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Weekly Internet Poll # 342

Q. Is the business community right to call a strike?

Total votes: 4,505



Yes 63.3%

No 35.4%

Don't know/can't say 1.3%

Weekly Internet Poll # 343. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Will the Maoists join the interim government in the next couple of weeks?

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OBLIVIOUS: Parliament didn't meet on Thursday, as talks continued about the CPN-M joining the interim government, but lawmakers should be planning for a longer interim phase.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Before the flurry

Start preparing for a longer interim period

KIRAN NEPAL

When the interim government is finally complete, the 7+1 parties will face more challenges: postponing the constituent assembly elections and creating conditions for a later, but freer and fairer, election. With the delay comes a longer transitional period and a new set of concerns.

"Elections in June are impossible, but the political parties just want someone else to say it," says former home secretary Sri Kanta Regmi. A high-ranking source told us the government is ready to announce the delay after Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala returns from the SAARC summit in New Delhi on 5 April.

But the next date being looked at is not in November, after the festive season, but July-August, for fear that a longer transition

will heighten instability and give 'regressive forces' a fillip. "What with the major struggles between the political parties, the palace, and those who would interfere, it's starting to look a lot like 1950," says political analyst Shri Bhadra Sharma, referring to the CA elections announced by King Tribhuban that never took place.

A longer interregnum will affect the timeline in the comprehensive peace agreement, especially on the Maoist army and arms management process, the seven-party agreement, and the international community's engagement with Nepal. A sluggish economy and worsening law and order are further complications.

Resolution of major issues such as federalism and the status of the royal family—long-term solutions for which are the mandate of the CA—will be

delayed. The association of foreign interference with the madhes movement and royalist manoeuvres will continue. Demands for equal representation and securing the rights of ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities will also rise.

The Maoist army and arms management process will have to be retooled to ensure that verified combatants stay in the camps. Politically, the delay helps the CPN-M condone some of its cadres' more anti-social behaviour, like extortion and intimidation.

The economy is in shambles, which could spark further instability. There is a supply crisis, inflation is on the rise, revenue collection is down, and customs posts have been weakened by the madhes movement. The business community is feeling the strain of a weak security situation.

Alliances between the seven parties are being renegotiated. Bargaining over portfolios has deepened the UML-NC divide, and driven the moderate socialists closer to the Maoists.

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A tale of two MPs

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At the local level mainstream parties will have to factor in the growing strength of regional groups. Relations between workers of the seven parties and Maoist cadres remain shaky and issues like the return of internally displaced people will have to be negotiated through the local units proposed by the interim constitution. ●

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NEPALI
Times

editors@nepalitimes.com
www.nepalitimes.com

Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Editor: **Kunda Dixit**
Executive Editor: **Anagha Neelakantan**
Design: **Kiran Maharjan** Web: **Rupendra Kayastha**
Director Sales and Marketing: **Sunaina Shah** marketing@himalmedia.com
Circulation Manager: **Samir Maharjan** sales@himalmedia.com
Subscription: subscription@himalmedia.com, 5011628/29
Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018



Now, IDEA MANAGEMENT

The peace process, which had been moving in fits and starts, is now having one of its fits.

A prolonged deadlock over the interim government has brought things to a standstill again. It hasn't exactly gone into reverse gear, but there is no forward movement either.

That the Constituent Assembly election can't be held as scheduled in June is now a foregone conclusion. And despite the crocodile tears the 7+1 are shedding about it, this suits everyone just fine.

What is much more serious is that they all fiddled while the tarai burned just so they'd have an excuse for a poll postponement. This is political cynicism at its worst, and most dangerous.

Nepal's paranoid politicians are masters at the game of playing victim. They blame everyone but themselves for bad governance, inability to deliver development, and for all-round fecklessness. We blame the royals, India, militant Madhesis, but never ourselves for letting things get out of hand.

The most appalling and dangerous display of calculated victimhood was the mass funeral at Pashupati of 18 Maoists last week. No doubt, it was the most macabre massacre even by the brutal standards of the past 12 years of conflict. And if anyone had any illusions, it proved that the ceasefire of the past year in the rest of the country has never applied to the eastern tarai. The Maoist cult of martyrdom seen at the funeral could easily have gone awfully wrong if it had lit the spark of ethnic retaliation in the hills. It is a tribute to the traditional tolerance of Nepalis that they refused to be provoked. A majority of those who were watching the funeral from the sidewalks felt that the Maoists were reaping the whirlwind.

Latent ethnic prejudices when stirred up by politics can be an explosive mixture. Those who want to provoke an ethno-separatist war in this country can easily use violence to breed more violence.

As a party that is about to enter the government, it doesn't behoove the Maoists to show such gross capriciousness.

It is in the interest of the Nepali people that we assist the CPN-M to make a smooth transition from an underground guerrilla force to a political party. The sooner that happens the easier it will be for everyone to accept them in an interim government. But it will be difficult to trust a group that is still beating up people who don't pay extortion money, threatening to take the lives of newspaper editors, decimating forests, and refusing to return confiscated property.

We've had an 'arms management'. Now the Maoists need to agree to 'ideological management' by formally renouncing violence and intimidation as a political tactic.

Only this will engender trust, expedite their entry into government, ensure free and fair elections, and prevent the peace process from derailing.



KIRAN PANDAY

Boomerang

The Maoists and the MJF have lost ground, but the ideals that drove them remain important

The Gaur killings are turning out to be a watershed in national politics. They raise two important questions: Do the Maoists now want constituent assembly elections in June? What will happen of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum?



EYES WIDE SHUT
Sheetal Kumar

Gaur seems to have given the Maoists the perfect excuse to not only stay away from an interim government but also to delay elections to the constituent assembly. Pushpa Kamal Dahal's ultimatum and the Maoists' recent central office meeting must be seen in this light. This may be no more than posturing to influence delicate negotiations on division of spoils. But it

could also be a serious rethink in strategy, because joining an interim government now and pressing for June elections could ultimately obliterate them.

The Maoists may be stupid, but not that stupid that they don't see which way the wind is blowing. An election in June would most likely cut them down to size because of the erosion of support in the madhesi and janajati constituencies. Thanks to their blunder in Lahan and the apparent foot-in-mouth disease afflicting their senior leadership, the Maoist sense of their own invincibility has been destroyed. Moreover, if they were to join an interim government now, they would be seen as just another establishment party, further alienating key constituencies.

It doesn't make sense that they would want elections now, when their support is at its lowest? Is it not plausible, then, that their latest threats are nothing more than preparing the grounds to both stay out of government and delay the assembly elections? The killing of 28 of their cadres in Gaur and Prime Minister Koirala's reluctance to part with high-power ministries have given the Maoists the perfect excuses to wriggle out of their commitments.

The irony is that the Maoists are blaming the dismal security situation, as exemplified by Gaur, for their troubles. But it is they, more than anyone else, who must take the blame. They hindered police deployment, formed parallel policing mechanisms, and continued with threats and intimidation, all of which wrecked security. Now

those actions have boomeranged on them. Instead of them hounding other groups, the Maoists are themselves being gone after by outfits like the MJF.

Where does all this—the last week in—particular—leave the MJF? In tatters, to say the least. This was a group that leapt out of nowhere to lead the recent legitimate madhesi movement. But Upendra Yadav's obstinacy and his gambler's instinct have wrecked the standing of the MJF. Already, political influence in the tarai is shifting from the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from its fold. Yadav has compounded the problem by going into hiding. From a legitimate group that was repeatedly invited for talks by the government, the MJF is now being treated as a common criminal gang. Talk about a reversal of fortunes.

The recent troubles of both the Maoists and MJF show that nothing is certain—or permanent—in politics. Both these groups can still reclaim lost ground. But that prospect looks dim now, at least for the foreseeable future. The Maoists will need years of hard work to address the deficiencies caused by their arrogant behaviour and serious internal policy flaws. The MJF will need to work twice as hard to prove that it is indeed a genuine group and not one led by fundamentalist and regressive elements. But even as these two groups today stand discredited, it would be wise to remember that the original ideas that propelled them—social and political inclusion, and genuine sense of madhesi alienation—have not been rejected. Forgetting that will mean trouble. ●

Spring cleaning

It's time Girija Koirala told New Delhi a thing or two

New Delhi - The imperial centre of South Asia is warming up as it prepares to welcome SAARC heads of state and government. India's disturbed neighbourhood keeps its foreign ministry babus perpetually on their toes.

In Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers have become even more audacious, directly attacking air force bases. Bangladesh has a technocratic government under the



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

guardianship of defence forces. In Pakistan, over two-thirds of practicing lawyers don't recognise the appointment of an acting chief justice on the grounds that the previous head of the judiciary has been unlawfully made inactive.

Nepal's peace process is the success story Indian diplomats have been citing to gain American approval for their hegemony in the subcontinent. As the process threatens to unravel, New Delhi's official

circles are increasingly worried.

Unofficial Nepal 'experts', however, are sanguine. Conventional wisdom among those former diplomats, ambassador wannabes, and journalists who frequent the India International Centre is that the madhes uprising has saved Nepal from falling into the hands of the Maoists. According to this interpretation, the seven-party alliance had completely surrendered to Pushpa Kamal Dahal's bullying tactics. Upendra Yadav saved them by directly challenging the Maoists. "The MJF has prevented Maoists from taking over the state from the backdoor of Baluwatar," said one such busybody.

In civil society circles, Nepal's people power is still being celebrated. There is little worry here that there are high chances of a rightist backlash should the peace process falter. Some influential donors would no doubt love to have a technocratic government—obviously under the thumb of the army—conducting make-believe constituent assembly elections to legitimise the status quo. The Indians seem to realise the futility of such an exercise in

a volatile country, though. That is perhaps why they don't seem to be too worried about the June deadline. Prime Minister Koirala will probably be told to prioritise peace over elections.

