is looking good. That may shock and appall those of you queuing up to buy petrol, but it's true. The situation looks grim from Kathmandu but at a distance, one can see a rosy glow of hope, of dawn after a long night of discrimination and cynicism.

As I flew out of the erstwhile kingdom two weeks ago, the jaws of the capital's chattering classes were in overdrive. The tarai situation, Maoist nefariousness, secret king-led takeover conspiracies, an army coup, incompetence from the top down in the government, familiar scenes of a prime minister blithering while Lahan burned, the same old collection of high caste men

plotting to deny everyone their rights.

Why, I was at one party where someone was so upset by it all, he barely managed a second whisky

and had no appetite for the chicken momos. "It's, it's.....just wrong..." he sputtered...then grabbed a beaker of amber nectar and joined another conversation.

Nepal has always suffered from its elite's blinkered, close-up, stuck-in-the-moment vision. No distance, no history, no context, no hope. When you talk to the same people all the time, the conversation is bound to distill downwards. A spurious rumour you started last week is this week's absolute truth, next week's fallacious fact.

But as you move away from the crazed confines of the benighted Valley, time and space offer perspective. It all of a sudden seems almost comprehensible. What's going on around the country becomes logical and even a good thing.

What's not good is deaths, injuries, disrupted lives. So when I say that events in the tarai or elsewhere are to be welcomed, I exclude violence and its direct impact on people and families in the affected area. I do not however think there's anything wrong with a little discomfort and inconvenience in the capital. Too much comfort over the years has much to answer for here. That petrol line or the shivery dark moments during power cuts, think of them as opportunities to reflect upon what the Valley has, and the what rest of the country lacks.

That's what it is all about. People in the tarai are moving into the democratic space created by various Jana Andolans and demanding a share of it. They don't want empty promises or visions of equity and peace in some unspecific future. They want their space now, and they want lasting title to it. So does every other community in the country that has been left out while the top people of business, palace, and politics partied in Kathmandu.

Sitting in Canada, a diverse place that has had more than its share of aggrieved citizens, I feel Nepal's excluded masses are behaving logically. Just as the people of Quebec behaved here a generation ago. Basically they said "give us our share or we'll set up our own country". It's a tactic that worked beyond their wildest dreams. Quebec remains part of Canada but is both hugely autonomous and very influential in the country's federal system.

This is so obviously the way ahead for Nepal. The only way to meet the demands of all excluded groups is to move quickly towards a devolved, federal system of government, even in the interim before a new constitution. Give the people what they want, give it to them now. Share power and—crucially—share responsibility for governance.

Because you know what? That's exactly what's going to happen. Whether certain high caste men in Kathmandu like it or not. One way or another, federalism is coming, and soon. It's why Nepal is looking good. From a distance, anyway. ●



HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

MALLIKA ARYAL

The ambitious project to bring Himalayan glacial melt through a tunnel to augment the Valley's water supply is already seven years late, but it may be delayed further. Demand for water has far outstripped supply, and this dry season will see massive shortages.

The road to the Melamchi headworks (pictured) in Sindupalchok is almost complete. But before the 26.5km tunnel drilling can start, the government has to fulfil the condition of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to revise water distribution policy.

In January, the now-dissolved parliament passed a bill amending the Nepal Water Supply Corporation Act which terminated its control of the Valley's water supply system and brought in the British firm, Severn Trent Water, as a management contractor.

NWSC employees cut off water supply to Singha Darbar, Baluwatar and the royal palace in protest.

The ADB had wanted a Water Regulatory Board, Tariff Fixation Commission and the setting up of

This dry season Kathmandu will see a water shortage like never before

a private Kathmandu Water Limited (KWL). The conditions have been met. And when three other bidders withdrew, Severn Trent bagged the contract to manage the capital's water supply for six years for a total of \$8.5 million.

The reason for the present hurry seems to be that the ADB is reviewing its Melamchi loan in March, and this has stiffened political opposition to the deal.

"The government says Kathmandu's water distribution is not managed well, but why do we need a foreign company without any competition?" asks Prakash Rai, of the NC-D affiliated employees association still staging a sit-in outside NWSC office. A rival union affiliated to the UML has agreed to government assurance that jobs will be guaranteed, but Rai says there are loopholes.

The Melamchi Water Supply Development Board (MWSDB) says privatisation doesn't mean the NWSC is being sold to a

foreign company. "This is just a management contract, which means that the general, technical, and financial expertise is from a foreign company," explains the Board's Purna Das Shrestha.

He says Nepali companies weren't qualified enough to take up the job and Severn Trent showed its commitment by staying with the bidding process despite three bidding calls. A French and German company which had been short-listed withdrew.

Privatisation has its detractors, but Shrestha says Severn Trent will guarantee two hour water supply to 190,000 taps in Kathmandu in two years even before Melamchi is completed.

Regardless of whether or not Severn Trent takes over, there will be a water tariff hike. In 2004, the government decided to increase prices annually by 15 percent. For the last two years the tariff has remained the same, which means the next increase will be a whopping 30 percent. Consumers



MIN BAJRACHARYA

When parliament passed a bill to lease management of the capital's drinking water system to a private operator in January, and even though it



COMMENT
Ajaya Dixit

wasn't yet validated by the speaker, it created an uproar.

