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#343

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Weekly Internet Poll # 343

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

Total votes: 2,673

- Definitely 56.9%
- Maybe 20.5%
- No 22.5%

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Q. What should be the top priority of the interim government?

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Before

HIGHWAY INFERNO: Seventeen parked buses were torched in Lahan on 18 January this year by madhesi activists. The same spot on Thursday afternoon (below).

BHARAT JHARGAMAGAR/ KANTI PUR



After

KUNDA DIXIT

Go to p4

The smoke has cleared in Lahan, but many things will never be the same again

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In the interim

Out with the best, in with the worst

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

The biggest indicator of how far we've come in the last 18 months is that there is no longer a peace talks team. The mainstreaming of the Maoists began with their signing the 12-point understanding with the seven-party alliance in November 2005, helping create the conditions for the April Uprising. The second test of their commitment to making the transition was the comprehensive peace agreement and cantonment of combatants. Then came promulgation of the interim constitution and formation of an interim parliament which included the Maoists. Now, at the end of the fourth phase of this ongoing peace process, the former rebels are in the interim government.

It's been a long journey over the last 12 years for the Maoist leadership, from parliament to the countryside and then the jungles, from exile back to where they started—Singha Darbar. The Nepali people will be waiting for signs that the comrades-in-government have learnt some lessons along the way and know they, like the other parties, are here to govern.

The CPN-M cannot now revert to their old dismissal of parliamentary democracy as bourgeois gameplaying. Instead, the Maoist ministers must learn how to use the tactics of democracy for the greater good. They will have to guard against the diktat-based decision-making procedures favoured by revolutionaries. The machinery of the government here is hardly a model of integrity and efficiency anyway, and the new ministers will have to find ways to inspire uncooperative bureaucrats, not threaten them.

Individual corruption is bad enough, and parties often make it worse by institutionalising graft. The CPN-M will suffer a serious blow to its legitimacy if it makes decisions under the influence of voluntary contributions to the party. A wayward minister can be taken to task, but you can't redeem a whole party involved in the kickback loop, as amply displayed by the UML ever since it decided to impose levies on its representatives in government.

Favouritism is endemic in revolutionary outfits. Again, the UML's stint as a ruling party has lessons for the Maoists. They will have to find ways of calming disgruntled party members without dispensing favours billed to the exchequer.

The Maoists must remember that they continue to be under the scanner of the international community as well as civil society. Their procedural legitimacy is tenuous until they face the electorate. Until then, they must acquire legitimacy of performance. Failure of the peace process from this point on will cost the country more than we could ever imagine.

The new interim government should have kept on some old hands for continuity. In particular, it's a shame Madhab Nepal did not see fit to retain the talented and thoughtful UML leader Pradip Gyawali. But then, what does Madhab Nepal know?

EYES WIDE SHUT
Sheetal Kumar

Knowledgeable sources say Gyawali's positive contributions to the peace process must not be overlooked. More than anyone else, it was he who toiled long hours to finalise the comprehensive peace agreement, the interim constitution, and the tripartite arms monitoring agreement. While Home Minister Krishna Sitaula and Maoist negotiator Krishna Bahadur Mahara got all the credit, it was Gyawali's patient prodding, pleading, and cajoling that

delivered those agreements. His party may not acknowledge Gyawali's contributions, but let us hope that historians some day will.

Gyawali's talents will be missed in the coming days because the peace process is not yet over. There are many key negotiations ahead, most importantly on how to reform and democratise the Nepal Army and how to integrate the Maoist army with the nation's security sector. When those tough negotiations open, Gyawali will be sorely missed.

This brings us to a significant dynamic in the new cabinet: the retention of Sitaula as home minister. With the dissolution of the previous talks committees, Sitaula will from now on focus solely on improving security. A good thing, since giving him the dual responsibilities—strengthening security and negotiating with the very people wrecking it—was a bad idea to begin with.

But perhaps Sitaula should have been taken out of the Home Ministry and given Peace and Reconstruction instead. That way, he could have continued to be the point man of the seven-party alliance in talks with the Maoists, and someone else could have looked after security. This would have had the added advantage of keeping Sitaula in the government without seeming to be giving in to the demands of the Madhesi Janadhikar

Forum. But Prime Minister Koirala can always be counted on to blow chances like this.

With Sitaula's wings clipped, the wily Ram Chandra Paudel has been thrust into centrestage as minister for peace and reconstruction. In this capacity, he is likely to lead all government negotiations with the Maoists as well as with madhesi, janajati, and other agitating groups. It's worth asking why a conservative hill bahun like Paudel—who not only dislikes the Maoists but has also shown no willingness to learn what fuels madhesi, janajati, and dalit anger—was put into this position.

Is his conservativeness a factor precisely because he won't be giving in as easily as Sitaula or Mahanta Thakur? Or is it the attraction of the reconstruction funds? Either way, Paudel's new position strengthens his hand in succeeding the ailing prime minister not just in government, but also in the Nepali Congress. It's a serious gesture to Sushil Koirala and Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Of the other appointments, one wonders why the UML sent Sahana Pradhan to lead its contingent. She is immensely intelligent and talented, but lacks influence in her own party. It would not be a good situation for the UML if the other coalition partners were to take her as a lightweight.

The Maoists' Mahara is in a similar position. Though regarded as influential within the party, no one is ever in doubt as to who really runs the Maoists. Not even a crow flies in Maoist territory without the Fierce One's permission. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Re-imagination

It's possible to build a South Asian identity, but it won't happen at SAARC summits

Twenty-two years after their first summit in Dhaka, South Asia's heads of state and government are still debating the future of the world's largest regional grouping. The over 800 journalists who gathered in New Delhi to cover the 14th SAARC Summit had virtually nothing new to report on.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Kashmir continues to be the core issue for Pakistan. Multilateralism in its relationship with India is still the main concern of Bangladesh. Maldivian strongman Mohammed Abdul Gayoom, who has been associated with SAARC since its inception, is content with the ceremonial nature of the organisation.

There is no room in the SAARC charter for observers, but that didn't stop the foreign ministers of China, Japan, and South Korea, and representatives from the United States and the European Union from addressing the inaugural session. Nepal was responsible for China's entry as an

observer at the last summit. But Kathmandu needs to watch out—if SAARC turns into an arena of contestation for spheres of influence, Kathmandu will have everything to lose and nothing to gain, just as it did during the Cold War, when it aligned itself too closely with the United States.

There is distrust all around. Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapakse became a media celebrity when he made the benign suggestion of a common currency. But Rajapakse might not know that, though people are allowed to move freely across the Nepal-India border, Indian rupees in denominations higher than 100 can't. Such examples are legion, and make it difficult to see how South Asian unity, as envisioned by futuristic civil society activists from Bengal, Punjab, and Sindh, is realistic. We need a different imagining of South Asia.