But no matter what Nepal's friends, neighbours, and overlords say, the choices that the seven-party alliance makes will continue to be more important than what the Maoist or MJF leaders say or do. Koirala has a lot more freedom than other leaders in South Asia for a simple reason—so far his hunches have proved to be more correct than all the learned analyses sponsored by donor agencies.

It's almost a year since the April Uprising put Nepal's three important players in their proper places. People poured out in the streets to push King Gyanendra to the margin. They told mainstream parties to stop bickering at least until elections to the constituent assembly were over. The lesson for the Maoists was even more unambiguous: they were told to commit themselves unequivocally to peaceful politics.

But somebody somewhere forgot to

draft a missive from the people of Nepal to the government of India, the often unseen but important player of power politics in Nepal. When Koirala comes visiting next week, he must tell his hosts as politely as possible: "Please, keep your hands off the madhes for a while and allow us to sort out our own mess. Yes, taking madhesis for granted was a major blunder, but only we can correct that." The prime minister will require the mandate of his alliance partners and the Maoists to take such a stand in the Indian capital. New Delhi itself might have stayed out of the trouble in the tarai, but it hasn't been able to impress upon Patna and Lucknow the importance of doing likewise. Koirala needs to use his personal good offices to do that.

However despondent a turn attitudes might be taking in Kathmandu, to Indian eyes the popular uprising still has legitimacy. But it's fast depleting. One thing is clear here and at home: the interim government needs to be formed soon, and its main agenda must remain making haste slowly for the constituent assembly election. ●

LETTERS

REPEAT AFTER ME

Nepali Times has been among the few media outlets that has raised serious concerns about the implications and futility of a botched election ('No to June', #339; 'Step away from the polls', 'Only fools rush in', #341). I can't understand why the eight parties stick to their rhetoric about holding the constituent assembly elections in June at any cost. Do they know something (or have they agreed to something) that we don't know about? If so, they need to tell us what that is. Surely they haven't forgotten the royal local election already. The two Jana Andolans have proven that informed citizens are also guardians of their democratic rights and, therefore, those of the democratic parties as well.

The silence of civil society and the media at large is amazing. I have not seen any serious analysis about the pros and cons of holding or not holding the election in time from these quarters. It's their duty to come up with different alternatives based on sound analysis, not just echo the agenda of one or another political force.

Sandesh Hamal, Lalitpur

● How many times do you have to say something before people listen? For the last couple of months your front pages, editorials, and columns have said a few things repeatedly: a botched election will be disastrous, no elections in June, and so on ('Big questions', #337, 'No to June', #339, 'Step way from the polls', #341). It would be nice to tell *Nepali Times* to stop flogging a dead horse. Alas, every week, as you hit the nail on the head, it becomes clear that those of us who agree with you were hitting our heads against a brick wall. The parties don't understand anything, do they? Keep saying what needs to be said.

P Bhandari, email

● The June deadline of the constituent assembly elections may not be attainable. But to delay the formation of the interim government is damaging in every count. It is a betrayal of the people and Jana Andolan II. There are no results because only an inclusive government with proportional representation of all people, including backward and oppressed groups, represents the people. Without this, incidents like the Gaur carnage and the madhesi movement will keep popping up, and make space for reactionary forces.

Bhakti Nepal, Canada

LITTLE MAOISTS

The Maoists' proposed education scheme is appalling. Why on earth should a child's mind be filled with political rubbish and deadly knowledge about making guns and explosives, and wars? Compare their ideology with the age-old idealistic belief that children should be taught physical education, music, poetry, and natural sciences. If a condemnable scheme such

as the Maoists' were to be implemented, I'd rather teach my children at home than send them to school. No conscientious guardian will allow their children's minds to be filled with such rubbish at such a young age.

Khanal, Stanford University

● The rest of the world may view Maoism as it does the dodo, albeit less fondly. In Nepal people want to give the dying ideology new life by indoctrinating children. This is fanaticism. If Maoists want to be looked upon as reasonable, normal people—i.e., part of the 'mainstream', they had better play the part. Only a crank would want to teach philosophy and economics to nine- and ten-year-olds. Not to mention 'military science', and the technology behind 'homemade guns'. I'm sure the syllabus for 12-year-olds includes a section on nuclear weaponry. And I suppose 15- and 16-year-olds will have considerable practical studies of ballistic missiles.

The Maoists don't seem to just want to replace capitalism with another system. It looks like they want to reach into children's minds and distort their thinking. They think their ideology must be preserved unconditionally, even at the cost of permanently disfiguring childhood.

Manish, email

● What are these commie educational experts thinking? This ridiculous curriculum will do nothing to achieve what we desperately need—jobs, economic growth, and prosperity, capital, investments, a strong middle class, and a democratic system. How will memorising Prachanda's biography and communist ideologies help our nation?

Yes, the communist revolution has become a significant part of our history, and students must be aware of what it was and the players involved. But this has to be done in an unbiased, objective manner. We should also not forget all the other important actors and events that have shaped our history. More importantly, we need an apolitical curriculum that encourages students to think and analyse critically, that fosters entrepreneurship and rewards hard work. We need a capable citizenry up-to-date with the constantly shifting economic realities of the world. Instead, our students will be taught to live off barter, as in medieval times.

And military education? Fourth- and fifth-graders learning to make guns and explosives works if you want to introduce the draft. Mr Prachanda, if you are listening, our kids don't need to learn route-finding—we don't want to live in the jungle like you did.

Looking at this curriculum, it's easy to imagine Nepal turning into North Korea, with a military dictatorship that glorifies its tyrannical leaders. If this is implemented, I am moving with my kids.

Deepti Satyaki, email

● Granted Ms Yami's take on education has its limitations, some of which were pointed out in last week's letters ('We will link education with labour', #340, 'Mis-education', Letters, #341). But it was irresponsible to paste the Maoists' guerrilla education policy and curriculum and attribute it to the present-day mainstream party ('Little Maoists', #341). Had the Maoist stayed in the jungle to fight the war and won, this curriculum might have been implemented. But with the change in their political status, I am sure

to see the difference), and answerable to the people and not to ideology.

SK, email

● Re: 'Little Maoists'. Are you serious?! I was about to congratulate the Ass for his wacky genius, but then I realized this was a bonafide story. Thanks to you, Hisila, with your plan Nepali kids in the Maoist version of fundamentalist madrasas will find themselves not only brainwashed with laal salaamism, but also glaringly incompetent in the software-driven Asian economy. We've already paid the price for an educational experiment gone wrong—the Naya Shikshyaa Yojanaa. We cannot repeat the mistake. After 10 years of bloodshed and trauma, our kids deserve better.

Nirmal Niroula, email

ONE-SIDED

I was shocked that the business community was labelled 'royalist' ('A small, shrinking centre', State of the State, #341). If all other Nepalis have the right to protest in the streets, why can't businesspeople? They have suffered a great deal of mental and physical abuse at the hands of the Maoists

and organised crime—attacks, intimidation, kidnapping—and our ineffective government did nothing. Where was this so-called civil society when these attacks were happening? Businessmen should not pay any taxes to this government, which has no moral and legal right to them any more.

PL, email

● The brutal assault on Hari Lal Shrestha is the latest instance of Maoist atrocities on ordinary citizens ('Enough', Economic Sense, #341). Yet there was no

condemnation from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which otherwise is quick to react to human rights violations. With the 'Maoisation' of civil society, it is futile to expect Messers Devendra Raj Panday, Daman Nath Dhungana, and Krishna Pahadi to break ties with the CPN-M. Are attacks on civil liberties part of the economic policies Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai have been outlining in their meetings with the international community and the private sector? If the Maoist leadership is sincere, they must allow the rule of law to punish the culprits and also publicly apologise for their cadres' behaviour. Anything less will prove that they have not renounced terrorism.

Otherwise, the people will be compelled to revolt and the rallying cry this time will be "Prachanda chor, desh chod!"

Name withheld, Kathmandu

● There is a huge difference between the leaders and the members of the Maoists who believe in 'equality'. Pushpa Kamal Dahal says "there should no difference between rich and poor". But in practice, there is a huge difference in the lifestyle and the power people on either end have. Poor PLA fighters live in tents made of plastic bags, while Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai rent a Rs 55,000 house. Dahal flashes a designer watch. He signed the peace agreement with a pen that could have cost thousands more than a Nepali-made pen. He rides a Pajero. But, Mr Dahal, if you believe in equality, love your country, and want to support Nepali industry, live like your compatriots. Use Starline pens, Goldstar shoes, Hulas Mustang vehicles.

Saurav, email



their education policies have changed, and I don't think this absurd curriculum does justice to their outlook.

Nepal's education does need reform. We do not need the monarchical propaganda replaced by communist propaganda, but we do need reform. And the Maoists' quasi-'scientific' answerable-to-the-people brand of education has merit—as long as it remains scientific and non-communist (between which they've ceased

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“Nepal is being Sikkimised”

Nepali Times: Has the Maoist party decided to join the government?

Pasang: Discussions are going on. Our understanding was interim government by March and constituent assembly elections by June. But there is a conspiracy to prevent that from happening. Certain forces are trying to prevent the Maoists from entering the government at all cost. That is why we are in deep discussion about whether or not to join the government.

Where are the discussions headed?

If the three forces: the NC, UML, and the CPN-M can agree on a fair composition of the new government, we may be a part of it or we may not. But the government is backtracking from previous commitments. For example, they had agreed that we would get the deputy prime ministership and one of the three main ministries: finance, home, or defence. The UML would get the Speaker and the NC would get the prime ministership. Now they don't want to let go of deputy prime ministership.

If the elections are postponed beyond June what will be the situation in the cantonments?

Even at the moment, the situation in the camps is challenging. Our comrades are waiting for the interim government so the elections can be held as scheduled to bring a transformation in the structure of the state and the security forces. That is our commitment in the 12-point agreement. So if the elections are postponed that would constitute a violation of the ceasefire Code of Conduct, the 12-point agreement and will be against the spirit of the peace process. In other words, it destabilises the whole process, and we will have to think about that.