To look for answers to Nepal's urban water supply crisis, we need to go back to the murder of Ranodip Singh in the 1880s by his own cousins. This heralded the demise of the Jungs and rise of the Sumsheres. Prime Minister Bir Sumshere Rana summoned a British engineer to build a drinking water system in Kathmandu to expiate his sins.

Bir Dhara Works, which was

Pipe

completed in 1891, also served Phora Durbar, then a Rana palace. Modern technology had made inroads into a medieval kingdom as an item of luxury. At that time in the UK, private companies had already started making profit by serving piped drinking water to citizens.

Bir's successors, Chandra and Bhim, added more water to the system. Many foreign aid agencies supported expansion of the system after the 1950s. In the early 1970s, the World Bank became the main actor in managing Kathmandu's water supply and pumped in Rs 756 million in two decades. The Melamchi Project was selected as an option for Kathmandu's increasing needs in the mid-1980s. In the heydays of post-referendum Panchayat polity, the cliché was that Melamchi's clear water would flush the filth from the Bagmati. Later, leaders boasted they would wash Kathmandu's streets with Melamchi water.

In 1987, the then-government assigned Rastriya Panchayat member Birendra Keshari Pokharel to head a commission to study the water supply and sewerage situation in the main cities. His report showed poor quality of services, fiscal incontinence, and institutional haemorrhage. It recommended

public debate



paying Rs 50 for 10,000 litres will now have to pay Rs 66.

“Whether water can be considered a commodity is a debate in itself, but water and sanitation are public utilities. If they are to be looked after by

private companies, what then is the government going to do?” asks lawyer Bhola Nath Dhungana, who has researched Manila’s experience with water privatisation. In a country with a patchy history of privatisation,

handing over an essential commodity like water to the private sector is fraught with risks, he says, adding that it has failed in Bolivia, Argentina, and the Philippines.

NWSC’s Hari Prasad Dhakal says the state-owned company was never given a chance to prove itself. “Instead of interfering with NWSC, the government should have made it autonomous and freed it from political interference,” he says.

Experts say the government has never looked at alternatives to Melamchi. Just upgrading the ageing water mains and cutting back on leakage would augment supply by anywhere between 40 to 70 percent. Cutting back on waste by pricing could conserve water, and rain-harvesting would provide water for non-drinking use. Construction of reservoirs on the Valley rim to store monsoon runoff would be much less expensive than drilling a long tunnel.

“The problem of water scarcity did not arise overnight, and we have alternative ways of bringing in water besides Melamchi,” says Dhungana, “it’s not too late to look at them.” ●

dreams The politics of water during a political transition

that management be decentralised, leakages controlled, municipalities brought in, and a Pubic Utility Commission formed to hedge tariffs. Both the World Bank and the government ignored these recommendations.

Despite known institutional dysfunction, donors and the government continued to pump millions of rupees into the corporation. It was supposed to be autonomous but was a defacto government outfit. Its 1989 Act stipulated that the corporation should ‘comply with (government) directives’. Genetically, the corporation was designed to suit political manipulation and rent-seeking, and became a medium for dispensing patronage. In the mid-1990s, it was twinned with a British private water company to help build its management capacity. The program’s review in 1995 showed that very little had improved since 1987. It also recommended fiscal and administrative devolution, but these were also ignored.

The late 1980s saw the emergence of an ideology of corporate globalisation. Western governments and aid institutions imposed it as a panacea for nascent democracies, including Nepal, instead of helping nurture a plurality of

approaches to build competitive markets that would be regulated by socially-rooted institutions. The bureaucracy, adept at co-opting development jargon, remained faithful to its aid masters and became a champion of the free market. Without exploring other institutional modes, the government in 1998 constituted the High Level Private Sector Participation Committee to pave the way for a private operator to manage Kathmandu’s water supply.

By the mid 1990s the World Bank was dithering and a few years later would withdraw from the urban drinking water sector. In a 2002 interview with *Nepali Times* its Nepal representative, Ken Ohashi, admitted that the Bank’s investment had been flushed down the Bagmati.

Asked ‘What about Melamchi? Why are you not involved?’, Ohashi replied: ‘This is not a popular position in Kathmandu, where many people view Melamchi as the solution to all their water problems. We believe that important options have not been explored to utilise the water resources available within the Valley’. He also raised questions about Melamchi crowding out priority projects and equity concerns from a national perspective. Both questions have

remained unanswered. In a classic display of donor competition, the Asian Development Bank jumped in to fill the vacuum.

The story put out about a private water service provider in Kathmandu is a compilation of pious statements about how the world ought to be. But were alternatives piloted and lessons documented for up-scaling in the last ten years, or was the selected mode pushed as the only alternative? How should Nepali organisations be reformed?

Recent thinking on the governance of natural resources suggests that a mix of institutional styles—government, market, community initiatives—is necessary for the policy terrain to remain dynamic and stable. Competition, not selection of one institutional style, contributes to efficiency.

The decision on the nature of the mix is a political one, which is why Nepal’s interim parliament must enter the debate by first educating itself of past mistakes and examining alternative ways to provide citizens with basic services such as drinking water. Then it can propose principles for a re-structured Nepal. ●

Ajaya Dixit is a water analyst with Nepal Water Conservation Foundation.