At least three of South Asia's formal leaders have a banking background. Chief Advisor of Bangladesh's interim government, Fakhruddin Ahmed, and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh are former World Bank employees. Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz is a Citicorp product. They are more comfortable with figures

than with facts. Thus all the hoopla over a common market, single currency, consolidated funds for poverty alleviation, and connectivity.

All good ideas and important issues. But we first need to reduce the mutual suspicion that runs rampant in the region. Creating emotional unity among South Asians is as important as creating institutions and instruments of regional cooperation. Why not think about a South Asian University?

There are other non-controversial issues too. Since all 'national' time zones of the region are equally mocked, how about having a common South Asian Standard Time? In 4BCE, when the subcontinent was home to an extraordinarily forward-looking civilisation, Ujjain marked the first meridian of longitude in Indian geography.

Even with Afghanistan joining the SAARC family, Ujjain still remains almost at the centre of South Asia. Why not take time from here to represent all of us spread across the subcontinent, from Kabul to Kohima, Kashmir to Colombo. And Ujjain is probably a better location for a proposed

South Asian University than the officious and chauvinistic New Delhi. Ujjain has good land links, and air connections through Indore to all the capitals of the region.

We'd also do well to appoint a South Asian Minority Commission to report on the status of human rights in marginalised populations at the yearly summits. Better a reprimand from responsible citizens of the region than be taken to task at international fora by Amnesty International or UN agencies.

English is the South Asian lingua franca. But if SAARC is to emerge as people's organisation rather than the talk shop of its ruling elite, Hindostani will have to be given a fair chance to establish itself as an alternative.

Common public service broadcasting, propagation of shared cultural values, and celebration of the region's diversity will create the grounds for the emergence of a South Asian Union—with a common currency, a single passport, and a distinctive identity. It's a historic process that can't be hurried along by the region's insecure leaders who gather every year or two for a couple of days of ritualistic bonhomie. ●

LETTERS

MISTAKE

The new interim government has made a mistake by keeping Krishna Prasad Sitaula on as home minister. He's already had the position, and proved incapable of maintaining peace and security. It's entirely probable that the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum will use his continued presence in the government as a reason to start their anti-peace activities again, and disrupt the upcoming election.

Navin, email

PASANG

Your interview with Nanda Kishore Pun ('Nepal is being Sikkimised', #342) was depressing. Pun may be articulate and relatively smart, but why does a teacher have to become a fighter?

A Adhikary, email

TWO MPS

Kudos to Mallika Aryal for her thoughtful, detailed comparison of the lives of Shanti Pakhrin and Devi Khadka ('A tale of two MPs', #342). Khadka is clearly in the wrong, but Aryal is correct to humanise her. We need to understand people like this and the things they do if we are to move on. As for Shanti Pakhrin, I suppose I will never understand whether it is nobility of spirit that keeps her from confronting Khadka, or a similar adherence to the party line. Of course it's her tragedy and her choice, but I can't help feeling that we need more individual cases to really comprehend the devastation of the last decade. We have one Maina Sunar. Why not also a Buddhi Man Pakhrin?

Name withheld, email

I started reading 'A tale of two MPs' with scepticism, and came away with a deeper understanding of the human cost of the war. This is exactly the kind of journalism we need, parallel to hard news. Give Mallika Aryal a gold star or a raise.

Hari Rai, email

'A tale of two MPs' shows vividly how big a credibility and trust gap the Maoists have to overcome. They may have excuses for everything, but their lame justifications don't fly. And the Nepali people are not idiots.

Shanti Basnet, email

MISSING WOMEN

In his weekly columns Daniel Lak's recurrent words of wisdom from Canada for both Nepalis and Westerners living in Nepal is very interesting to read. However in your last issue ('Where are the women?', Here and there, # 342) he mentions that Nepali women are so neglected that they work in the fields even with toxic shock syndrome (TSS) or chronic prolapse of the uterus. With TSS, unlike uterine prolapse, you are at death's door and unlikely to be working in the field because it may be hard to even stand up! I caught this fallacy because I am in the medical profession. I hope Mr Lak does not always paint with such broad strokes.

Buddha Basnyat, Kathmandu

Thank you, Daniel Lak. I knew it would take a non-Nepali man to write that article, because most Nepali men and women don't feel the same way or if they do, don't care to write it. For most, Nepali women should be subservient, silent, and have few opinions. Nepal rails and strikes against every other problem, but there's no voice calling to uproot the ancient patriarchal system that is so entwined with Hindu culture.

Monika Acharya, email

The lives of urban Nepali women are just as shocking as those of women in rural areas. A woman wakes up, rushes to the kitchen to prepare the morning meal, at the same time helps her children get ready for school, and then goes to work. Meanwhile, her husband spends hours chatting in the teashop. No matter how useless his conversation, the man has a platform to share his ideas and is allowed to express his opinion whether it comes from rational thought or baseless assumption. A woman would be excluded from the conversation, because "what does she know about things besides home and family", and her thoughts are "superficial". I also appreciate that Daniel Lak acknowledges how the media and INGOs usually glorify women from influential Kathmandu families, rather than the unsung heroes. A woman's identity should not be influenced by father's business and husband's popularity.

Bobby Limbu, Hanoi

BUSINESS UNUSUAL

Ashutosh Tiwari is quite right in saying that we need to find comprehensive, multi-faceted ways to sell our country abroad ('Presenting Nepal', Strictly Business, \$342). It would be good if people like himself started to help out. The ideas are there, obviously. Why not put your money where your mouth is?

Bibek Thapa, email

ALL A-TWITCHER

I see the Ass has a new name for the man variously known as Chhabilal, Pushpa Kamal, Prachanda, The Fierce One, The Awesome One, The Man with the Scary Moustachios etc (he's beginning to sound like The Artist Formerly Known as the Artist Formerly Known as Prince). The Twitchy One indeed. It's appropriate—in his years as a pseudo guerrilla, I'm sure Dahal learnt well the advantage of being a moving target.