Think about what?

Think about the way forward. Take it up with the government through negotiations and start a peaceful agitation.

So has there been a complete breakdown in trust?

Not yet. But we feel that through its actions the government is eroding the confidence and trust between us and is forcing us to think about restarting our struggle.

Did the killing of your cadres in Gaur have anything to do with the breakdown in trust?

The Gaur incident was part of a grand design. The Forum [Madhesi Janadhikar] is just a mask behind which domestic forces and international powers, reactionaries and even sections of the political parties who don't want elections are hiding. It is an amalgamation of status quoists.

When do you expect the elections to take place?

The chances are looking slim that they will be held in June. And if they are not held in June, I doubt they will ever be held. In fact, there is a conspiracy to make sure they election does not happen. We are seeing a re-run of 1951.

How do you see security sector reform happening, and what part will the Maoist army have in it?

Once the constituent assembly is elected it will set up a government which will make a new security policy and decide about whether a country like Nepal needs an army of its present size. Our economic condition and geopolitical realities mean that we can't afford to have such a big army. We have to decide the size of the army—say 40-50,000—and how many from each of the armies it should comprise.



Nanda Kishore Pun (Pasang) is the Maoist central committee member, PLA deputy commander, and vice-chair of the joint arms management committee. The former geography teacher from Rolpa spoke to Nepali Times this week about delays in forming an interim government and the effect of delayed constituent assembly elections on Maoist cantonments.

KIRAN PANDAY

Where did the Young Communist League come from and what is its present role?

The YCL has always been a fraternal organisation of our precursor parties. Its role was to organise youth, be involved in events, conduct political awareness, and take part in development work as volunteers. After the start of the 'people's war', however, the parent party was banned, so the YCL also had to go underground. It is now active again.

There are reports that the YCL is made up of your ex-guerrillas.

If the party so decides, it can also include young fighters in the YCL to mobilise the youth. And it is true that at present some commanders have been sent to the YCL. They are individuals who were previously active in the YCL and have experience.

People are still complaining about extortion and abductions by the Maoist party...

These allegations are part of a grand design conspiracy to destroy our party's reputation—that we are violating the Code of Conduct and can't be trusted. The aim is to taint our party, prevent us from coming into the government, and scuttle the elections. These attacks are now coming from all sides. But how come the parties, which are really violating the Code of Conduct, delaying the formation of the interim government, and allowing massacres like

Gaur to happen, not being criticised? I admit that we've made small mistakes, but it is dishonest to focus on these to divert attention from their big blunders. It's as if the Maoists are solely responsible for creating an environment of peace.

We have to ask whether the government is also helping create a conducive environment. For example, some of our comrades are still political prisoners. They haven't been released yet. Hundreds are still disappeared, but no list has been brought out yet.

The UN says there are many minors in the camps, when are you going to re-unite them with their families?

We are waiting for the second phase of the process to verify them and then send back the ones who are below 18 through mutual negotiations. We object to this issue being raised by the UN even before the verification has taken place, and this may not be good for the peace process. The inmates of the cantonments have only been registered, they haven't been verified yet. Our commitment is not to register anyone below 18, in fact 4-5,000 of those who were underage have been sent back. We are confident that there are only a handful of underage people in the camps.

Are you finding it difficult to make the transition from a guerrilla force to a political party?

It is natural that this transition takes time. But we are trying to rapidly change our operational methods. The signs are mostly positive. There are some incidents which shouldn't be happening. But the party is big, not everything that happens is sanctioned, but ultimately we have to take responsibility when these things happen. Usually, the chain of command and the veteran party cadre are very disciplined. There are a few isolated incidents. But those who say that the Maoists haven't changed their spots and are up to their old ways have a political agenda. That is why it is important for the media and others to realise what is correct and what is not.

How seriously do you take the madhes crisis?

The Forum is a front, neither a political party nor an organisation. Behind that façade they have reactionaries and forces from within and outside the country who want to create instability. They are anti-national separatists who want to break up Nepal. The people know who they are. They are using our slogans but they are not committed to the goals of autonomy and federalism.

Who are these domestic and outside forces?

Some people want to turn Nepal into Sikkim. The tarai has the largest proportion of the population—49 point something—so if there are political forces who want to Sikkimise Nepal based on population proportion and not geographical composition, then Nepal is going into someone else's hands. To solve this problem we have to quickly form an interim government and all eight parties must work on a national campaign for federalism, self-determination, and a republic through the CA election.



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New homes

Phase II of the Valley Homes Terraces housing project has just been completed. The second phase, an extension on the original location at Sunakothi, has 30 new houses in four different models. Phase two offers larger, more luxurious houses, a new clubhouse with a swimming pool and gym, and another children's park. Other services on the premises include a banquet hall, ATMs, a clinic, a daycare centre, and a take-out restaurant



Sharing in

Himal International Energy (HIEPL) has acquired a further 10 percent shares in the Bhote Koshi Power Company (BKPC) from the International Finance Corporation, bringing its total stake in the project to 85 percent. HIEPL and its sister concern Himal International Power Corporation, together own 95 percent of the shares in BKPC. The Bhote Kosi hydropower project is a 36MW hydropower operation in Sindhupalchok that was commissioned in January 2001 with a total investment of \$98 million.

Official ride

The Kinetic Nova-135 is the official Miss Nepal scooter, following a deal between Kinetic marketers, Shrestha International Traders and Miss Nepal organisers, The Hidden Treasure Nepal. Kinetic Nova already has more than 100,000 satisfied customers. The Nova's many features include electric start, no gears, a 135cc engine, and a mobile phone charging port.



Another ATM



The Everest Bank has just opened a new ATM at Apex College in Baneshwor. This ATM will accept cards from all 18 banks in the SCT network, and Visa and MasterCard for a nominal charge of Rs 25. The charge is waived for Everest Bank account holders.

Visiting ill kids

Kumiko Hashimoto, wife of the late former prime minister of Japan and friend of Nepal, Ryutaro Hashimoto, is visiting the Kanti Children's Hospital this week to view conditions and visit ill children. The Hashimoto Trust Fund for the hospital was established in 1993 and provides medical care free of cost to patients whose families could otherwise not afford treatment. The Trust also presents the Hashimoto Medical Award to medical personnel for dedication and excellence in discharging duties. Hashimoto will be accompanied by her oldest son Ryo, and singer Judy Ongg.

NEW PRODUCTS

The Panchakanya group is introducing two new sports motorcycles from the Chinese company R2. The bikes are 125cc and 200cc. Special features include electric and kick start options, front and rear disc brakes, CDI ignition, and a remote controlled alarm. The maximum speed for the 125cc R2 is 90kmph, and 120kmph for the 200cc. The 125cc bike is being offered at an introductory price of Rs 140,000.



Presenting Nepal

Naïve, cottage industry *haats* abroad don't quite cut it, well-rounded trade fairs do

Last week, there was a Nepal Trade Fair in Dhaka. It was organised by the Embassy of Nepal and Nepal's Ministry of Industry's Trade and Export Promotion Centre (TEPC). Ten exhibitors from the handicraft



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

industry sold wares such as silver jewellery, carved wooden windows, pashmina shawls, lokta paper products, handmade bags, and herbal tea.

"Dhaka is only an hour's flight from Kathmandu, and Bangladesh presents a globally emerging market," said Ramesh Prasad Khanal, charge d'affaires at the embassy. "About 1,500 Nepali students are studying medicine, nursing, public health, and engineering here, and most well-to-do Bangladeshis speak fondly of their visits to Nepal. Given these ties, it's only fitting that we try to expand trade between our two countries. This fair, organised for the first time since 2001, is a step in that direction."

Narayan P Shrestha, executive director of TEPC, said the fair was meant to give exposure to small entrepreneurs. "Our export value to Bangladesh was about Rs. 240 million last year. That makes Bangladesh our 15th major trading partner, after Turkey and Bhutan."

Exhibitors' enthusiasm was somewhat tempered. Though they appreciated the organisers' hard work and credited the embassy staff with leveraging the support of Dhaka-based Nepali professionals and students, most said the turnout—about 5,000 visitors over the four-day period—was lower than what they expected. "Most buyers are foreigners from diplomatic and

aid communities," one said. "I wish there were more Bangladeshi buyers so we could understand their demands and tastes," added another. "Bangladeshis look for foodstuff—lentils, noodles, dairy products—not just handicrafts, where they have an edge," said a third. Khanal was responsive, reassuring us that, "Next time, we'll host fairs in commercial venues and not in the embassy premises."

Visiting the fair, I was charmed by its *haat* feel. You could close your eyes and imagine the fair's business content being similar to that of any Nepali trade fair conducted anywhere. In, say, 1997 or 1987. While the world has moved on to branding countries and their products in an integrated manner for trade,

businesses expand production, attract investment, use better technologies, and generate employment.

We need to re-think and improve the content of our international trade fairs. The idea is to get more bang for our limited buck, so that we imprint a compelling 'Open for Business and Leisure' stamp on Nepal's image. Nepal Tourism Board, for instance, can't just send random posters, and expect to sell leisure destinations to wealthy Bangladeshis who are not interested in paragliding or mountain climbing. Our entrepreneurs should not take part in fairs without understanding what buyers actually look for. Likewise, government officers need to partner with private sector



ASHUTOSH TIWARI

investments, and tourism, this fair was a stark reminder that our approach to foreign trade remains naively cottage industry-esque.

Sure, that approach has its own appeal. But to enhance a country's trading profile in increasingly sophisticated and brutally competitive international markets, herding relatively unspecialised small businesses with seemingly undifferentiated handicraft products seems like an expensively outdated way. Other than raise small-volume transactions, such an approach does little to help Nepali

players to organise food festivals and cultural events and to start here's-how-easily-you-invest-in-Nepal conversations.