Street burlesque

From spontaneity to manipulation to farce

The Hand recalls his first brush with protest in the kingdom, way back when crossing New Road was simple. Nepal Bank’s staff was on duty as usual, but fountain pens lay neatly on the desks and ledgers were firmly closed. Due to a grievance with management, I was politely informed, a ‘Pen Down’ strike was in effect.

It’s been downhill ever since. Nepal Banda, Chakka Jam, Julius, Nakka Banda, shoot-on-sight curfews, and school closures ad nauseum are now so entrenched in the national psyche, they are considered normal. Demonstrators and police throwing bricks at each other is now a national sport, and self-righteous anger the latest intoxicant of choice.



MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

Jana Andolan I and the triumph of democracy in 1990 was the last time any of this made sense. Protest had the people’s support, hope for a

better future seemed justified, and the party leaders were yet to squander their prestige. (Hard to imagine now, I know.) The unity of purpose was thrilling; surely no cause since then can be termed truly popular.

The ensuing parade of minority governments introduced the nation to protest as farce. Politicians in power one day were manning barricades the next, causing many of us to lose track of who was calling or thwarting the endless series of bandas. Callous disregard for working people and their need to support their families led to cynicism and disillusionment, as the trust invested in our once-heroic leaders was wantonly betrayed. That very few still supported these absurd antics didn’t deter the parties, who hired busloads of villagers at Rs 100 a head to yell slogans in the capital. As the demonstrations grew more stage-managed and less meaningful, several low points stand out in the collective memory.

An alarming fusion of tackiness and menace was fashioned when a false report in an obscure newspaper brought Bollywood onto the scene. An actor’s purported dissing of Nepal saw an explosion of unprecedented lunacy, adding another fear to our growing repertoire of concerns. The havoc wreaked during these ‘Hrithik Roshan’ riots was so obviously manipulated by agents provocateurs, with a cast of goondas on call, it became painfully clear civil breakdown was only a misquote away. In a nation at war, any disruption to society was a tactical victory; the chance to target Indians and their businesses was simply the gravy.

The tragic murder of innocent Nepali workers in Iraq set off another shocking explosion. The news broke in the night, allowing plenty of time for orchestrating a riot next morning. Burning tyres, appearing at key intersections like clockwork, brought the city to a standstill as organised mobs plundered employment agencies and attacked anything associated with Islam. The sight of computers and office furniture tossed out of windows as the crowd went wild added low comedy to a display already surreal, while illustrating that any of us could be the next scapegoat.



KIRAN PANDAY

When the mob vandalised mosques, shattering a timeless tradition of tolerance, they disgraced the entire country. The Hand was surely not alone in realising that society had been hijacked by those without shame or scruples.

Detailing the multitude of protests unleashed on the citizens would be as tiresome as the events themselves. But we all have our favourites, certain riots that evoke the fin-de-siecle spirit of collapse more poetically than most. The Hand’s current choice broke out when the school board detected leaked examination papers just before a major test. The students rose up as one to defend their inherent right to cheat, breaking furniture and ransacking the principle’s office to convey their point.

To protest is a human right, but it loses validity when manipulated by cynical politicians whose sole agenda is gaining access to the troughs of power and money. The scheming politicisation of everything has left little that is sacred, and made a mockery of the people’s valid aspirations for a better life. ●

Kyoto can be made to work

Climate change has become a 'threshold issue.' Deny the evidence, ignore the problem, and you look like a Luddite. The International Panel on Climate Change's new report confirms the scientific consensus: global warming is happening and its consequences will be severe, unless action is taken.



COMMENT
David Miliband

The European Commission proposes unilateral cuts of 20 percent in European emissions from 1990 levels. The U.S. Senate is considering four similar bills.

The British government will soon present a landmark Climate Change Bill mandating CO₂ emission reductions of 60 percent from 1990 levels by 2050. All this is welcome. But the biggest issue has yet to be confronted: how to forge an equitable global compact that sustains the development aspirations of poorer countries and contributes to the battle against climate change.

Consider the facts framing this debate. At the moment, the United States accounts for 25 percent of global emissions and the European Union 14 percent. Per capita, emissions from developing countries (accounting for 5 billion of the world's 6 billion people) are a

fraction of that. But by 2020, total emissions from developing countries, led by India and China, will be greater than emissions from the industrialized world. How world leaders deal with this evolution will determine how well we cope with global warming.

In discussing these issues, developing countries have traditionally cleaved to a simple view: developed countries caused the problem, and it's theirs to solve. By the same token, developing nations have a right to develop, climate change or not. Any global agreement dealing with our shared problems, then, must acknowledge two principles. First, not

only have developed countries indeed caused the problem, but it's they that possess the greatest capacity to reduce emissions. Second, by a cruel irony, developing countries will suffer the most from climate change. They therefore have a strong incentive to seek development that protects the natural environment. I call this "leapfrogeconomics."

For the poorer countries in the world, development is, rightly, nonnegotiable. But there's a critical choice. Will that development be high-carbon or low-carbon? A leapfrog economy will embrace the latter without passing through decades of traditional, high-carbon industrialization. That choice will, in turn, essentially be about heat, electricity and transport. In all three areas there are examples from developing countries that show what is possible. China has well over 50 percent of the world's installed solar thermal water heating; India leads the developing world in wind power; in Brazil ethanol car fuel has displaced \$120 billion worth of oil.