AN, email

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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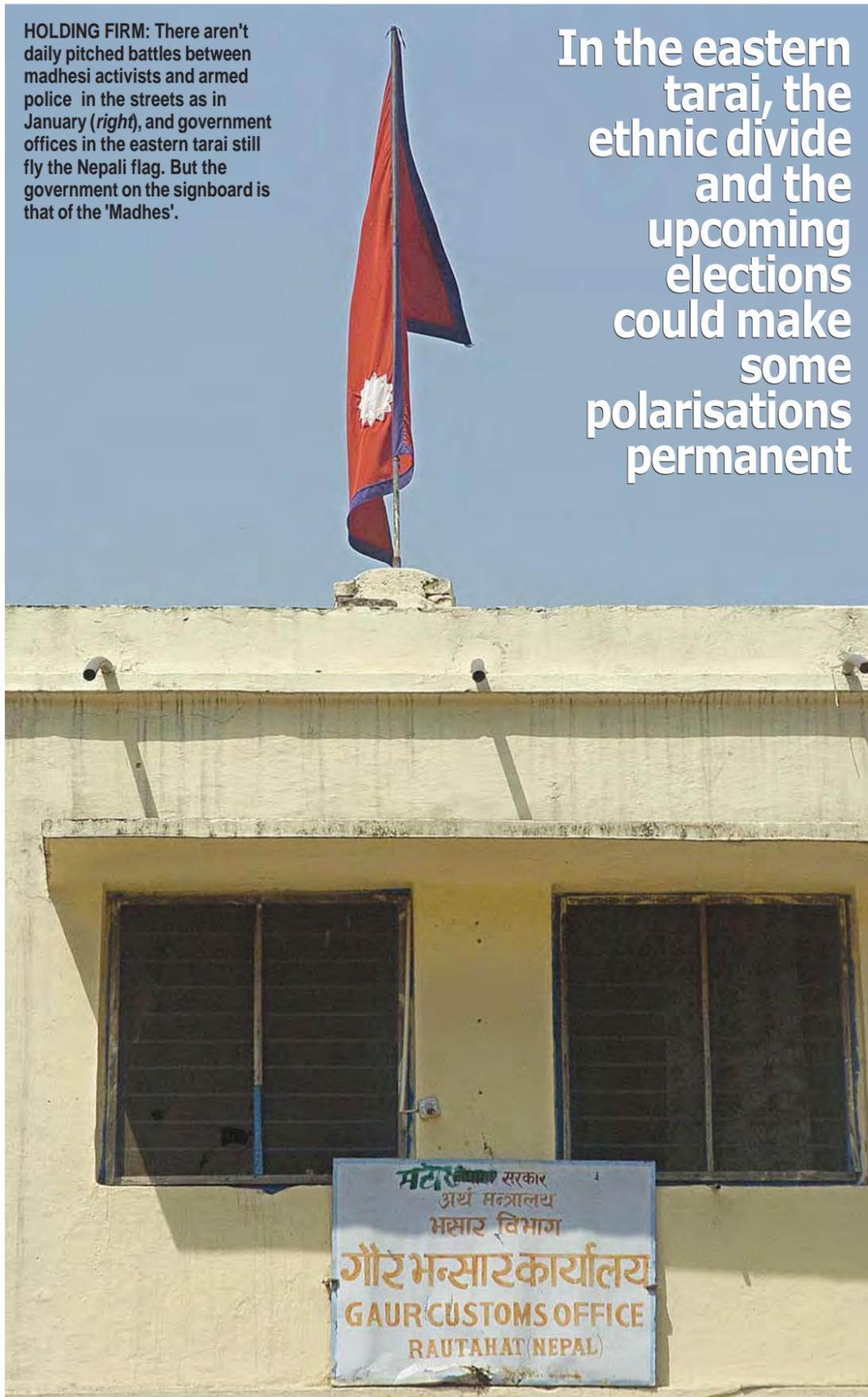
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Three months later

HOLDING FIRM: There aren't daily pitched battles between madhesi activists and armed police in the streets as in January (right), and government offices in the eastern tarai still fly the Nepali flag. But the government on the signboard is that of the 'Madhes'.

In the eastern tarai, the ethnic divide and the upcoming elections could make some polarisations permanent



SAGAR SHRESTHA



AJIT TIWARI

KUNDA DIXIT in SIRAHA

Nearly three months after they witnessed an unprecedented explosion of violence, the towns of the central and eastern tarai are limping back to normal. But the ethnic polarisation of Nepal's plains may be an enduring legacy.

Here in Lahan where it all started in mid-January, many hill residents who fled back then have returned. Protests by the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) do not seem to have the same energy these days, especially after the Tharus refused to join, following the massacre of Maoists in Gaur three weeks ago. The sekuwa shops are open, and night buses roar through town all night.

But the atmosphere is still charged, cross-border crime is widespread and there is a general sense of lawlessness. Kidnappings for ransom, mainly of hill people by one of the tarai militant groups, are a daily occurrence. Attacks and death threats against journalists have forced many to move out. Few think proper elections can be held in June.

"Things will never be the same again," says one Lahan resident, "Nepal is now divided and the border is the east-west highway."

Indeed, election politics and new ethnic polarisation can create

a volatile mix in Siraha and its adjoining districts as campaigning for elections heat up. The Chure-Bhabar agitation is a direct response to a militant madhes and represents the interests of the Tamang, Magar and other hill-ethnic groups that live along or north of the highway.

Meeting madhes demands for re-demarcation of constituencies by plains people will short-change hill dwellers, and vice-versa. Highway towns like Lahan are where these interests intersect, and delineating voting units north-south will favour madhesis while hill ethnics living here will benefit from an east-west arrangement. All this is made much more complicated by past gerrymandering.

The most direct impact of the last three months is that the Maoists are now 'internally displaced people' from the eastern tarai, and everyone who didn't like them (from royalist land-owners to local political party cadre) are happy with that. Nearly everyone here agrees that it was the Maoists who sparked off the protests with the killing of a madhesi activist on 18 January, and then made matters worse by spiriting away his body.

One thing the hill and plains dwellers of the tarai are in agreement about is that the eight parties goofed again by not transferring Home Minister Krishna Sitaula to another ministry in last week's reshuffle. "It was an opportunity missed," said one activist here, "it proved to us that Kathmandu is still not listening."

Now, with elections in the air, the MJF is fading away just as suddenly as it appeared, and madhesi leaders of the political parties who took up the Forum's slogans during the agitation are back in their parties.

Militant madhesi groups like the two factions of the JTMM are at the forefront again. Besides kidnappings and bombings, one of them has called for a tarai shutdown on 9 April, demanding an end to Kathmandu's 'colonial rule' of the plains.

Unlike the rest of Nepal which has experienced a year of ceasefire, the war never ended here. With the new ethnic rift and an unstable election up ahead, it doesn't look like the eastern tarai will see real peace anytime soon. ●

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Fifth birthday

Laxmi Bank celebrated its fifth anniversary at the start of the month. The bank, which started in Birganj and in 2005 set up its corporate office in Hattisar, Kathmandu, now has eight branches around the country. The bank's assets now stand at Rs 8 billion, and their non-performing loan rate—0.5 percent—is the best in the industry. Laxmi Bank provides online banking through Laxmi iBank and mobile phone banking through SMS Alert. The bank has won the Best Presented Accounts award from the Institute of Chartered Accountants (ICAN) for the last two years.