Of course, such an integrated approach to trade fairs is easier talked about than done. But unless we become strategic about what we want to sell to others by consistently presenting Nepal in a certain light, merely organising trade fairs abroad in a business-as-usual manner may just be an expensive way of recreating Basantapur's tourist market on foreign soil at taxpayers' expense. ●

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Red light

Asal Sasan, March-April 2007

असल शासन

In the last budget, the government had decided to give VDCs Rs 1 million for local development. If they provided a statement of accounts of the first instalment of Rs 500,000 they were supposed to get the rest of the money. The only problem is that in Dolakha, Sindhupalchok and many other districts village councils haven't been able to even meet yet to discuss local priorities like roads, electricity, drinking water because of Maoist obstruction. As a result, millions of rupees earmarked for the districts are in danger of being frozen. In many villages, even allowances for elderly and handicapped can't be allocated.

At the DDC level, the budgets haven't even been discussed because staff meetings have not

been allowed. In Dolakha, for instance, all donor projects have come to a halt except the district roads effort, but even that project by DfID may be stopped. Many who had come to depend on construction jobs may now lose employment. "We thought we could begin by March, now it may not even happen by April," says Dolakha Local Development Officer, Bishnu Prasad Pokhrel, "now we are in danger of the budget lapsing, there is just too much politics in development."

The Maoists had agreed to a village council after a review of past projects under the royal rule. But that may be too late. Sindhupalchok may lose up to Rs 50 million in grants to the district because of Maoist objection to village councils meeting.

Development is the people's right. The VDC grants had allowed employment to be created at the local level for local development. All this is now in danger. The Maoists have their own rationale. Says Maoist Dolakha in-charge, Ganga Bahadur Karki: "Unless there is a political solution, all talk of development is useless."



Water buffalos

Samaya, 15 March

समय

Endangered water buffaloes have been turning up dead in the fields and farms of Kusaha in west Sunsari. In February alone, three of the rare animals were found, having been electrocuted to death. Such electrocution seems to be a form of 'revenge killing', say officials at Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve.

Farmers, in order to protect their farms against rampaging buffaloes, have taken to stringing up naked live wire around their plots. The buffaloes get entangled in these and die. Locals are defiant and say that they never receive compensation from the government when their fields are torn up by water buffaloes.

Although the penalty for killing an endangered water buffalo is 10 years imprisonment and up to Rs 50,000 in fines, no farmer has yet been formally charged. Officials here fear that taking one farmer into custody will provoke the entire

community into opposition, and hinder other efforts to help conserve the animals.

There are only 19 water buffalo deaths officially recorded since 2000, but locals estimate the actual number is far higher. Some say that last year alone 14 corpses were found. According to a 2004 survey, the 175 sq km Koshi Tappu Wildlife Area reserve is home to 159 water buffaloes, 87 female and 72 male.

This is a warning sign, as the female population needs to be five times the male to maintain population levels. An adult male water buffalo can impregnate up to five females. When there aren't enough, the males fight amongst themselves, leading to injuries and even death. The reproduction rate for Koshi Tappu water buffaloes remains at a low 0.3 percent.

In addition to the live wire fences and low female-to-male ratio, the number of water buffaloes is also decreasing due to the directed use of poison and lack of grazing areas inside the reserve.



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Army politics

Sanghu, 26 March

Brigadiers Rana Dhoj Limbu and Dilip Rayamajhi handed in their letters of resignation this week, saying that the military has become politicised and that standard rules for promotion are not being followed.

The trigger for their resignations was the promotion by the new and improved democratic army of five generals from one- to two-star. These were Toran Jung Bahadur Singh, Pawan Jung Thapa, Gaurab Shamshere Rana, Anil Jung Thapa, and Ananta

Thebe. Limbu and Rayamajhi were also in line for promotion but the government denied them the move up, saying that since they have not taken the NDS [National Defence Academy] exam, they were ineligible.

Shortly before this incident, however, Brigadier General Sarad Neupane, who is rumoured to be close to Nepali Congress and who has also not taken the NDS exam, was promoted. This discrepancy is making army officers unhappy and proves that the military is so much under the influence of politics now that it will even promote under-qualified officers. The Chief of Army Staff has not

been able to follow standard military regulations relating to transfer and promotion of officers, and he is slowly losing influence inside the military.

Although the process of transfer of divisional chiefs has been completed, Chatra Man Singh Gurung, who has been the divisional chief of the mid-western division for 19 months,



MIN BAJRACHARYA

is yet to be transferred. Gaurab Rana, who has been in the army head office for a long time, was to be transferred, and Gurung

brought in. Rana is understood to be related to Pawan Kumar Pandey, personal secretary to the COAS, and an understanding between the two caused the delay. Before this, Gurung was replaced by Rana as Commandant of the Cadet School. Two days after this decision was made, Rukmangat Katuwal was pressured to send Rana to Pokhara instead.

As all this happens, Rana is travelling around the world. He spent a week in New Delhi attending the wedding of Pashupati Shamshere Rana's daughter Devayani. Then he was off to Britain, and is scheduled to soon visit the United States.

The tarai's lesson for the hills

Editorial in Abhiyan, 19-25 March

अभियान

Tikh Bahadur Khatri is the principal of a school in Palpa and, like thousands of other Nepali hill-dwellers, he was getting ready to migrate down to the tarai. But today, he has not only changed his mind he even wants to sell the property he has in Rupendehi. "With the tarai troubles and life getting easier in the hills with road access, I had to ask myself whether it was a wise move," he says.

Khatri is among many who have changed their minds about migrating. There hasn't been any research yet, but anecdotal evidence like this shows not only that Nepal's traditional hill-to-tarai migration has stopped, but also families that migrated earlier are returning to their hill villages.

Although it is tragic, the trend has positive aspects. Nepal's unregulated and mismanaged transmigration is now in control and there is new awareness among the families of the hills and himals about building their own villages. They are asking why their village has remained so underdeveloped, and trying to look for ways to raise living standards in their hill homes. Across Nepal, farmers are becoming self-sustaining and building their villages without any help from the government. In Rukum and Rolpa, in Palpa and Makwanpur there is a new consciousness sweeping the land. People have realised that no one is going to help them, and they have to help themselves. If only the government would help just a little bit there would be a flood of development.

To be sure, it is not because of the madhes agitation that there is this new burst of creative energy across the hills. Last year's people power restoration of democracy has a lot to do with it. The government may not have helped in development, but at least it is not an obstacle to decentralised planning. It is true, however, that the hills and mountain people have now realised that they need to compete with the plains for development. An example of this is the planning and construction of an inner-tarai alternative route to the east in Sindhuli.

Kathmandu's development socialites, donors and policy-makers need to understand this phenomenon and try to channel it towards national development. Throughout Nepal's history we have seen that Kathmandu talks a lot and does little while the villages talk little and do a lot. Proof of that is the present trend of self-help development across the hills of Nepal. Hope for Nepal's future lies in channelling this new energy and giving it direction.



Crossed out: Upendra Yadav
Replaced with: Pappu Yadav [convicted gangster in Bihar]

हिमाल Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 March-13 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“We don't accept the leadership of a prime minister like Girija Prasad Koirala who supports the monarchy, Indian Hindu fundamentalists, and national and foreign reactionary forces.”

Maoist MP Deb Gurung quoted in Rajdhani, 25 March.

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT



The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Nepal was established in May 2005, following the signature of an agreement of cooperation with the Government of Nepal. The Office has a mandate to monitor the observance of human rights and international humanitarian law, with a view to advising the authorities of Nepal on the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and measures for the promotion and protection of human rights in Nepal. The Office is seeking to fill the following position:

National Human Rights Officer, NOA - 1 position

Based in Janakpur, the incumbent will participate in monitoring, investigating and reporting on violations of human rights, and to contribute to initiatives linked to supporting human rights protection; participate in field missions; and perform other duties, including interpretation and/or translation, as required.

Qualifications and other desirable skills for the positions: Advanced University degree, preferably in law, political science, international relations or other disciplines related to human rights.

At least 3 years of relevant professional experience in human rights and/or experience in working with marginalized groups. Fluency in oral and written Nepali and English is essential; knowledge of Hindi or Maithili an asset. Knowledge of other local languages highly desirable. Excellent communication skills. Ability to work in an international or multicultural environment. Knowledge of technology and use of office computer applications.

Candidates are requested to complete a UN Personal History form available either at UN offices throughout the country or the OHCHR webpage <http://nepal.ohchr.org/vacancy.htm>. The deadline for receipt of application is Friday, 13 April 2007. All applicants are strongly encouraged to submit their application by email mentioning the vacancy title, to the following address: pnnp@ohchr.org.

If applicants cannot submit an application by email, they may send it to the address indicated below: Personnel Officer - OHCHR – Nepal P.O. Box 24555, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Only short listed candidates will be contacted. Women, indigenous and disadvantaged candidates are strongly encouraged to apply.



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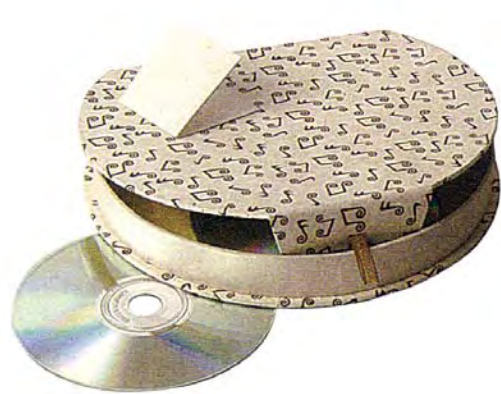
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Fair f

PRANAYA

A few years ago, Mithileshwori saw little reason for hopes or dreams. She'd been married at 13 and had little education. Her marriage had turned sour and she was now a desperately poor single mother of two children.