Today we have a great new advantage in promoting such green technologies. That's because, when it comes to the trade-off between environment and development, finance may not be the problem it traditionally has been. Here is why.

When developed countries take on emissions-reduction commitments, they can either reduce their own emissions, or pay for low-carbon energy investments in the developing world. Under the Kyoto Protocol, for instance, the European Emissions Trading Scheme allocates emissions allowances to companies operating in the EU. They are allowed to trade those allowances and, subject to an

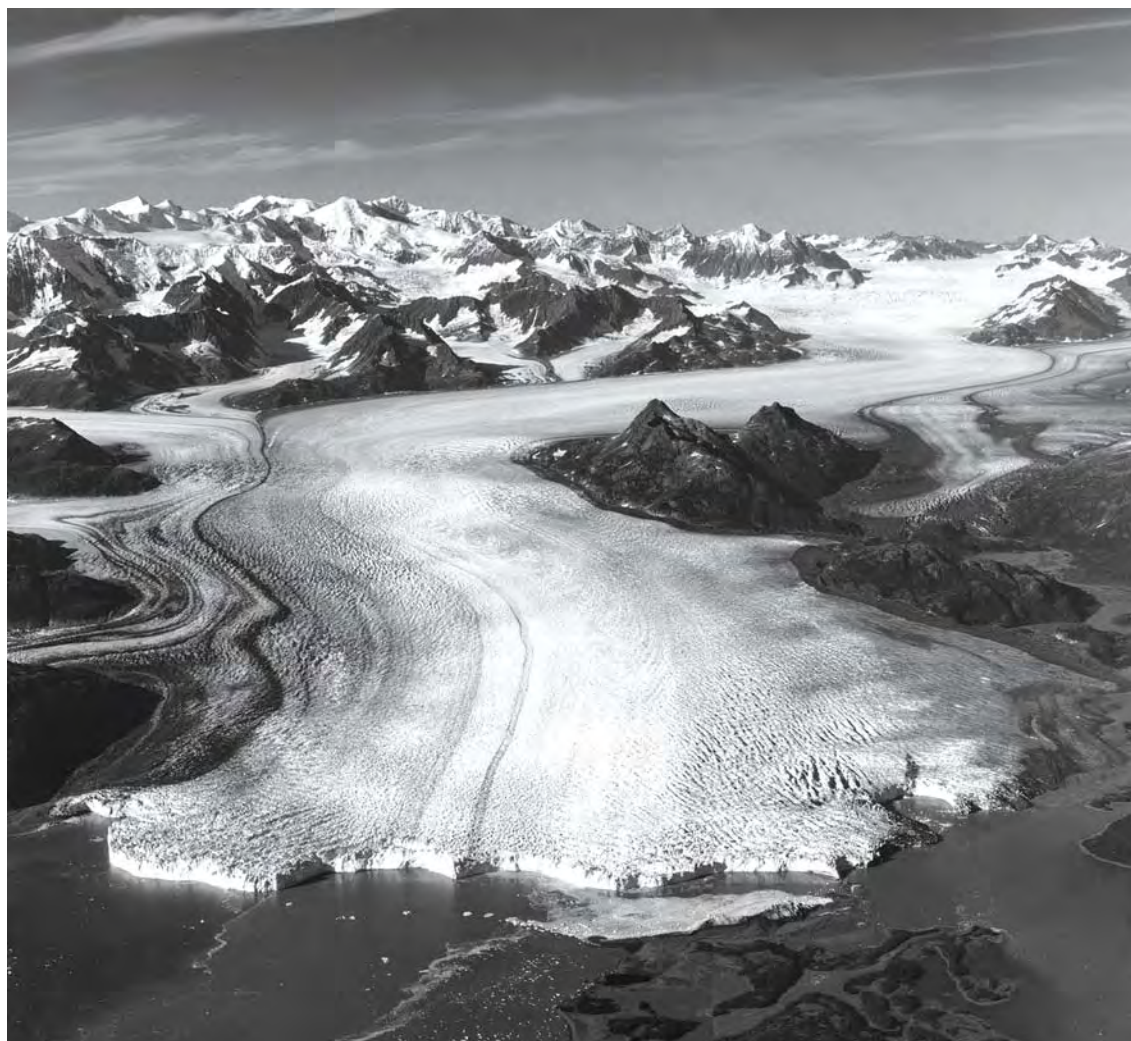
overall limit, purchase credits from emission-reduction projects around the world.

This has created a lively international market in carbon finance. Already there are some \$3 billion in established global carbon-trading funds. By the end of the decade this market is projected to be \$40 billion annually. Obviously, the larger the carbon-reduction commitments that industrial nations take on, the greater this figure will be. If all industrialized countries took on emissions-reduction commitments of 60 to 80 percent, according to the UN, and if they purchased half of their reductions in the developing world, and if the carbon price were at least \$10 per ton, then the global financial flows would be of the order of \$100 billion per year.

This sort of money could help bridge the gap between high- and low-carbon development. It could help fund the extra cost from carbon capture and storage technology that reduce emissions from coal-fired power stations by 85 percent. It could make the difference for governments choosing between "cheaper" fossil-fuel power plants and more expensive hydroelectric projects. It could help make solar power a reality.

