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 longer interim period. The delay 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.

The economy is in shambles, which could spark further instability. There is a supply crisis, inflation is on the rise, 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.

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.

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

The Maoist killings are not about violence but 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 Janathan Forum?

The Maoists want to arrest the MJF and take over the territories. But it looks more like a ploy. It doesn’t behoove the Maoists to show such gross capriciousness. 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 ground to both stay out of government and delay the assembly elections? The killing of 28 of their cadres in Gaur and Purwakot shows the Maoists’ reluctance to part with high-power ministries have given them the Maoists the perfect excuses to withdraw their support from the interim government now and seek elections. The irony is that the Maoists are blaming the dismal security situation on the government—but it is the Maoists that have been the major perpetrators of violence in the Gaur area. Is it not possible: “Please, keep your hands off the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from the MJF, as key madhesi student groups and civil society bolt from

It’s time Girija Koirala told the Maoists and the MJF that nothing is certain—or permanent—in politics. Both these groups can still reclaim lost ground. But that prospect looks dim now, at least until elections to the constituent assembly are over. The Maoists and the MJF, having come to power in 2001, have not made any meaningful progress toward a federal state. And they are in no position to make any meaningful progress toward a federal state now. They need the mandate of their alliance partners to stay in power. They need the mandate of their alliance partners to stay in power. They need the mandate of their alliance partners to stay in power. They need the mandate of their alliance partners to stay in power. They need the mandate of their alliance partners to stay in power.

New Delhi - The imperial centre of South Asia has a new look. After a long period of de-stabilisation, India has now become a more stable and predictable power. The recent troubles of both Nepal and Sri Lanka have been a wake-up call to the rest of the region. The recent troubles of both Nepal and Sri Lanka have been a wake-up call to the rest of the region.

The recent troubles of both Nepal and Sri Lanka have been a wake-up call to the rest of the region.
Nepali Times has been among the few media outlets that has implemented, I am moving with the change in their policies 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 people power on either hand. 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 deal of mental and physical abuse at the hands of the Maoists and organised crime—attacks, intimidation, kidnaping—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. We cannot repeat the same mistakes 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 people power on either hand. 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 deal of mental and physical abuse at the hands of the Maoists and organised crime—attacks, intimidation, kidnaping—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. We cannot repeat the same mistakes.
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 this 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 reviewed, they haven’t been verified yet. This 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 gradually 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 reactionary forces 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 tami has the largest proportion of the population—40 percent something—even 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.
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 Damanthi, 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 (HEPL) has acquired a further 10 percent shares in the Bhole Koshi Power Company (BKPC) from the International Finance Corporation, bringing its total stake in the project to 85 percent. HEPL and its sister concern Himal International Power Corporation, together own 85 percent of the shares in BKPC. The Bhole Kosi hydropower project is a 36MW hydropower operation in Sindhupalchowk 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 Baneswor. This ATM will accept cards from all 18 banks in the SCT network, and Visa and MasterCard holders. The Everest Bank ATM at Apex College in Baneswor. This ATM will accept cards from all 18 banks in the SCT network, and Visa and MasterCard

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. The Trust also presents the Hashimoto Medical Award to medical personnel for dedication and excellence in discharging duties.

NEW PRODUCTS
The Panchakanya group is introducing two new sports motorcycles from the Chinese company RZ. The bikes are 125cc and 200cc. Special features include electric and “Auto-start” options, four-disc brakes, CDI ignition, and a remote controlled alarm. The maximum speed for the 125cc RZ is 90kmp, and 120kmp for the 200cc. The 125cc bike is being offered at an introductory price of Rs 140,000.

New products

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 industry sold wares such as silver jewellery, carved wooden windows, paper products, hand made bags, and herbal tea.

“Dhaka is only an hour’s flight from Kathmandu, and Bangladesh presents a globally emerging market,” said Rashesh Prasad Khanal, chargé d’affaires at the embassy. “About 1.5 million 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 around Rs 240 million last year. That makes Bangladesh our 13th 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 providing the support of Dhaka-based Nepali professionals and students, most said the turnout—to 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 foodstuffs—biscuits, noodles, dairy products—not just handicrafts, where they have an edge,” said a lady. 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 haunt. You could do your own eyes and imagine the fair’s business content being similar to that of any Nepal trade fair conducted anywhere. In 1997 or 1987. While the world has moved on to branding countries and their products in an integrated manner for trade, we are still stuck with a naïve, cottage industry-esque. The fair was a stark reminder that our approach to foreign trade remains naïve cottage industry-esque. Sure, that approach has its expense. On foreign soil at taxpayers’ expense.