Mithileshwori occasionally made small sums of money creating and supplying Mithila paintings to vendors in Kathmandu. But demand and payments were unreliable, she still did not earn enough to send her kids to school, and often simply did not have the cash for the supplies she needed for her income-generating art.

That's where fair trade organisations come in. Mithileshwori heard of Mahaguthi, one of Nepal's pioneering fair trade companies, and arranged to supply them a trial lot of paintings. She was paid immediately—Rs 7,000, more than she had ever earned at one go. Today, she earns about Rs 400,000 annually, in part because fair trade firms like Mahaguthi give their producers start-up loans so people like Mithileshwori can set up shop on a structured larger scale.

"Producers first," says Sunil Chitrakar, executive director of Mahaguthi, describing fair trade. "The focus is always on producers." The 14 fair trade organisations in Nepal under the Fair Trade Group Nepal (FTGN) umbrella work on the principle of dealing directly with marginalised groups, cutting out middlemen. They ensure that their suppliers earn more than minimum wage, provide low interest loans for business and education, health care, and childcare, and encourage sustainable green production practices.

Fair trade started out as a fringe social justice movement, and today conscientious consumers help empower over a million-and-a-half once-disadvantaged producers of all kinds of goods—coffee from Guatemala, quinoa from Ecuador, lokta paper from Nepal.

Culture, rather than straightforward business is the focus of Fair Trade

Nepali products design international companies



Tibetan Brocade Stationary Set
Price: \$5.00
Bhaktapur Craft Paper Limited
6610795

Ball Cushion Small
Price: \$4.00
Sana Hastakala
5555837

Ball Cushion Large
Price: \$14.00
Sana Hastakala
5555837



Namaste Frog with Sweater
Price: \$4.54
Children-Nepal
61-532054

Aripa Cushion Cover
Price: \$2.12
Janakpur Women's Development Centre
41-521080

Garnet and Sterling Silver Earring
Price: \$12.10
Manushi
4444762



Garnet and Sterling Silver Necklace
Price: \$24.20
Manushi
4444762



Aripa Curtain
Price: \$11.03/pair
Janakpur Women's Development Centre
41-521080

Aripa Bed Cover
Price: \$15.16
Janakpur Women's Development Centre
41-521080



Wool Round Rug
Price: \$15.16
Kumbeshwar Tech

Long Socks
Price: \$4.00/pair
Technical School
5537484



Wooden Desk Calendar

Price: \$3.00
Nepal Girls Care Centre
4109026



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Group Nepal. "When people buy our products, they're not just getting a mat or a cup or a doll, they're getting an entire story—where the product comes from, who made it, how," says Chandra Prasad Kacchipati, executive director of fair trade company Sana Hastakala, and secretary of FTGN.

He says an essential part of running a fair trade business is developing a better work culture—where producers and marketers work together for mutual benefit, "like a family." People can work from home, develop their skills and earn a fair wage. "It becomes about more than money—it's about pride," says Kacchipati. Nepal's fair trade companies work with more than 7,000 artisans and craftmakers, mostly from underprivileged and traditionally oppressed communities.

Fair trade products are well-priced and nationally competitive.

FTGN is supported by a European Union Asia Invest program, Fair Trade in Nepal, which helps it position and market Nepali fair trade products better in the European market. The challenge now is to lobby for fair trade-friendly policies at the national level, so the movement can grow, and resources can be ploughed into the all-important areas of better design and quality control. "In other countries, fair trade groups get tax breaks, but here we are treated like any other business undertaking," explains Kacchipati.

"We'd be able to direct more funds to start-ups and social welfare for producers, if we had government support," says Kiran Khadgi of the fair trade Khumbeswar Technical School. And that's essential because, after all, fair trade is such a potent way to alleviate poverty because it starts at the lowest level, and empowers individuals. ●

Prices as quoted in Fair Trade Group Nepal Member Organisations' Portfolio



Round Floor Mat
Price: \$18.50
Technical School
5537484

Ladies Ring Bag
Price: \$11.73
Women's Skill Development
Project in Pokhara
61-520393



Notebook

Price: \$2.95
Nepal Leprosy Trust
5521622



Fish Box

Price: \$1.20
Women Development
Service Centre
41-521668



Baidehi Box

Price: \$1.20
Women Development Service Centre
41-521668

Leather and Fabric Boxy Bag

Price: \$9.99
Nepal Leprosy Trust
5521622



Leather and Fabric Hem Wallet

Price: \$7.95
Nepal Leprosy Trust
5521622

Elephant Candle Stand

Price: \$1.10
Janakpur Women's
Development Centre
41-521080



Cotton Bed Set B/W

Price: \$29.05
New SADLE
4820680

Cotton Cushion Cover

Price: \$3.96
New SADLE
4820680

Nepal won't get far if the patriarchal attitudes don't go

Where are the women?

Apartheid in South Africa is long gone and lamented only by bigots and loonies. But one image remains with me from those days, strangely enough not related to racial exclusion.

A British television documentary team spent a day with PW Botha, then president of South Africa. It was a part of a series called something like "A Day in the Life of..." The show featured good and evil people, showing them in the most banal of settings, to help us figure them out.

One scene with Botha stands out. He comes in from riding a horse on his ranch, tosses a Tyrolean hat across the room, and says, "Where are the women, I need some tea." In that South African accent that sounds so lordly and condescending—at least



HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

from a white racist.

It's a question—minus the tea—that I often ask myself about Nepal's peace process, reinvention, turmoil, call it what you will. Where are the women?

Let's be honest. Nepali Hindu society is hugely patriarchal. In some parts of the country, men behave towards women much as the Taliban did in Afghanistan, with even less concern for their dignity and safety, I daresay. One only has to conjure up those tales of caste Hindu women in western Nepal working in the fields with prolapsed uteruses and toxic shock syndrome while the men sit drinking in a speakeasy, debating politics and preparing for a night's spousal abuse.



NARESH NEWAR

It's true that urban life and generational change is gradually improving female prospects in this country. But even in Kathmandu, being female is a hurdle to overcome, unless of course one is rich or privileged or has a handy surname and a famous father. This city has merely reinvented patriarchy and most of the gains are slight or illusory.

Look at the news media. Almost all of the stories are about the doings of men, and if women are covered, they are involved in 'women's issues'—mother's groups, domestic violence, fighting for their rights. Just once I'd like to see a story in the business section about a new bank or tourist company, headed by a woman.

Not that we need women to highlight their own inequality for the rest of us. We should be aware and working hard to end it already. Offices should be hiring, training, and promoting women. The international sector has a huge responsibility here. It needs to stop hiring women from famous families and lead the way into a meritocracy where gender is all but invisible.

As for political parties, the sooner they open their ranks to women of merit and ability, the better. Think Margaret Thatcher, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Hillary Clinton, and Michelle Bachelet. Can any of the current male leaders of any party out there possibly have any reasonable objection to this?

Nepal is poor and in political turmoil for many reasons. Feudalism, an inept and venal elite, inexperience, lack of education and so on. But primarily, the continuing patriarchal attitudes of Nepali men and, yes, women, keep this country in the state it's in.

Maybe we should start with men making their own tea. ●

A tale of

Their bitter connection also shows the enormous gap between the Maoists and ordinary Nepalis



SO NEAR YET SO FAR: Shanti Pakhrin and Devi Khadka are both MPs from Dolakha. Pakhrin has not spoken to Khadka yet about her husband's murder by Maoists.

DAMBER K SHRESTHA

MALLIKA ARYAL

Shanti Pakhrin, 28, is a UML MP from Dolakha. She shares a small rented room with her nine-year-old daughter and two sisters-in-law in a modest, crowded Kathmandu neighbourhood. Dominating the dim, cramped space mostly taken up by two beds is a garlanded photograph of Shanti's late husband, Buddhi Man, which sits atop a cupboard.

A few kilometres away, in a more posh part of town, lives Maoist MP Devi Khadka. The contrast between the living situations of the two women is hard to miss. The five-storeyed building that houses the Maoist women MPs is elaborately painted and frescoed, and we walk up marble stairs to Khadka's room on the third floor. Her quarters are cheerful: sunny, freshly-painted, with a recently-laid carpet.

The two women are the same

age, from the same district and, now, are both parliamentarians. But the connection between them is far deeper—and more bitter—than these facts let on.

On the night of 25 November 2002, as Buddhi Man Pakhrin was getting ready for bed, a knock came on the door. Pakhrin, a UML activist and chair of Dolakha's Thulopatal VDC, was asked by three Maoist cadres—'Avinash', 'Kiran', and 'Srijana'—to immediately come away with them for a meeting.

Pakhrin never returned home to his wife, then pregnant with their third daughter, and his children. A week later a villager found his dead body an eight-hour walk away. Pakhrin had been dragged across fields and rocky trails, his body was bloody, bruised, and covered with cuts and burn marks. Nails had been hammered between his fingers.

At this time, Khadka was the Maoist district secretary for Dolakha. Today she and Pakhrin sit in the same legislative

chamber when parliament is in session. Pakhrin says her relationship with Khadka is "civil"—she has never confronted her. In fact, says Pakhrin, they have only talked once.

The irony is, says Pakhrin, that she and her husband, staunch leftists, had real sympathy for the Maoist cause. "Until they took my husband, I truly thought the Maoists' ideology was good and that they were fighting evil," says Pakhrin. "I never thought for a moment that they would kill him like that."

But soon after her husband's death, Pakhrin realised that he had been resisting Maoist pressure for a long time. Buddhi Man Pakhrin's few years of chairmanship of Thulopatal VDC had brought a number of positive developments—he had lobbied successfully for running water, the opening of schools, and the building of bridges. On the side, he had also been refusing Maoist demands for a share of the VDC's development funds.