Golf winners

For the first time in its 13-year history, Surya Nepal Masters this year was won by a Nepali. Deepak Thapa Magar shot a one-over 73 and finished with a tournament tally of eight-under 280 to bag the winner's cheque of Rs 324,000. Sabin Sapkota won second place and Rs 224,000 with a six-under 66 to finish at five-under 283. Malaysian Sasidaran and Nepali Deepak Acharya tied for third place at one-under 287, and were awarded Rs 114,000 each. In the amateur category, Rabi Khadka shot a final round 75 to win the amateur title with a tournament tally of six over 294. Surya Prasad Sharma finished second at 303, while Tashi Ghale finished third at 305. Suman Sapkota was nominated the Most Promising Nepali Golfer.



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NEW PRODUCTS



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power windows, power lock, an internally controlled rear view mirror, anti-lock braking system, and driver's side airbag. The car is being marketed by Arun Intercontinental traders. Maruti's other compact cars are the Alto, the Swift, and the WagonR.

Paper, paper on the table

The Common Minimum Program can't become like another election manifesto

The document on the Common Minimum Program that the eight parties (surprisingly) signed is a dramatic departure from economic plan the Maoists were insisting upon to build the great New Nepal.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

There is no mention of 'nationalist capitalists' or of doing away with private ownership of land. There are no clauses on nationalisation of private health centres or educational institutions.

Instead, the program talks about foreign and domestic investment, the need to build and reconstruct infrastructure, and most importantly, increasing labor productivity and getting from the paradigm wherein the economy is held to ransom by a 'pseudo-militant' labour force. The CMP actually talks about ending extortion of all kinds and reducing the fiscal gap.

Of course there are reasons to be sceptical. How many plans have we seen signed but never implemented? The document reads suspiciously like a wishful-thinking party election manifesto. The ambitious clauses that plan

to end corruption, nepotism, and favouritism have real attention to detail, such as requiring government officials to hand over all gifts received to the government. Unfortunately, it sounds a bit like the slogans of yore: drinking water for all, universal free education, and the like.

The real test of credibility has begun for the eight parties and the coming months will present a challenge to the CPN-M in particular. Its leadership will have to demonstrate that it still controls the party's cadres. For the seven parties, renewed credibility will come from dealing with the powerbrokers—often their own—who are under investigation by the Committee for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority. The king, his people, and palace might have their powers suspended, but it is now up to the parties to ensure that they do not enable new palaces to sprout in Balkhu, Baluwatar, Buddhanagar, or Budhanilkantha. That's what reform is about.

The parties could perhaps afford to deviate from the earlier agreements. If this plan is ignored, there will be little chance to set in palce conditions for a better Nepal. We can't afford a New Nepal in which there are worse versions of the failures of the old one.



While the CMP does emphasise economic growth and development, it does not address the critical issues of job creation, revenue building, and enterprise creation in the Nepal's remote, rural corners. It also assumes that resources are unlimited and that it is not essential to look at issues relating to their sustainable use. The plan does not have a strategy on how to discipline the plethora of donors and INGOs that will come to prey on the rebuilding business. In the 1990s, these agencies helped produce some great report writers. Hopefully, this time around, they'll drop the lesson on unaccountable spending. The onus also lies on such agencies to ensure that the CMP is followed through.

It's been a long year. Hopefully by next April, things will look less like an April Fool's joke. ●

"The business environment in Nepal is pathetic"



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Radhesh Pant, managing director of the Bank of Kathmandu, spoke to Nepali Times this week about the state of banking and the business environment in Nepal.

Nepali Times: What does Bank of Kathmandu (BoK) consider its unique qualities?

Radhesh Pant: Bank of Kathmandu was established 13 years ago and is wholly owned by Nepalis. We rank fifth in Nepal in terms of revenue and profitability. [A large proportion of its shares] are public, we've managed our operating costs well, and have grown steadily—we have 12 branches and two counters. We're doing a lot of homework focussing on our niche, which shall help sustain us in the future.

What are the challenges for BoK?

There's overcrowding in the banking industry, so there will be competition in pricing and quality services. Our focus is long term. We have to capitalise on the fact that we are in all five development regions and that we are wholly Nepali-owned. We started operating satellite branches to minimise costs—these have no more than five staff, some part-time or on contract. We are also looking to invest in new areas such as rural or micro finance. Technology has always been our strength—we use one of the best banking software packages available, Finacle by Infosys, and would like to maximise its use in the future.

What's your assessment of the state of banking in Nepal?

On the one hand there is congestion in the banking sector but on the other, you see that about 85 percent of Nepalis don't have access to banking. There are a lot of players, but there is a huge market yet to be penetrated. Due to instability over the past few years, the investment climate has not been good, which led to a stagnation of the private sector. That was when banks entered retail, but retail is also getting crowded, which is why the banking sector needs to move on identifying different opportunities. Banks will have to be really competitive and try to create their niche market, or they'll have to start consolidating through mergers and acquisitions in order to become a cost player. There are a lot of things we can do in the 'New Nepal' and we're looking forward to those opportunities. But in the current situation, international and domestic investors are still apprehensive about investments in Nepal, and not much is coming in.

So there are real challenges.

The first challenge for banks and for the state is to be able to attract investment in the country. Second, in banking, new products have to be introduced. The

banking industry cannot sustain itself just with deposits and credits. We need expertise in investment banking, analysing projects, raising capital, new financing techniques. We need to focus on some core sectors—hydropower, infrastructure, tourism, herbs—we need to understand and analyse the financing of those sectors. And finally, I believe that we need to play a major role in providing access to finance in rural Nepal.

And what about the business environment?

It's quite pathetic. Look at the last two months, especially in the tarai, where business has come to a complete halt. The numerous problems with security and labour are not good for business.

What does the future look like for BoK?

We want to grow in a sustainable manner. We're planning three more branches this fiscal year, and will venture into small-medium enterprises and rural and micro finance. BoK already has 150 odd agents connected throughout the country by 'BOK Money Transfer'—an in-house product—for inward money remittance. We want to build on that, and grow the remittance we receive from abroad by deploying resources.

No revenge

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 31 March-13 April

A week after the Gaur massacre in which 28 Nepalis were killed, the investigation committee is mired in controversy. The longer the delay, the bigger the danger that its fallout will be nationwide.