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 officials need to partner with private sector businesses expand production, attract investment, use better technologies, and generate employment.

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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 Boulangur’s tourist market on foreign soil at taxpayers’ expense.
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.”

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.
The tarai’s lesson for the hills

Editorial in Abhiyan, 19-25 March

Tibeb. 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 not eligible.

Shortly before this incident, however, Brigadier General Sandal 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. The process of transfer of divisional chiefs has been completed, Chhaut Man Singh Gurung, who has been the divisional commander for the western division for 19 months, is yet to be transferred. Gaurab Rana, who has been in the army 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 Katwal 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 Shamsher Rana’s daughter Deoyani. Then he was off to Britain, and is scheduled to soon visit the United States.

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 Kathmandu, 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 intercession 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; of national and international jurisprudence.

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 Madheshi is 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.

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

Vacancy Announcement

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.
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.
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.

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 Kinn 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

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A tale of two women: Their bitter connection also shows the enormous gap between the Maoists and ordinary Nepalis

Where are the women?

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

Apartheid in South Africa is long gone and lamented only by bigots and boorish. But one image remains with me from those three 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 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 from a white racist.

It’s a question—minus the tea—that I often ask myself about Nepal’s peace process. Reinv.ention, 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 right’s spousal abuse.

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.

The irony is, says Pakhrin, that she and her husband, staunch leftist, 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 pressures 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 other hand, he had also been refusing Maoist demands for a share of the VDC’s development funds.

Devi Khadka believed they had still argued—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 “civil”—she has never been interested in politics very young, when she saw clearly that “civil”...
two MPs

everything\textquotesingle{}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\textquotesingle{}s Movement and joined the Maoist party in 1996 when the \textquoteleft\textquoteleftpeople\textquotequoters; war started. \textquoteleft\textquoteleftI 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?\textquoteright\textquoteright asks Khadka.

Khadka\textquotesingle{}s is a typical story of a family who was displaced and her husband was killed by the state. She then joined the Maoist party, rose quickly through the ranks to become the Maoist Dolakha district secretary in 2002.

Like many of the party\textquotesingle{}s demagogues, she makes it sounds as if the threat of external forces was the major obstacle to peace—something which the Maoists have \textquoteleft\textquoteleftalways wanted.\textquoteright\textquoteright

As we leave, Khadka tells us \textquoteleft\textquoteleftThere was a time when we'd look at the lights of Kathmandu from the Mahabharata and Sailung hills. It\textquotesingle{}s so different to actually be here... still, we\textquotesingle;re glad to not be fighting the war, we didn\textquotesingle;t want to be in the jungles forever.\textquoteright\textquoteright

Individual Maoists like Devi Khadka might be in peace-time mode now, out of the jungles of war. But they are not yet out of anger at continued Maoist depredations. Faith in the government\textquotesingle{}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 disappeared.

Nepal\textquotesingle{}s ability to attract foreign investment, seriously hindered over the past twenty years by instability and the politics of fear, 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?

The Maoists have never made a formal apology for the many thousands of deaths caused by their attacks on police stations, homes, and people. Khadka tells us: \textquoteleft\textquoteleftBringing up such issues now would jeopardise the peace process,\textquoteright\textquoteright she argues. \textquoteleft\textquoteleftWhen you are a representative of the people, you are not an individual anymore. You cannot let emotions rule you.\textquoteright\textquoteright

Khadka steers the conversation far from the realms of feeling and empathy. Instead, she presses home the point about the challenges the party has had to face since leaving the jungles and wars of outside interference. Like many of the party\textquotesingle{}s demagogues, she makes it sounds as if the threat of external forces was the major obstacle to peace—something which the Maoists have \textquoteleft\textquoteleftalways wanted.\textquoteright\textquoteright

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Banning the media’s struggle for freedom

Three films document the Nepali

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.”