Devi Khadka believed then—and still argues—that Buddhi Man was an informer. For her, this was and is the worst kind of person. Khadka became interested in politics very young, when she saw clearly that the state does not favour the poor. "When I was four years old, a rich man in the village made my father sign forged documents and we lost

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two MPs



MIN BAJRACHARYA

everything,” Khadka begins. In the years that followed, her family was displaced and her brother was found dead in prison. She participated in some protests in the 1990 People’s Movement and joined the Maoist party in 1996 when the ‘people’s war’ started. “I was already very dissatisfied with the state structure, the inequality in Nepal, the way women were discriminated against. How could you change this but with extreme measures like those proposed by Maoist ideology?” asks Khadka.

Khadka’s is a typical story of a highly motivated—and highly persecuted—‘revolutionary’. When just in her teens, she was founding chair of the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Women’s Association (Revolutionary). In 1997 came the experience that

radicalised her even further. Khadka was arrested and disappeared for 28 days. She then spent four months in police custody where she was repeatedly raped. Two years later she was a PLA commander, first for Dolakha and Sindhupalchok, and then Dolakha, Okhaldhunga, and Solu Khumbu. She rose swiftly through the ranks to become the Maoist Dolakha district secretary in 2002.

When asked directly about the torture and murder of Buddhi Man Pakhrin, Khadka says simply, “He was an informer and killed by party’s orders.” Press her and she answers defensively that UML informers caused the death of 15 of her comrades in Dolakha.

“I understand what it is like to lose family members,” she says, adding that she wished that fewer people had died in the war. Before

this can sink in, though, she hastily adds, “That doesn’t mean we regret having fought the people’s war.”

But Pakhrin is not looking for an apology anyway. She wants closure. “I want whoever gave the order that my husband be killed, to stand up and take responsibility.”

The Maoists have never made an official public statement or taken responsibility for Buddhi Man’s killing. Pakhrin says she met ‘Avinash’ a couple of years later and confronted him. “We did not take Buddhi sir away to kill him,” he answered. “I gave up my bed so he did not have to sleep on the floor, there was an order from the party that he be questioned, and he died during the course of investigation.”

Why is Pakhrin not pressing the matter in parliament or when she sees Khadka?

“Bringing up such issues now could jeopardise the peace process,” she argues. “When you are a representative of the people, you are not an individual anymore. You cannot let emotions rule you.”

Khadka steers the conversation far from the realms of feeling and empathy. Instead, she speaks to us about the challenges the party has had to face since leaving the jungles and warns of outside interference. Like many of the party’s demagogues, she makes it sounds as of the threat of external forces was the major obstacle to peace—which the Maoists have “always wanted.”

As we are leaving, Khadka tells us: “There was a time when we’d look at the lights of Kathmandu from the Mahabharata and Sailung hills. It’s so different to actually be here... still, we’re glad to not be fighting the war, we didn’t want to be in the jungles forever.”

Individual Maoists like Devi Khadka might be in peacetime mode now, out of the jungles of war. But they are not yet out of other, more murky woods. Shanti Pakhrin, more outspoken than many, is keeping her counsel for now. But she says, “when I speak, it will be for all the women who lost their husbands in the war.” Then she will insist on being heard. ●

What peace dividend?

The end of commerce is nigh

Even in the best of times, Nepal’s business climate could never be called friendly. Poor infrastructure, avaricious authorities and endless red tape are among the many problems Nepali entrepreneurs routinely overcome in the course of conducting their affairs.

The suspicious attitude entertained towards commerce by the bureaucracy must be assuaged with bribes, licenses often hinge on large kickbacks, and chronic shortages of essentials like electricity, fuel, and common sense add to the woes. Whatever economic progress has been achieved over the past decades was despite government policy, not because of it.

The advent of the New Nepal looks to insure those hardships and hurdles will soon be remembered as the ‘good old days’.

Hopes for a peace dividend are already dashed as it becomes painfully obvious the end of war has made things worse for business.

Maoist extortionists are operating with impunity and Party-affiliated trade unions are ejecting previous union representatives in factories and hotels. In many cases, their antagonistic approach to relations with management eventually renders their demands irrelevant, as the company shuts down and the jobs disappear.

The three-day strike called by the business community last week was a potent expression of the deeply felt frustrations and anger at continued Maoist depredations. Faith in the government’s ability to rein in such illegal activities is at an all-time low, and any belief the comrades are people who keep their word has dissipated.

Nepal’s ability to attract foreign investment, seriously hindered over the past twenty years by instability and the politics of fools, is now held hostage to Maoist ideology. Who in their right mind would consider investing in a country where one of the major political parties openly condones beating business owners to extract donations?

Blaming others for one’s mistakes is a time-honoured custom in local politics but the recent exposure of widespread extortion rackets run by the Party has taken this national tradition to new depths. Politburo members reacted defensively to the front page news and their justifications contain troubling insights into the party perception of commerce and its workings. Hisila Yami, ever at the forefront of shrill polemics, disingenuously blamed the victim for his own beating and stated he got what he deserved, ignoring the inconvenient fact kidnapping and torture during ‘tax collection’ is not yet legal. Pushpa Kamal Dahal placed the blame squarely on mythical royalist bogeymen, while labelling hoteliers “infamous abusers of labour” for good measure.

Economic theories based on ideology, tiresome at best, are intolerable when the entire economy is in free fall. As the politburo debates the inevitability of dialectical materialism and how many capitalists can fit in a re-education camp, more factories are closed by the intransigent demands of their union, more people lose their jobs, and the vicious cycle of poverty, unemployment and lack of prospects that caused this conflict is perpetuated.

The mayhem inflicted on the nation to gain a third of parliament for the comrades shattered the hopes of an entire generation. Adding insult to injury—seemingly a Maoist trademark—any chance for peacetime economic progress is effectively stifled by their blatant hostility to all private forms of economic activity.

One doesn’t have to look far to see what works. India provides an excellent example of how a few intelligent government policies allow the people’s entrepreneurial genius to flourish and drive the economy. Considering the Maoist leadership conducted their war from the safety of Delhi, it is astonishing that they remain oblivious to the remarkable progress India has accomplished since economic liberalisation. This suggests a tragically blinkered approach, so steeped in textbook ideology as to wilfully ignore reality, and does not bode well for Nepal’s future.

Demonising business, instead of welcoming the job creation it fosters, is so Cold War old-fashioned as to be downright kitschy. At least Marxist fears of exploitation by foreign companies can be soothed now that Maoist invective ensures that Nepal stays firmly off investors’ maps. The so called ‘national capitalists’ the party welcomes (i.e. tolerates) will certainly reduce their exposure by moving assets offshore instead of investing in the future, with continued stagnation the result.

The civil war cost the country hugely in lives wasted and opportunities lost. As the comrades play out this next stage of their ideological fantasy one wonders how much longer the people must wait for the benefits of peace. ●



MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

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is now on the stands!

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Tibet, the mundane
Nine stories on Tibet's evolving relationships
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SAARC's third decade – Nihal Rodrigo, et al
Prospects for regional energy integration – Bishal Thapa
Dhaka's purge – Mahtab Haider
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Uranium contamination in Jaduguda – Lina Krishnan
On cracking the Indus script – Iravatham Mahadevan
As India takes over as SAARC chair, 18 questions
for Manmohan Singh

April 2007 Vol. 20 No. 4
HIMAL
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TIBET
the mundane

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KUNDA DIXIT

Better To Have Been Killed
Produced and Directed by
Dhruba Basnet
CIJ/Himal Association 2006
info@himalassociation.com

The recurring theme in Dhruba Basnet's heartrending documentary about journalists being tortured in detention is how they asked their tormentors to just finish it off by shooting them.

"It became unbearable," recalls Nagendra Upadhya of the *Mallika* newspaper in Dhangadi, "I just wished I could die quickly and be freed of my pain and misery."

Badri Sharma of *Dhorpatan Dainik* in Baglung told the police who were smashing his toe-nails: "Give me your pistol, I'll kill myself." The policeman replied: "You think you can die so easily?"

Dipin Rai of *Mukti Abaj* in Jhapa was tortured so brutally in a semi-underground bunker that he remembers thinking: "Wish they'd just kill me."

"I couldn't bear the torture and even thought of trying to escape so they would shoot me," says Ambika Bhandari, the Dhankuta correspondent of *Nepal Samacharpatra*.

Given the agonised on-camera testimonies of journalists under torture it is no surprise that



Dhruba Basnet has titled his latest documentary *Better To Have Been Killed*. Just watching and listening to these traumatised editors is bad enough, and all of them carry the physical and psychological scars of their ordeal.

And for those who thought King Gyanendra's military regime was bad, the documentary makes a shocking revelation. The worst tortures and longest incarcerations took place when parliament was in session and elected prime minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was in power in 2001-02.

The torturers during the emergency period were policemen and the journalists were blindfolded, kept inside small dark rooms with hands tied behind their backs for up to 14 months, beaten and tortured every day.

Banning the

Three films document the Nepali media's struggle for freedom

sake of inflicting pain than extracting confessions.

It is a tribute to the tenacity and courage of these journalists that they not only survived, but are now coming forward to tell their tale. In his documentary, Dhruba Basnet follows the journalists as they walk back into their places of detention and show the small dark rooms where they spent nearly a year-and-a-half.

While Badri Sharma was being mercilessly beaten in prison, the policemen told him to quit

to hospital and he was caught by the soldiers. During torture the army often told him he would be buried alive or dropped into the jungle from a helicopter.

More than a year after being released, Nagendra breaks into cold sweat and has nightmares every time he sees soldiers, he has nightmares and wakes up screaming. Badri still feels a dull pain in his stomach where the policemen kicked him with boots. Dipin looks away every time he passes the barrack where he was tortured. Ambika avoids going back to his home town of Dhankuta, there are just too many painful memories.

Shyam Shrestha, editor of *Mulyankan* was also stopped at the airport and detained by police during the Deuba regime in 2001 and says the only reason he was released was because of his high profile. "There was no warrant, no proof, no reason to arrest us, in hindsight it is clear this was a dress rehearsal for the royal coup," he says.