Of course, carbon finance alone will not be sufficient. Technology cooperation, higher product-efficiency standards, and adaptation to climate changes are vital. But it is a big headstart. The stakes are high. Unless developed countries take a lead, there will be no progress. But without developing countries as part of the solution, the problem will get worse. We are all in this together. ●

David Miliband is a British Labour Party MP and secretary of State for Environment.



Weathering this storm

Climate change is serious, but not worth the current hysteria

The United Nations' climate panel, the IPCC, issued a new report last week. The hysterical coverage in media suggests that global warming is worse than we had imagined, and that we need to take swift and strong action now. That is misinformation.



OPINION
Bjorn Lomborg

The IPCC report is a good summary of what the world's scientists know about global warming. Unlike the Bush administration, which was caught downplaying the science, the IPCC squarely tells us that mankind is largely responsible for the planet's recent warming. Unlike Al Gore, who has travelled the world warning that our cities might soon be under the oceans, it refrains from scaremongering.

But this report is no direr than the IPCC's last one in 2001. In two important

ways, it is actually less so. The report reflects the fact that since 2001, scientists have become more certain that humans are largely responsible for global warming. But the estimates of temperature increases, heat waves, and cold waves are nearly identical to those produced six years ago.

Two surprising facts in the report went unmentioned. First, scientists have changed their estimates of how much sea levels will rise. In the 1980's, America's Environmental Protection Agency expected oceans to rise by several metres by 2100. By the 1990's, the IPCC was expecting a 67cm rise. Six years ago, the figure was 48.5 cm. In this year's report, the estimated rise is 38.5 cm on average.

This rejects one of the most harrowing scenes from Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, which graphically demonstrates how a 20ft rise in the sea level would inundate much of Florida, Shanghai, and Holland. The IPCC report makes it clear that such frightening exaggerations have no basis in science.

The report reveals the improbability of another scenario vividly depicted by Gore and in the Hollywood film *The Day After Tomorrow*—that global warming could make the Gulf Stream shut down, turning Europe into a new Siberia—saying it is "very unlikely." Even if the Gulf Stream were to weaken over the century, this would be good, as there would be less net warming over land areas.

The climate panel is by statute "politically neutral"—it is supposed to tell us just the facts and leave the rest to politicians and the people who elect them. This is why the report is a careful and sensible document. But scientists and journalists, acting as intermediaries between the report and the public, have engaged in greenhouse activism.

Climate change is a real and serious problem. But some seem to believe that no new report or development is enough if it doesn't reveal more serious consequences and more terrifying calamities than considered before.

The media frenzy has little or no scientific backing. One of England's foremost climatologists, Mike Hulme, director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, says green militancy and megaphone journalism use "catastrophe and chaos as unguided weapons with which forlornly to threaten society into behavioural change ... we need to take a deep breath and pause."

A 38.5 cm rise in the ocean's levels is a problem, but will not bring down civilisation. Last century, sea levels rose by half that amount without most of us even noticing. The UN tells us we can do virtually nothing to affect climate change before 2030. So let's ask the hard question: what other issues should we focus on so we can help real people improve their lives and resilience to better deal with the world's challenges.

When Nobel Laureate economists recently weighed how to achieve the most good for the world the recent Copenhagen Consensus project, they found that HIV/AIDS, malaria, malnutrition, and trade barriers should be tackled long before any dramatic action on climate change. This helps more than baseless fury. ●

(Project Syndicate)

Bjorn Lomborg is the organiser of Copenhagen Consensus and adjunct professor at Copenhagen Business School.

Ryszard Kapuscinski, journalist

VICTORIA BRITTAIN

For Ryszard Kapuscinski, who died last month aged 74, journalism was a mission, not a career, and he spent much of his life, happily, in uncomfortable and obscure places, many of them in Africa, trying to convey their essence to a continent far away. No one was more surprised than him when, in his mid-40s, he suddenly became extremely successful, with his books translated into 30 languages. He won literary prizes in Germany, France, Canada, Italy, the US, and was made journalist of the century in Poland.

Kapuscinski was born in Pinsk, now in Belarus, and in 1945 was taken to Poland by his mother, searching for his soldier father. War as the norm for life was deep in his young psyche after those early years of ceaseless hunger, cold, sudden deaths, noise and terror, with no shoes, no home, no books in school. Decades later he wrote: "We who went through the war know how difficult it is to convey the truth about it to those for whom that experience is, happily, unfamiliar. We know how language fails us, how often we feel helpless, how the experience is, finally, incommunicable."

After university in Warsaw, where he studied history, he found his metier as a 23-year-old trainee journalist on a youth journal. A story exposing mismanagement and drunkenness in a showcase steel factory set off a political firestorm that sent him into hiding. He was vindicated and sent abroad as a treat, to India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, the first Polish journalist to have that opportunity. Later he moved to the Polish News Agency (PAP), and stayed there until 1981.