It is clear the massacre happened because of the intense rivalry between the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) with its ex-Maoist leader Upendra Yadav, and the Maoists themselves. Both sides want to wipe each other out—there is no immediate chance of the two burying the hatchet anytime soon.



MANOJ TIMALSINA

WRECKED: MJF and YCL members clashed at this stage in Gaur.

But this doesn't mean that inhumane atrocities like Gaur should be allowed to happen again. The truth will come out about what happened that day. It is clear that unarmed members of the Young Communist League were hunted down and ruthlessly beaten to death with sharp bamboo sticks. Those who ran and hid inside houses were dragged out and butchered. This massacre was pre-meditated. Chasing and killing unarmed people and perpetrating atrocities on women are heinous crimes. The criminals must be brought to justice.

For this, we first need a credible investigation committee that can go through all the evidence with a fine-tooth comb. After that we need swift justice for the guilty and compensation for the victims. Otherwise outside forces and those with revenge on their minds can create further havoc.

If it wants to be seen as a political force, the MJF must also take responsibility for the massacre and hand over the guilty. The Gaur massacre should be an exception, not the rule.

Stealing

Sanghu, 2 April

साँघु

Democracy may be here, but the Royal Nepal Army is not turning into a democratic force anytime soon. Chief of Army Staff Rukmangat Katuwal ordered a number of measures to be set into motion after the transition, but some officers are disregarding the Army Act 2006.

There are accounts of officers involved in embezzling as much as Rs 70 million from forces on peacekeeping duty. Those who lost their pay include the 169 members of the Ranasingh Battalion who went on peacekeeping duty to Haiti last summer and returned in February this year. Members of the unit received from the UN a monthly salary of \$1,028, a governmental allowance of \$1,000 for working the peacekeeping force, and food rations. Of the 86 items on the list for soldiers' rations, only six were actually provided as required. The rest were sold outside the camps and substituted with cheap local goods.

Shumshere Battalion's ration officer Major Bishnu Khatri is said to have embezzled more than Rs 10 million out of the ration funds for the 507-member peacekeeping force. The soldiers who served in Haiti say they never saw the milk, biscuits, eggs, cheese, cornflakes, meat, and dry fruits that were supposed to be part of their rations.

As for the salaries, soldiers received only \$775 of the \$1028 that is due to them. Officers, who receive the same, get a take home sum of \$850. Soldiers thus pay \$253 each into the Army Welfare Fund, while officers contribute only \$150. The soldiers also complain that although they were in Haiti for seven months, they only received salaries for six months.

Morning after

Prakash Timilsina in *Jana Aaastha*, 4 April

आस्था

The morning after five Maoist leaders were made ministers, they gathered at Pushpa Kamal Dahal's house in Khusibu. The first to arrive—in his ministry car—was Minister for Forest and Soil Conservation Matrika Yadav. He was followed by Minister for Local Development Deb Gurung, and Minister of Information and

Communications Krishna Prasad Mahara. Minister of Women, Children, and Social Welfare, Khadga Bahadur BK arrived at around 8.30 AM.

Minister of Physical Planning and Works Hisila Yami, and leaders Baburam Bhattarai, Ram Bahadur Thapa, and Pushpa Kamal Dahal were waiting to start an 'informal' meeting. Dahal apparently spent the better part of the morning advising the new ministers on how to present themselves effectively.

When the meeting ended at 10.30 AM, Mahara stayed on at the HQ [Dahal's house]. Yadav headed to Nakkhu prison to meet a Maoist party worker and only reached his new office at 1PM. Minister Yami headed straight to check out the ministers' quarters in Pulchok, and BK headed home to Chabahil. Mahara reached his office at around 11AM, but rushed right out to attend the anniversary of Radio Nepal.



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Framed pictures of the king were taken out of government offices, and Mahara decided to replace the one in his office with a photo of Prime Minister Koirala. When BK reached his office, he was thirsty, but there was no water for him. The entire office was turned upside down to find a full jar. The Maoist ministers felt the shortage of fuel, and had to make stops at petrol stations.

Unlike in the past, not one file was signed in any of their ministries. Yadav said, "We do not sign files without studying the contents carefully." The Maoist ministers have decided not to wear daura suruwal,

arguing that it is a reminder of the dark days of the Panchayat era. The 'dedicated' their first day of work to understanding the system, which meant no work was done in their ministries.

Un-educated

Dharmendra Jha and Rajan Pokhrel in *Annapurna Post*, 3 April

अन्नपूर्ण पोष्ट

Dhanusa - Ramsaran Sada, 60, sits near the Ram Janaki temple in Dhanusa dham, takes a long drag from his *bidi*, and looks away when we ask him about constituent assembly elections.

He knows nothing about the 20 June election announced by the new interim government. He has no clue why an election of that kind would take place.

Sada tells us that people say he is a Kangresi because he was born the year the Nepali Congress was formed. "I hear the government is conducting a 'big' election but I don't know why, how or when it is happening," he says. Pointing at his friend Bhola Bahadur Poudel, Sada says, "He is a peon at a local school, perhaps he knows." Poudel doesn't know about the big day either, but says, "I have heard the phrase ['constituent assembly elections']

many times." A little distance away, 17-year old Kishore Santosh from Laxmipur says much the same. "I am illiterate, how would I know what a constituent assembly is."

Sada, Poudel, and Santosh are a sharp reminder of what happens to a society that cannot educate its members. Lal Bahadur Hathi, chairman of the Dhanusa teacher's union, is angry: "The leaders just stay in the headquarters. Shouldn't they be more involved in political education so everyone is aware of the changes taking place in the country?"

Illiteracy is one of the major reasons for the under-

development in the tarai and for how disenchanting the people are. "If the leaders were selfless and worked hard to fulfil their responsibilities, the problem will be solved," adds Hathi "There is no political awareness because there aren't enough teachers."

Ram Krishna Yadav, president of the NC in Dhanusa, says he knows that there is a serious lack of awareness and that political education is a top priority for his party. "We have to conduct the elections at any cost. If that means devising a program for political training, we are ready to do that as well."

National Development Party

Interview in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 30 March-13 April



Takashi Miyahara has lived in Nepal for the past 41 years. He is a Nepali citizen of Japanese origin and has opened his own 'Nepal National Development Party'. An engineer and tourism entrepreneur, Miyahara says he became a Nepali citizen precisely so he could launch his party.

Himal Khabarpatrika: So, what's with this party?

Takashi Miyahara: This is a party not for politics but for development.

How so?