In 2002, the international press watchdog, Reporters without Borders accused Deuba of 'turning Nepal into the world's biggest prison for journalists'. The known torturers of journalists are still in the police and army, they were ever tried.

Ambika Bhandari was the only journalist who took the police and government to court and was awarded Rs 20,000 by the Dhankuta court. The government has appealed the case.



During the second emergency following the royal coup of February 2005, the torturers were soldiers and the journalists were kept in bunkers inside barracks. Before being released reporters were warned not to talk, and the testimonies show the torture was just for the

journalism. He recalls telling them: "If by leaving journalism it will bring peace back to this country, I will quit." That is the only time he gave anything to the police.

Nagendra Upadhya was arrested because the Maoists had forced him to take a sick comrade

April 7, 4:30 pm

LIVE ON



MISS NEPAL

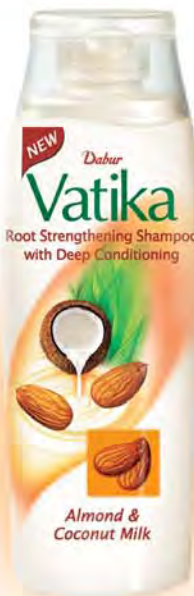


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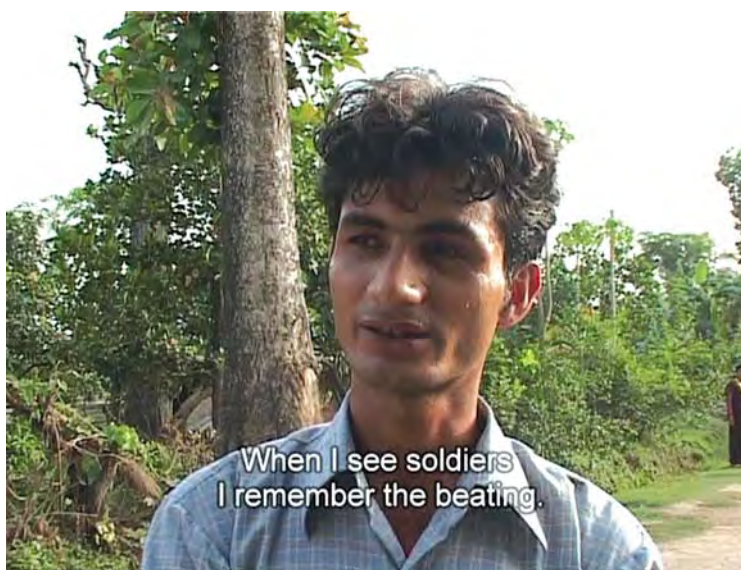
Operation Free Voice
Producer and Director
Hasta Gurung
CIJ/Himal Association, 2006
info@himalassociation.com

Hasta Gurung's documentary is a chronology of the crackdown on the media after the February 2005 military coup by the king. Overnight, newsrooms were turned into barracks, there was direct censorship and FM stations were not allowed to broadcast news.

Operation Free Voice documents the stories of the journalists in the frontlines, how they struggled to uphold their freedom, defied controls and then used media's power to restore democracy.

The army singled out radio for special treatment, confiscating transmitters, harassing radio reporters, threatening to take away their licenses. The Supreme Court through numerous verdicts and stay orders came out strongly in support for free press and giving radio stations the legal basis to start re-broadcasting news.

Hasta Gurung also tells the

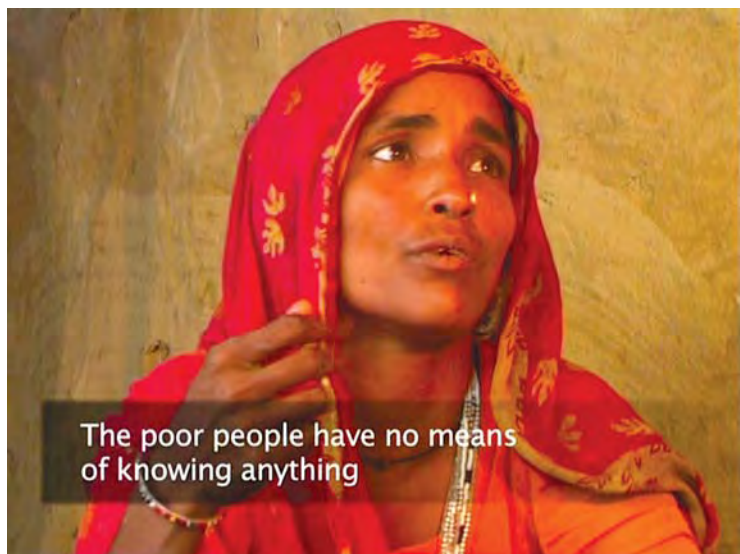


story of how the Maoists ransacked Radio Ghodaghodi in Banke that broadcast in Tharu language. Far from apologising, Maoist leader Min Bahadur Sob is shown publicly warning stations they will be attacked if they persisted in their "anti-people" broadcasts.

The radio stations did not sit idly by, they resisted and defied controls, mailed a broken radio set to Information Minister Tanka Dhakal, organised a nationwide

referendum on whether news should be allowed on FM, held protest poetry readings, concerts and parody shows, they read the news to passers-by on the streets and even sang the news.

The lesson of *Operation Free Voice* is that the media successfully fended off controls only because it was united. Nepal's media showed that the best way to safeguard press freedom is by its maximum application.



I am a Nepali—Hear My Voice
Produced by Heart in Design
UNESCO Nepal and OHCHR,
2007

If you thought press freedom was only for media, this UN-produced film shatters that myth.

Access to information is a fundamental right of citizens, not just of journalists. It uses the example of Madan Pokhara FM and Lumbini FM to show how information empowers people and liberates them.

Yet, despite the spread of FM

radio throughout Nepal, there are still large areas which do not have easy access to information. The digital divide exists not just globally but within Nepal, where the spread of information is uneven. New technologies, if judiciously used, can help us leapfrog the gap.

Asked about whether she finds radios useful, a woman Kamaiya replies matter-of-factly: "First food, then shelter, then we will think about radio."

The film underlines the challenge ahead for FM stations in Nepal: that a large section of Nepalis do not even speak Nepali. Access to information is all very well, but it has to be in a language that people understand. And then the real role for radio in the coming year, which is to educate citizens about the constituent assembly elections so that they can vote wisely.

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Photo Finnish

Home thoughts from an election in Finland

HELSINKI - We are used to having election observers come to Nepal to see if our voting is free and fair. They come from democracy watchdogs, the European Union, or the neighbouring SAARC country, and inspect voting procedures.

But here we were, Nepali journalists monitoring the general elections in Finland for a change. This was what voting in a mature democracy was like, we thought, and it couldn't be more different than elections back home.

It's been eight years since our last elections, so our memories of them are a bit hazy. But we recall the notoriously unstable years of Nepal's coalition politics, having 12 governments in 11 years and four elections in a decade.

The biggest attitudinal difference between politics in Finland and Nepal is that Finnish voters weren't terribly worried that the contending parties didn't win an absolute majority. In fact, they seemed to prefer it that way.

The Centre Party won 51 percent of the seats in the 200-member parliament, the National Coalition Party got 50, and the



NEPALI PAN
Shiva Gaunle

Social Democrats 45. The Leftwing Alliance (17) and Green League (15) trailed, and other smaller parties totalled 22 seats. Forty-six percent of the seats went to women, making

Finland second only to Sweden in the number of women in parliament.

Campaigning was also completely different. There weren't any rallies along the main streets that caused traffic snarls in the city centre as party supporters marched for aam sabhas. No posters on walls and tempos with loudspeakers. Candidates stood outside department stores distributing stickers. "I was born here," said one candidate in a Helsinki suburb, "I know almost everyone by name."

Finnish electoral laws are liberal and everyone obeys them. Parties have to present their statement of account as soon as polling is finished. Even MPs are taxed 38 percent on their salaries. Property, earnings and campaign financing are transparent.



Used to reading tomes that go for election manifestos in Nepal, the electoral issues here were refreshingly different. At a campaign debate, they were: protecting democracy in Asia, preventing hunger in Africa, discussing what to do about climate change, and asking how to bolster Finland's ties with the EU.

When the results were announced, the National Coalition Party had increased its seat numbers by ten percent compared with the 2003 election, at the expense of the Social Democrats. Analysts were trying to figure out why. But this didn't seem to indicate any major shift in political focus of the government.

"Finland is a unique multi-party democracy, it has a tradition of cooperative, not competitive politics," explains Kimo Grunlund, a university professor.

This could be seen in the way Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen was running his campaign in a town 80 km outside Helsinki. He wasn't running down his rivals, in fact he had nothing nasty to say about anyone, just a low-key speech on how he'd do his job even better.

The most important lessons Nepali political parties can take from Finland are: to have a minimum understanding on national interest, ensure continuity of basic policies with cooperation between parties, and respect for minorities and the smaller parties.

After all, politics is not really about politics. An election is just a mechanism to select the most efficient managers to run the country for four years so they can improve the lives of citizens. If they do their jobs well, they get re-elected. If they don't, they lose.

Here, on the other hand, politics is everything. Those who win think they can do anything. Those who lose, lose all. Just look at the unseemly scramble this week for ministerial portfolios in the interim government. And we haven't even had elections yet. ●

Shiva Gaunle is editor of Himal Khabarpatrika.