“Torture was for the 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,” Basnet says. While 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-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 passes the barracks where he was tortured. Ambika avoids going back to his home town of Dhanauta, 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 Dhanauta court. The government has appealed the case.
Operation Free Voice
Producer and Director
Hasta Gurung
GUHHimal 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 marked Radio Ghodaghodi in Banke that broadcast in Tharu language. Far from apologising, Maoist leader Min Bahadur Sobi is shown publicly warming 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 passengers 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.

Useful to 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 radio useful, a woman Kamaiya replies matter-of-factly: “First food, then shelter, then radio.” More often they are used judiciously, can help us leapfrog the gap.

“The film underlines the need to inform the public when they are attacked if they refuse to work with the regime,” says Kamaiya.

The film underlines the need to inform the public when they are attacked if they refuse to work with the regime. Used to reading tomes that go for election manifestos in Nepal, the electoral issues here were refreshingly different. At a campaign rally for the 2005 elections, 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.

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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 Nepal 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 are those who stay in power. Leadership is not about getting people to vote, it’s about leading when they win.

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The biggest attitudinal difference between politics in Finland and Nepal is that Finnish voters weren’t terribly worried that the parties being re-elected 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 Social Democrats 45. The Left-wing Alliance (17) and Green League (15) trailed, and even smaller parties took 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 saabas. No posters on walls and temples 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.
EXHIBITIONS
- The Freedom Exhibition an exhibition of mosaics by trafficked children, until 30 March, 10AM-6PM at the Summit Hotel.
- Another Me photographs by Achintoo Badra at the Indigo Gallery, extended until 1 April, 8AM-6PM. 4413580
- Bells poetry by Megha Raj ‘Manjul’ Sharma, photographs by Herbert Gramalkipoulotis, 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 Shan, from until 20 April, 11AM-6PM at Siddhartha Art Gallery Baber Mahal Revisited. 4216048

In Search of Bliss an exhibition of paintings by Chirag Bangdel at Bayo Fiesta, Naxal. 4414395

EVENTS
- French book launch at the Alliance Francaise, Tripureswor, 30 March. 6PM onwards. 4248850
- Cine-diner French Film Paths to Kathmandu and dinner, 30 March, 7PM at Alliance Francaise, Tripureswor, Rs 300. 4241183
- Yoga Chaiti Shrinkhala on ‘Yoga and Music’- 30 March, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107599
- Mangalbarne Discussion Series on ‘War widows and health,’ 3 April, 9PM at Martin Chautari. 4258685
- 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
- Yola Maya Classic classical music series at Yola Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoika, 5PM onwards on the second of every new Nepali month, Rs 100 entrance. 5553767
- Live Music by Cineey Gurung every Wednesday and Rashmi Gurung every Friday, 7PM onwards at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex. 5524188
- 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 VaVa Cafe, Thamel every Friday, 8PM
- Gaine (Gandarbhas) perform at every lunch and dinner, Club Himlaya Nagarkot. 6680800

DINING
- Dinner and wine tasting at Muchoo’s Kitchen, the Organic Bistro, 31 March, 7PM, Rs 1,000 4429903
- Saturday Brunch at the Waterfall Garden, Radisson Hotel. 441818
- Walk and lunch at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage, every Saturday until 28 April. 9413179272
- Trendy martinis and appetizers at the Box Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4491254
- North Indian kebabs, curries, roti and biryani at The Dhaba, Thapathali. 9840290619
- Delightful weekend special with seeka, bara, and barbeque, every Friday at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat. 5:30 PM onwards. 4417706
- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La Doon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- Continental cuisine and wine by the fire place at Khinyo’s, Thamel. 4250440
- Cafe Bahal at Kathmandu Guest House. 4708632
- Smogasbord lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4372628
- Gysok lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Cafe, 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. 4451912
- 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. 9744007035
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Casa, 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
- Senoritis & 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, Shribhateen 4428587 and Pulchok. 552755
- AKA Pizza at Moksh, delivery available. 5532612

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 4,440. 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
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.

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

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.

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

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

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 Dastar Rangsala. 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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