My plan is to build an east-west railway track, other underground trains, north-south trains to link with Indian towns and highways joining Birganj-Kathmandu, Narayanghat-Kathmandu, Narayanghat-Pokhara through tunnels. I would shift the capital to Narayanghat, build an international airport in Simara, build dams on the Kosi, Karnali, and Gandaki to assist in irrigation, a port, tourism and transportation.

When did you set up the party?

14/15 months ago.

How large is the party?

Not too big. But after our press conference last month 30/40 youngsters came up and said they'd join.

But you need 10,000 members to register a party.

We'll get there. But that rule should also apply to the other eight parties.

Are you also going to contest the elections?

I am planning to stand for elections from Lalitpur No 2. If I don't stand myself, I'll get the youngsters to do so.



Eight parties:

"Boom" "Crash" "Help" "Bang"

समय Abin Shrestha in *Samaya*, 5 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"It is not important that people change, so long as their mentality is changing. Our priority, therefore, is to accept the changing political environment and move ahead."

CPN-M member Krishna Bahadur Mahara, Minister for Information and Communications, quoted in *Gorkhapatra*, 2 April.

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In this town, most social events are lubricated with alcohol. And we use the word 'event' broadly: everything from "but it's Wednesday" to "meet the head of a very large and important organisation", "let's brainstorm for this serious report" to "maybe this is a date or maybe I'm going to ditch you".

Nepali Times is calling for restraint. Because we're cunning and because we're familiar with the howls of protest ("what else is there to do"), we're giving you an alternative. No, not forming a book club, pressing flowers, or digitising your collection of 80s tapes, but the art of the coffee hour. Most of us are regular people who work six days a week, unlike the handful of habitués of the city coffeehouses, and cappuccino and cake is a ritual that too often falls by the wayside. Get back into the habit at any of these cafés, all staff favourites. All but one serve proper espresso-based coffee drinks and desserts; some have excellent lunch and dinner menus too.

In one's (coffee)

Swap your social drink for a coffee

Saturday Café, Boudha:

This tranquil café, located in the shadow of the Boudha stupa, is the perfect place to de-stress and get away from it all. You don't even have to bring your own diversions—the second floor is stocked with novels, travel books and, given the location, the inevitable self-help books. The terrace is great for people- and stupa-watching over a cup of rich, freshly ground and brewed coffee. The tall glasses of iced coffee go down a treat on a summer's day.

Banana Cat Café, Pulchok:

The owners roast the coffee beans themselves at this café housed in an old mud building. The sandpit, swing, and resident cat make it perfect for an afternoon out with kids, while the other half of the languid garden is a good escape from said children. The two rooms are great for a quiet chat or read, or examining the jewellery, fabric, and pottery on sale. Don't be surprised if the names of the coffees don't quite match up to what you expect—a café au lait tastes just as good if called a latte. The desserts are unique, and the miles crepes and an-mitsu with ice-cream are much-loved.

La Dolce Vita, Thamel:

A great spot for discreet people-watching at Thamel's busiest intersection fuelled by what might be the most consistent coffee in town. Your macchiato or cappuccino will always taste the same at La Dolce Vita's low-key second floor lounge or lush rooftop. Other amusements include good tiramisi and watching the staff control their giggles when you order the 'chocolate mouse'.

Singma Food Court, Pulchok:

There's more than just delicious Malaysian and Singaporean food at this spacious restaurant. Singma has recently expanded its coffee menu to include cappuccino, espresso, latte and mocha made with top quality Nepali-grown coffee beans or, for a higher price, Starbucks. There's always a wide selection of excellent desserts such as baked cheesecakes and a delicious old-fashioned trifle. The ambience may somewhat functional, but Singma's free wifi internet access more than makes up for it.

Café Mitra, Thamel:

Sometimes you just want to be left alone. Or you'd just rather no one saw you having coffee with a Certain Person. Café Mitra, which is packed to its little gills most evenings, is surprisingly quiet in the late afternoons, and the espresso here is excellent, hot, and strong. It's also a good cure for an attack of the mopes, with its stack of trashy, gossipy magazines in the funky loos.

La'Soon, Pulchok:

This is an elegant choice for a late-afternoon espresso. Consistency is never a problem, because La'Soon serves excellent Nespresso coffees that come in pre-tamped pods for use in the special machine. The garden is quiet and the interiors smart-casual (the looming boiler is an oddly soothing sight). The waitstaff are among the best in town, remembering your preferences without ever being intrusive.

Himalayan Java, Thamel:

You can get solitude amid the crowds at the always-packed Java. The intensity of the American-style acidic, bitter roast might take some getting used to (it holds up well in the flat white), but that doesn't really matter when you're mixing everything from peanut butter to raspberry syrup into your iced double mocha. The desserts are good for a sugar high—oversize cookies, brownies, and things best described with words like 'triple' and 'fudge', and the wireless internet is good, though not free.



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

April 7, 4:30 pm

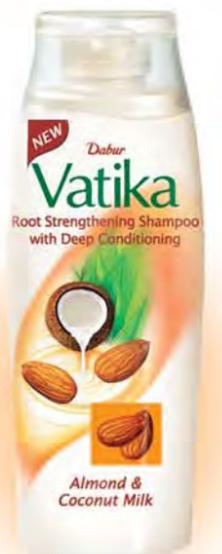
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BANANA CAT

Roadhouse Cafés in Thamel, Pulchowk, Bhatbhateni:

The two newer branches of this favourite pizzeria are almost better coffeshops than the original in Thamel. The earth tones and the shards of mirror and river stones embedded in the walls consciously transport you from away the bustle of the city. The friendly, efficient waitstaff are a bonus.

Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka:

The only coffee here comes in a French press, but since we find that infinitely preferable to drip coffee, Dhokaima's cosy bar and leafy, paved alfresco seating make the list. The bakery counter offers a selection of desserts including a popular rendition of black forest cake.

New Orleans in Thamel, Boudha:

It might not always be service with a smile at New Orleans, but the lattes are decent and the cake is served in very large portions. The wireless internet access is free in Thamel and costs Rs 200 a day in Boudha.

Illy Café, Thamel:

It's exciting to have a local franchise of Illy, the Italian coffee purveyor that is opening up new markets around the world by offering high quality, affordable shade-grown coffee. The café above Java in Thamel is a bit of a puzzle, though. It shares space with a Bose and Apple showroom and Photo Concern, and often directs customers to order from the Java menu. "But I want Illy coffee," you say. Sometimes you can get it.

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BECAUSE EVERY GIRL IS SPECIAL



MARTY LOGAN

from their youthful risk taking. Often they benefit monetarily as well as politically.