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **The Freedom Exhibition** an exhibition of mosaic by trafficked children, until 30 March, 10AM-6PM at the Summit Hotel.
- ❖ **Another Me** photographs by Achinto Badra at the Indigo Gallery, extended until 1 April, 8AM-6PM. 4413580
- ❖ **Bells** poetry by Megha Raj 'Manjul' Sharma, photographs by Herbert Grammatikopoulous, and mix media art by Manish Lal Shrestha, at the Gallery 32 at Dent Inn, the Dental Clinic, until 14 April.
- ❖ **Retrospective** an exhibition of paintings by Shashi Shah, from until 20 April, 11AM- 6PM at Siddhartha Art Gallery Baber Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- ❖ **In Search of Bliss** an exhibition of paintings by Chirag Bangdel at Baryo Fiesta, Naxal. 4414395



EVENTS

- ❖ **French book launch** at the Alliance Francaise, Tripureswor, 30 March, 6PM onwards. 4241163
- ❖ **Cine-diner** French Film *Paths to Kathmandu* and dinner, 30 March, 7PM at Alliance Francaise, Tripureswor, Rs 300. 4241163
- ❖ **Yuva Chalfal Shrinkhala** on 'Gajal – Youth and Music,' 30 March, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107599
- ❖ **Mangalbare Discussion Series** on 'War widows and health,' 3 April, 5PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Easter Celebrations** by the Kathmandu International Christian Congregation on Good Friday 6 April at 6PM and Easter Sunday 8 April at 11AM at the Kathmandu International Study Centre, Jawalakhel. 5525176
- ❖ **Civic Concerns** youth workshop by Youth Initiative at PIC, Heritage Plaza, 7 April, from 10AM-5.30PM. Rs 100 registration. 4107599
- ❖ **Toastmasters** communication and leadership program, every Wednesday 6PM at the Institute of Environmental Management, Tripureswor.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Yala Maya Classic** classical music series at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, 5PM onwards on the second of every Nepali month, Rs 100 entrance. 5553767
- ❖ **Live Music** by Ciney Gurung every Wednesday and Rashmi Gurung every Friday, 7PM onwards at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex. 5521408
- ❖ **Fusion and classical Nepali music** by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien, Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800. 4451212
- ❖ **Open Mic Night** at ViaVia Café, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- ❖ **Gaine (Gandarbhās)** perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himalaya Nagarkot. 6680080

DINING

- ❖ **Dinner and wine tasting** at Nhuchhe's Kitchen, the Organic Bistro, 31 March, 7PM, Rs 1,000. 4429903
- ❖ **Saturday Brunch** at the Waterfall Garden, Radisson Hotel. 4411818
- ❖ **Walk and lunch** at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage, every Saturday until 28 April. 9841371927
- ❖ **Trendy martinis** and appetizers at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **North Indian kebabs, curries, rotis and biryani** at The Dhaba, Thapathali. 9840290619
- ❖ **Delightful weekend special** with sekuwa, bara, and barbeque, every Friday at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 4411706
- ❖ **Light nouvelle snacks** and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La'Soon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- ❖ **Continental cuisine** and wine by the fire place at Kilroy's, Thamel. 4250440.
- ❖ **Café Bahal** at Kathmandu Guest House. 4700632.
- ❖ **Smorgasbord** lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- ❖ **Gyakok** lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum of four guests at Rs 450 per person, two hours order in advance.
- ❖ **Retro brunch barbecue** with the Crossfire Band at The Poolside, Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12-4PM, Rs 1,000 inclusive of swimming and complimentary drink. 4451212
- ❖ **International Brunch** weekends 11AM-3PM for Rs 499 per person (Rs 299 for children) at Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- ❖ **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 and a beer. 4479488
- ❖ **Senoritas & Margaritas** Inner Groove live at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's, Rs 599 includes a Mezza platter and a Margarita pitcher. 4479488
- ❖ **Woodfired Pizzas** at Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel, 4262768, Bhatbhateni 4426587 and Pulchok. 5521755
- ❖ **AKA Pizza** at Moksh, delivery available. 5526212

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Weekend package** at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4451212
- ❖ **Sun and Fun** Three days and two nights package at Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, Rs 7,499. 4412999
- ❖ **Pure relaxation** at the Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge. 4361500
- ❖ **Experience the jungle** at the Jungle Base Camp Lodge, Bardia.

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

Quest Entertainment



300 is a fantasy tale based on the Battle of Thermopylae where 300 Spartans led by King Leonidas (Gerard Butler) made a heroic stand against the overwhelming Persian army commanded by Xerxes (Rodrigo Santoro). Leonidas' refusal to bow down to Xerxes sets the events in motion, with the 300 ready to give up their lives to keep Sparta free from the clutches of Xerxes and his horde.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal
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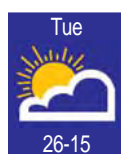
NEPALI WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



March is bowing out exactly as it should—we got our normal quota of precipitation this month and temperatures were average. It's a calming contrast to last year, when March was the hot culmination of a historic five-month-long drought. Thursday afternoon's satellite picture shows a fresh westerly heading towards the Kashmir Himalaya, leaving the lower foothills topped by a thin layer of clouds. In the absence of a powerful low pressure zone, a cloud build-up is unlikely in the skies above Nepal over the weekend. A low pressure trough developing could change that early next week. The week will kick off with cloudy mornings, warm days with sunny intervals.

KATHMANDU VALLEY



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MIN BAJRACHARYA

CRUISIN': CPN-M chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal leaving the party headquarters in Buddhanagar for another chat with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on Thursday on joining the interim government.



KIRAN PANDAY

TRAGEDY, AGAIN: Victims of the Gaur killings being cremated at Pashupati on Friday, two days after the incident.



KIRAN PANDAY

SHOP TALK: Australian ambassador Graeme Lade, FNCCI president Chandi Raj Dhakal, and US Ambassador James F Moriarty discuss the business environment at the Embassy of Pakistan on Friday.



KIRAN PANDAY

BETTER START PRAYING: Queen Komal marks Ram Nawami at the Ram Mandir in Battisputali on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

MOVE IT! Revellers and devotees pull the towering chariot of Seto Machhindranath from Ason to Kathmandu on Tuesday.

Jiri
30th - 31st March
Jiri Technical School
Local Organizer:
FNJ - Dolakha

Chautara
2nd - 3rd April
Chautara Hospital
Local Organizer:
FNJ - Sindhupalchok

Lahan
5th - 6th April
Marwadi Sewa Sadan
Local Organizer:
Ma Durga Bhawani Club

Ilam
8th - 9th April
Bal Mandir
Local Organizer:
FNJ - Ilam

Narayangadh
11th - 12th April
Udhyog Banijya Sangh Hall
Local Organizer:
FNJ - Chitwan

Nepalguni
14th - 15th April
Bheri Technical School Hall
Local Organizer:
FNJ - Banke

Dhangadi
17th - 18th April
DDC Hall
Local Organizer:
FNJ - Kailali

Palpa
20th - 21st April
Palpa Durbar - Bal Mandir
Local Organizer:
FNJ - Palpa

Pokhara
23rd - 24th April
Udhyog Banijya Sangh Hall
Local Organizer:
FNJ - Kaski

Kathmandu
29th April - 5th May
Nepal Art Council,
Babar Mahal
Local Organizer:
NFPJ

लडाईमा जनता

नेपालको युद्धका चित्रहरू १९९६-२००६

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PHOTO EXHIBITION TOUR

30th March - 5th May, 2007

A PEOPLE WAR

Images of the Nepal conflict 1996-2006

Envisioned by
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Kingless and presidentless

Despite repeated warnings, our honourable members of the interim parliament refused to switch their mobiles off, causing the mikes to go haywire. The parliament secretariat had required everyone to deposit their mobiles outside with their firearms, if any. But most ignored that rule, so the secretariat has installed a **jamming** device.

This has been extremely effective. So effective, in fact, that the batteries of MP mobiles all run out if they keep them on while inside the august chambers.



No way the Maoists would be in the government before the SAARC summit, if at all, so when that is announced it won't even merit a headline.

In fact, the general lack of interest in the interim government is an indication of how inured the fuel-starved, electricity-starved, water-starved and entertainment-starved denizens of the capital have become to shenanigans inside Singha Darbar.

The long and short of it is that all decisions, including the fate of King G, are now on hold till after Girija Maharaj meets Emperor Man Mohan at the Delhi Darbar on 1 April. The Ass can see the **April Fool** headline already: 'Army Stages Coup, Declares Nepal Republic'.

You have to hand it to the comrades and their

endurance and stamina for meetings. They can go for hours at their new HQ (semi-ironically located at Buddhanagar) and guarded by a fierce-looking security detail brandishing snub-nosed Colt Commandos.

Every which way the comrades look at it, they see a conspiracy by Running Dog Hegemons to prevent them from getting the deputy prime minister and placing themselves a **heartbeat** away from premiership.

We hear they see Girjababu as just carrying out the wishes of his farang mentors. The conclusion: forget about getting into government and continue playing opposition in the run up elections to reap the anti-incumbent benefits. Smart. Given the non-performance of the seven party alliance, the Ass guarantees that this strategy will be wildly successful.

Also, with civil society members of the Maobadi NGOs (MANGOs) pitching in, the comrades have an effective campaign machine already in place.



So just as well the Misinformation Ministry isn't going to Mahara. The Grey Shirts are on a death threat-rampage against journalists in Itahari and Mahedranagar this week and must be taking their cue from **Comrade Twitchy** who has himself

been lashing out at the "foreign-controlled media". After the foreign media that felt alluded to complained to its embassy, His Awesomeness has laid off personal diatribes and passed the baton on to his underlings.

Us scribes are getting it from both sides now. No sooner had the Buddies bashed Kantipur recently, the Nepal Defence Army (who they?) lobbed sockets at the paper's branch in Biratnagar and other assorted party offices.



The latest plenipotentiary to go back without presenting credentials is the new Canadian ambassador. Our **national limbo** is stretching a bit too long, the Ass thinks. How long can we be both kingless and presidentless? Let's decide once and for all. The Maoists will not wait, and last week held their First All-Nepal Republican Sports Meet at Comrade Dasrat Rang sala. So let's replace 'republic' everywhere we find it. Start with Republican Chitwan National Park, Republican Stag whiskey, and refer to my own internal aches as a Republican Pain in the Ass.

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