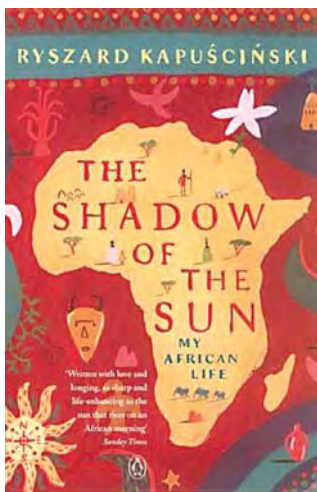
In 1957, he went to Africa, and returned there as often as possible over the next 40 years. He covered the whole continent, including 27 revolutions and coups, and was exhilarated by the feeling he was in at history in the making. He and his employers had no money, but he was a deal maker who often had the contacts to help other journalists who did have the money to hire planes, and thus both arrived at the scene of the latest drama. "Africa was my youth," he said later, describing how much the continent had meant to him.

In his early years as a journalist he developed the technique of two notebooks: one allowed him to earn his living with the bread and butter of agency reporting of facts, while the other was filled with the experiences he too modestly believed incommunicable, but which became his famous books, such as *The Emperor* (1978), on the fall of the extraordinary Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. It was his first book to be translated into English, and Jonathan Miller, who adapted it for the Royal Court Theatre in 1985, called it "an extraordinary representation of ornamental tyranny."

Before *The Emperor*, he wrote perhaps his best book, *Another Day of Life* (1976), a unique and closely observed account of the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in Angola, which he described as "a very personal book, about being alone and lost". He was the only foreign journalist, and the only person from eastern Europe, in Luanda in the chaotic and fearful summer of 1975.

Among his other books was *Shah of Shahs* (1982), on the last days of the Shah of Persia, and collections such as *The Soccer War* (1978), *The Shadow of the Sun* (1998) and, closer to home, *Imperium* (1993), essays and reportage on the Soviet Union, and five volumes of essays and poems. A sixth was due to be published soon.

All his writing about developing countries came out of his lived experience there. It was the ring of authenticity



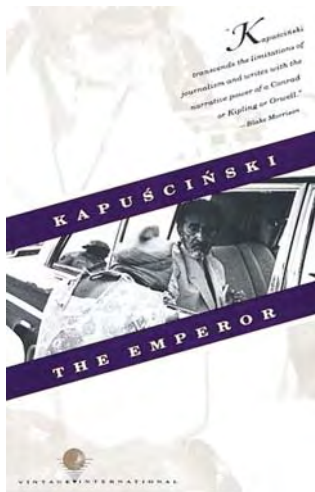
that made him as popular among African and Latin American intellectuals as at home in Poland. They all recognised his portraits of the mechanism of dictatorial rule, as well as appreciating his ease and empathy with ordinary people's lives. The Polish film-maker Andrzej Wajda made him his model for the journalist in his film *Rough Treatment* (1978).

Adam Low who made a film with Kapuscinski for the BBC in 1987, says the author had "a unique ability to focus on the telling object—the key he was given in Moscow to a flat in Azerbaijan, the egg he boiled daily in a kettle at the malaria clinic in Tanzania. He could be very funny, about the pomposity of British colonial officials in West Africa or the grandiosity of the Shah of Iran, and equally chilling about the bodies washed up in Lake Victoria during the final days of Amin."

Kapuscinski described his own work as "literary reportage". And, although he was personally a modest man, he believed in its importance for understanding the world. "Without trying to enter other ways of looking, perceiving, describing, we won't understand anything of the world." The European mind, he believed, was often too lazy to make the intellectual effort to see and understand the real world, dominated by the complex problems of poverty, and far away from the manipulated world of television.

In the last years of his life he spent a considerable amount of time lecturing in Mexico, often with his friend Gabriel García Márquez. He spoke always about the

importance of reportage, and delivered stinging attacks on news as a commodity, and on the flying "special correspondents" who report on instant drama without context or follow up. He hated what he called the "metamorphosis of the media". The value of news in his day, he said, had nothing to do with profits, but was the stuff of political struggle, and the search for truth. ● (The Guardian)



Kapuscinski on Kapuscinski

On his genre: Very difficult to describe. We have such a mixture now, such a fusion of different genres... in the American tradition you'd call it New Journalism. This implies writing about the facts, the real facts of life, but using the techniques of fiction

writing, in my case, because I'm trying to put more elements of the essay into my writing. My writing is a combination of three elements. The first is travel not like a tourist, but as exploration, as concentration, as a purpose. The second is reading literature on the subject: books, articles, scholarship. The third is reflection, which comes from travel and reading.

On 'Aesopian writing':

[When I started writing in Poland in the late 1950s] we were trying to use all the available possibilities, because there wasn't any underground. Underground literature only began in the 70s, when technical developments made it possible. Before that, we were involved in a game with the censors. That was our struggle. *The Emperor* is considered to be an Aesopian book in Poland and the Soviet Union.... not about Ethiopia or Haile Selassie—rather, it's about the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The First

Secretary at the time was very much the emperor with his court, and everybody read the book as being about him and the Central Committee.

Of course the authorities knew what it was about, and so it had a very small circulation, and it was forbidden to turn it into a film or a play. Aesopian language was used by all of us. And of course, using this language meant having readers who understood it.

The limitation of sources under the Communists had a very political effect on reading. People had just one book, and nothing else—no television or other diversions—so they just read the same book very carefully several times. Readership was high, and very attentive. It was people's only source of knowledge about the world. The tradition of Russian literature is also an eastern tradition of learning poetry and prose by heart. This is the most intimate relationship between literature and its readers: they treat the text as a part of themselves, as a possession. This art of reading, reading the text behind the text, is missing now.