Young men in western societies aren't immune from the angst and alienation that drives Muslim youth into the arms of Al Qaeda and turns Tamils into Tigers. It just takes a slightly different form. Crime in the United States, Europe and Canada is overwhelmingly the work of young men. Vehicle accidents from driving too fast are almost always caused by males in their teens or twenties. Riots, street fights and bar brawls? Young guys "blowing off steam" as some would have it.

Young men need to be given productive outlets for their volatile energy

There's an upside to this youthful energy and dynamic willingness to push physical boundaries. It can be directed into the police or the armed forces to at least serve the consensual cause of the nation. Sport needs young men to funnel their competitiveness into teamwork and victory for the side. Even the arts and pop culture benefit from the same testosterone which fuels bar fights and warrior culture. Young male rock guitar heroes are gunmen wielding a musical instrument rather than a Kalashnikov.

But how do we keep an eye on young men? Do we need to license them? Make them carry ID and report to the police regularly? Should they be sent off to boot camp and kept calm, or given injections to calm those raging hormones?

No, they should be given jobs and a meaningful role in the social forces that matter. In Nepal, that means political parties and democracy. First, get the economy moving, so the vast crowds of young men that burn tires and show up for every riot or protest will be too busy earning money to gherao or march in torchlight processions. Then give them a role in a meaningful process of nation building.

Direct that useful energy or feel its wrath. It's that simple. ●

Unstable elements

Those who think that it's possible to win a 'war on terror' tend to believe that it's justified to single out Muslims for special attention, that followers of Islam are more likely to turn to terror to assert their radical agendas.



HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

I beg to differ. But I do think a form of 'identity profiling' is justified in trying to keep people safe from militant attacks, whether in Afghanistan or Canada, Nepal or Sri Lanka.

Quite simply, I think we all need to keep a close eye on young men, whether Muslim or atheist, liberal democrat or Maoist.

Overwhelmingly, around the world, most violent activity is carried out by males between the ages of 15 and 35. Old and middle-aged men may lead Al Qaeda, other militant groups, and various mafias but the shock troops are young, and they probably enjoy their work.

The French scholar Olivier Roy describes these 20- and 30-somethings as a 'lost generation', an aimless, testosterone-charged seething mass of frustrated men. It was not necessarily political Islam or the

glories of a restored Caliphate that drove 19 Arab hijackers to commit the horrendous crimes of 11 September, Roy speculates, but youthful angst magnified by the bewitching messages of Osama bin Laden and his ilk.

All of history's revolutions, insurgencies, and militant movements have at their core a critical mass of young men who are willing to take great physical risks to themselves and others. Often, they are ready to die or kill. Why? Because they are young and have not been tempered by time. They don't know that extremes flare and fade, that moderation predominates, and that old men are the only ones who benefit

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"Donors can only support the parties"



KIRAN NEPAL

When Gareth Thomas, Britain's minister of International Development arrived in Kathmandu for a four-day visit earlier this month, his first stop wasn't to see ministers or politicians. Instead, Thomas headed out to Sankhuwasabha to see a DfID-supported community forestry project. On the trip, he spoke with *Nepali Times* about the challenges ahead for the country, the peace process, and increased British aid to Nepal.

Nepali Times: What impression will you take away from Sankhuwasabha?

Gareth Thomas: You really see Nepal only when you go out of Kathmandu. We spoke with people in the districts about their priorities and hopes for development. The most positive aspect of the trip was that the political parties were united and presented a single joint agreement to us. Our impression is that the people in the villages, the chief district officer, the political leadership in the villages, the entrepreneurs all want better roads, irrigation facilities, electricity, good education, and health services.

Do you think British aid has been put to good use here?

One can't generalise, but in Sankhuwasabha's Dhungedhara community forest, the user groups have made wood available to local schools, some schools are running scholarship programs, others have brought in teachers. There are more options to earn income in the region, and the community-centred program has helped improve living conditions of the local people considerably. These are all positive signs.

Some British-assisted projects, such as the Chainpur-Nunhadi road, have been stop-and-go. Where do you see British aid going now?

During the conflict we cut back on the number of assistance programs. The road was supposed to be 20km long and 40 percent of the work had already been completed when work on it stopped, because our focus was narrowed to education and health. Programs will resume when the elections take place and there is agreement from all sides.

The most important thing is good governance. Political parties should let the people lead—their demands have to be met. The sphere of taxes needs to be increased; this is the only way to create revenue. Donors support national priorities. We want the peace process to move ahead and political parties to clarify their development plans and priorities. In the last few days I have really come to understand how important assistance is to these rural parts, and we are trying to increase our total assistance. I cannot decide alone on these matters because I have to talk to bureaucrats in Kathmandu.

So what will you tell the central level leaders and government representatives in Kathmandu?

This visit to Nepal has made me hopeful, but that is not to say there are no challenges. When I meet with representatives of the government, I will tell them what I heard in these villages. I will try understanding what leaders in Kathmandu are offering these rural areas during the elections. I will include the voice of the people while advising the leaders in Kathmandu and request them to listen to what the people are saying. It is important to understand how Kathmandu's leadership responds to rural demands. Nepal's want the upcoming elections be free and fair and follow the ideals of democracy. The government needs to pay attention to that.

The time for real leadership by parties starts now. Donors can only walk behind the programs, goals, and plans that the political parties and government have made. While the government needs to understand what the Nepali people want, the people should also be patient with the political parties. It is important to see how the interim government will address the priorities, like those set by people in Dhungedhara.

The interim government now includes the Maoists, what's your reading?

To have the Maoists in the interim government is historic, and very encouraging. This government is only the beginning of a stable and strong peace process. The government should immediately start making policies on issues that will be important during the constituent assembly elections.

Will Britain's assistance to Nepal increase?

Assistance will increase considerably. This year British assistance to Nepal was Rs 5.2 billion, which will go up next fiscal year to Rs 5.8 billion. In addition, Rs 438 million has been allocated under the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, and an extra Rs 5 billion will be provided for the peace process and for debt relief. Now, people can question the government if the work being done does not match with the money donors are giving.

Tarai oil, redux

MARK WILLIAMSON
in EDINBURGH

Cairn Energy is back. This week Cairn announced plans to restart its hunt for oil in the tarai and increased its investment in Nepal. The Edinburgh-based Cairn Energy said assuming a "continued improvement in the political climate" in Nepal it expected to be able to start seismic studies on its exploration licences in the country early next year, 2008.



The announcements breathe life into a process that has been stalled for two years, since the Scottish firm halted its hunt for black gold in the tarai after King Gyanendra's takeover. The company was awarded rights to explore five blocks covering 35,000 sq km in the tarai in 2004.