On first arriving in Africa: My first trip to Africa came when the first countries south of the Sahara became independent, in 1958. Most correspondents came from the former colonial powers — there were British, French, and a lot of Italians, because there were a lot of Italian communities there. And of course there were a lot of Russians.

We all cooperated, all of us, East and West, regardless of country, because the working conditions were really terrible. We always moved in groups from one coup d'état to another, from one war to another... So if there was a coup d'état of leftist orientation in some country I took my Western colleagues with me and said "look, let them come in," and if there was one of rightist orientation they took me, saying "no, he's okay, give him a visa please, he's going with us, he's our friend," and so on.

To send the news out, there was no e-mail, nothing: telex was the only means, but telex was very rare in Africa. So if somebody was flying to Europe, we gave him correspondence, to send after he arrived. There was nothing: no cigarettes, no food, nothing...

The difference at that time was that this was a group of highly specialized people. They were real Africanists, and not only from experience. If you read articles from that time in *Le Monde*, in *The Times*, you'll find that the authors really had background, a knowledge of the subject. It was a very highly qualified sort of journalism — we were all great specialists. ●

ABOUT TOWN

VALENTINE'S DAY

- ❖ **Spark** the flame of passion at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Radisson Hotel on Valentine's Day.
- ❖ **Valentine's specials** and exotic cocktails at the Roadhouse cafe, Thamel 4262768, Bhatbhateni 4426587 and Pulchok 5521755
- ❖ **L'amour** with a free rose and Irish coffee on Valentine's Day at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4700043
- ❖ **Romance by the fireside** with a free rose and chocolate soufflé on Valentine's Day at Kilroy's, Thamel, 4250440
- ❖ **Valentine's dinner** with live music by Side B at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's, Rs 2,500 per couple. 4479488
- ❖ **Love Poem** recitations at the Rimal Natakghar, Gurukul, on Valentine's Day, 2PM onwards, Rs 50 entrance. 4466956
- ❖ **Candle-lit dinner** this Valentine's Day at the Baithak, Shangri-La Hotel, Rs 2,000 per couple. 4412999
- ❖ **Valentine's Day** at Le Meridien Kathmandu, Rs 6,000 including accommodation, lunch, and a special candle light dinner, Rs 1,500 for dinner only. 4451212
- ❖ **Valentine's Dinner** at Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency, 6.30 PM onwards, Rs 5,000 per couple. 4491234
- ❖ **Live music** by Rashmi Singh and the Kitcha Band at the Absolute bar, Hotel Narayani, 8PM onwards. 5521406



EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **My World, My View 1** exhibition of photos by underprivileged children, until 13 February at the British Council from 9AM-5.30 PM. 4410798

EVENTS

- ❖ **An Inconvenient Truth** a film by Davis Guggenheim, presented by the FSA Film Club at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 9 February, 5PM. 5542544
- ❖ **Eco Walk** to Changu Narayan, fund-raiser for Antardristi Nepal on 10 February, 10AM-4PM, Rs 700 for admissions, including lunch and transport. 4424017
- ❖ **In the Mood for Love** a film by Wong Kar-Wai, screened by the KFS at Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikutimandap, 11 February, 5.30 PM
- ❖ **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

MUSIC

- ❖ **Jamm** at Jatra with Jerry Julian and the Power of Joy, on 10 February from 7PM, Rs 200. 4256622
- ❖ **Classical music concert** with Shalil Shankar and Navaraj Gurung on 14 February at the Nepal Academy Hall, at 5.15 PM, Rs 100 entry. 9851078663
- ❖ **Fusion and classical Nepali music** by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien, Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Gaine (Gandarbas)** perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680080

DINING

- ❖ **Light nouvelle snacks** and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La'Soon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- ❖ **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. 4412999
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **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

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

YAK YETI YAK

by MIKU



Quest Entertainment



A series of episodes that centre around life at a traffic signal, the movie traces the lives of those that make a living off the signal, including the boss of the signal, a young girl who works the signal hawking traditional outfits, a prostitute, a drug-addict, and a variety of other assorted characters, who breathe life into the film.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal
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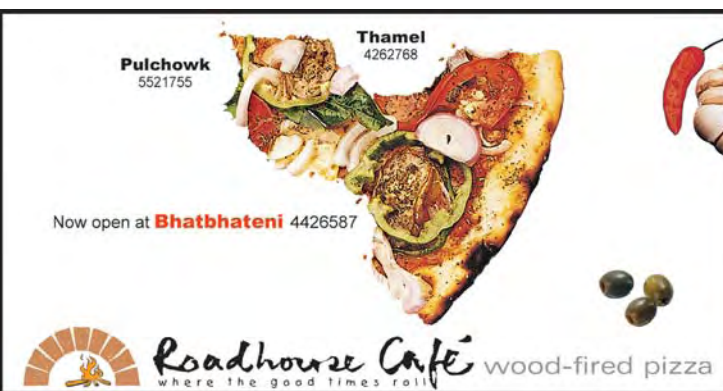
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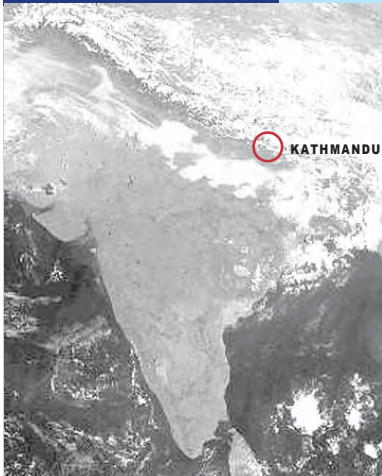


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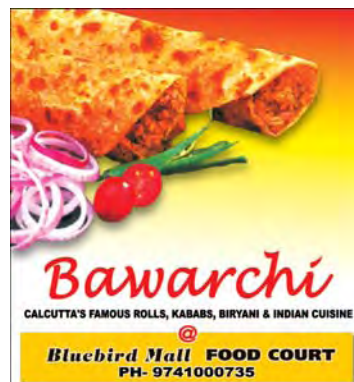
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



KATHMANDU VALLEY



The month-and-a-half long drought finally ended on Tuesday, when we pretty much averaged monthly quota of rain for February. The same thing happened in December, when a single burst of rain brought up the average for the month to normal, though the rest of the days remained dry. Thursday afternoon's satellite pictures show fragmented clouds over the Himalaya and a low-cloud blanket in the southern plain. The weekend will bring sunny intervals in the mountains and weak sunshine in the plains. Expect the mornings in the Valley to get colder again due to the clear nights.



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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KIRAN PANDAY

ON GUARD: A female Maoist cadre waits outside Royal Singhi Hotel in Kamladi during Pushpa Kamal Dahal's press conference last Thursday on the madhesi rights protests in the tarai unrest.



KUMAR SHRESTHA

HELP US HELP YOU: Maoist cadres at Basantapur on Thursday solicit donations to support their central-level public meeting next week at which party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal is scheduled to speak.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

SOLIDARITY: Journalists hold a protest vigil at the Maitighar mandala on Sunday to protest the beating of four journalists in Biratnagar that same morning.



KIRAN PANDAY

YOUNG ACHIEVERS: The winners of VOW magazine's annual Top Ten College Women Competiton take the stage at a function in their honour at Yak and Yeti Hotel on Sunday.

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Venue:- St.Xavier's School Godavari
Mela Time:- 10 am - 4 pm

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War in the time of cholera

The triple massage that departing passengers get during security check at Tribhuban International Airport has by now become legendary. There is the full-body massage at the luggage xray, then one is subjected to the **butt pat** at the departure hall and finally the full-frontal fondling on the tarmac before you board. Having been at the receiving end of all this ayurvedic kneading during a recent foray, the Ass couldn't help giggling, or whatever it is that donkeys do when they're tickled.

But if any of you thought Maoist extortion was getting too much, then you haven't yet seen extortion by policemen on duty at the security check at the airport. That mandatory massage is not free.

Police extortion at the airport security check has got so bad that the Japanese embassy has put up a notice at the xray queue in Japanese to warn its nationals to beware of the wallet search. This prominently displayed notice says, in part: "Except the airport tax, no one has the authority to demand any other payment from you at this airport. If anyone asks you for money answer with a firm 'No'. Report all incidents by calling the embassy at 4426680..."

That should've done the trick. But recently a relative of a European envoy returning after a visit to Nepal had to fork out cash to the frisker. Now, how about notices also in French, German, Spanish, and (as long as we are at it) **Czech**?



Our formerly-subterranean comrades are still finding it difficult to get used to life above ground and slip back into some of their ultra-radical jargon. That's what recently happened to Comrade Gaurav aka CP Gajurel in New Delhi for a conclave of regional revolutionaries at that cradle of subcontinental Maoism, JNU.

For the record, let it be known that this time he was not travelling on a forged British passport but a Nepali citizenship certificate. Anyway, to cut a long story short, knowing that the People's War Group delegates at the conference would be accusing the Nepalis of abandoning the revolution and compromising with the devil Gajurel pre-empted it all by declaring that the **Mau-Mau** was increasing its men under arms from 10,000 to 37,000 to launch an "urban uprising". And in dramatic doublespeak he added: "We are going to elections to ensure that the results are in our favour, if the opposition captures one booth we will capture five." And that's an exact quote.



It's a grand tradition in Nepali politics to pass the buck. Our politicians never miss the opportunity to exhibit opportunism especially when the faeces hits the fan as it did recently in what has come to be known as the **Jaundice Kanda**. The donkey now has evidence it wasn't jaundice, or hepa-B, or typhoid but the dreaded cholera. A pale looking Foreign Minister Oli was medevaced to Bangkok for treatment, and now there is the mother of all the buck-passing about sewerage contaminating Baluwatar.

The present government has blamed past governments for neglect, the politicians blame the doctors for inaccurate diagnosis, the bureaucrats blame the engineers, Comrade Makunay has blamed the government of which he is a partner and communist stalwart Lila Mani Pokhrel just threw up his hands and was observed praying fervently at a saptaha in Chitwan.

As far as the Ass can tell, no one has yet blamed faecal contamination. After all, if one mixes excreta with H₂O and calls the relevant authority the "Department of Sewarage and Water Supply" what do you expect?

ass@nepalitimes.com



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