Last week, Cairn said it would negotiate with the government in Kathmandu to restart activity under the 2004 contracts. The company signalled its continuing confidence in the prospect of Nepal containing meaningful reserves of oil and gas by acquiring rights to two more blocks from US corporation Texana. Cairn chief executive Sir Bill Gammell said the company had also reached an agreement to acquire control over more exploration acreage.

However, even if the political situation remains favourable, Cairn could not expect to start pumping oil in Nepal for years. Seismic studies would be used to identify which areas, if any, might contain hydrocarbons. The company would then complete costly exploration drilling to pin down deposits and try to estimate whether they are big enough to develop commercially. Installing equipment to pump oil and gas out of the ground, process the output and ship it to market would add months or years to the process.

Cairn hit the big time in the oil business in 2004, when it found billions of barrels of oil in Rajasthan, India. ●

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Old sake in new bottles

Six months into his premiership, Shinzo Abe is provoking anger across Asia and mixed feelings in Japan's key ally, the United States.

Abe's predecessor, the mould-breaking Junichiro Koizumi, revived Japan's economy, reformed the postal savings system, and smashed the long-ruling Liberal Democratic Party's



COMMENT
Francis Fukuyama

faction system. But he also legitimised a new Japanese nationalism and antagonised China and South Korea by annual visits to the Yasukuni shrine. Abe is even firmer on building an assertive, unapologetic Japan.

The Yasukuni controversy is not some obscure historical matter China and Korea use to badger Japan for political advantage. The real problem is not the 12 Class-A war criminals interred at the shrine, but the Yushukan military museum next door.

After the Mitsubishi Zero, tanks, and machine guns, on display is a history of the Pacific War that restores the 'Truth of Modern Japanese History'—Japan, a victim of European colonial powers, protected the rest of Asia. Its colonial occupation of Korea was a 'partnership'. The

The US could help curtail Japan's newly-resurgent old nationalism, but it will cost



PEACE SHRINE: Mitsubishi Zero fighter used in World War II stands at Tokyo's Yasukuni military museum.

victims of Japanese militarism in Nanjing or Manila are invisible.

No museum in Japan presents an alternative view of its 20th century history, so Yushukan is not one viewpoint among many in a pluralist democracy. Successive governments have hidden behind the Yushukan museum's operation by a private religious organisation to deny responsibility for the views expressed there.

Japan has never come to terms with its role in the Pacific War. Socialist Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama apologised to China in 1995, but there has never been genuine debate in Japan

over its degree of responsibility, and no attempt to propagate an alternative account to that of Yushukan.

My exposure to the Japanese right came in the early 1990's, when I was on a couple of panels in Japan with Watanabe Soichi who, unbeknownst to me, was selected to translate my book *The End of History and the Last Man*. Watanabe, a Sophia University professor, was a collaborator of Shintaro Ishihara, the nationalist politician who wrote *The Japan That Can Say No* and is now the governor of Tokyo.

He explains to large

audiences how the people of Manchuria were so grateful to Japan, they got teary when the occupying Kwantung Army left. Watanabe says the Pacific War was about race—the US was determined to keep a non-white people down. He's the equivalent of a Holocaust denier, but draws large and sympathetic audiences. I regularly receive books from Japanese writers "explaining" how the Nanjing Massacre was a fraud.

There have been disturbing incidents recently in which nationalists have physically intimidated critics of Koizumi's Yasukuni visits. For instance,

former prime ministerial candidate Kato Koichi's home was firebombed. (On the other hand, the publisher of Yomiuri Shimbun attacked Koizumi's visits and published a fascinating series on responsibility for the war.)

The US is in a difficult position. American strategists are eager to ring China with a NATO-like defensive barrier, building outward from the US-Japan Security Treaty. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has been pushing Japan to rearm, and officially supports a proposed revision of Article 9 of Japan's postwar constitution, which bans it from having a military or waging war.

But the legitimacy of the entire American military position in East Asia rests on the US exercising Japan's sovereign function of self-defence. Japan's unilateral revision of Article 9, viewed against the backdrop of its new nationalism, would isolate Japan from virtually all Asia.

Whether Abe pushes ahead with the revision—long part of his agenda—will depend greatly on the advice he gets from friends in the US. President Bush said nothing about Japan's new nationalism to his 'good friend Junichiro' out of gratitude for Japanese support in Iraq. Now that Japan has withdrawn its small contingent of troops, perhaps Bush will speak plainly. ● (Project Syndicate)

Francis Fukuyama is dean of the School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, and chair of The American Interest.

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Interview with a comet-hunter



Alan Hale, PhD, achieved worldwide recognition when Comet Hale-Bopp whooshed through the skies in the early months of 1997. But Hale's contributions are not limited to the co-discovery of the most widely-viewed comet in history. He has studied extensively the threat posed by near-Earth asteroids and the detecting

of planets around other stars. Hale is an outspoken advocate of improved science education and is pushing for an expanded human presence in space. Hale, who was born in Tachikawa, Japan in 1958, is the author of the acclaimed book *Everybody's Comet*. *Nepali Times* spoke with Hale about his wide-ranging career and how Nepal could develop astronomy education.

Nepali Times: How did you get into the field of astronomy? What inspired you to become an astronomer?

Alan Hale: I first became interested in astronomy when I was about six years old. My father checked out some books on astronomy from the library and handed them to me, to see if I might be interested. Turns out, I was. This was in the mid-1960s, during the Apollo 'rush to the moon', and I became inspired me to study astronomy and space. Later I



STAR GAZING
Kedar S Badu

had the opportunity to work at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory as a contractor for

the Deep Space Network [until 1986], and was involved in several space projects, most notably the Voyager 2 encounter with Uranus. This reawakened my long-time desire to pursue a career as a scientist.

What was your most exciting moment in stargazing?

This would have to be discovering Comet Hale-Bopp in 1995 and then seeing it. Some other spectacular, memorable sights I've seen include other Great Comets—Bennet, West, and Hyakutake—and seeing Comet McNaught last month in the daytime was quite a treat. The six total solar eclipses I've seen, and the January 1992 annular eclipse that happened at sunset, rank high on my list of favourite sights. I witnessed the great Leonid meteor storm of 1966, and the 1998 Leonid shower, with its many bright fireballs, was also quite impressive.

What key issues in astronomy are you now engaged in?

Some of the things I'm interested in include the hunt for objects that might threaten Earth (i.e., comets and asteroids), and also the role these objects may have played in the formation of the planets—and what resources they might contain for future human use. I'm also rather interested in the 'transition' between comets and asteroids, and the relationship between these two types of objects.

Highlights in April

Venus continues its brilliant show in the western sky after sunset and is near the famous Pleiades star cluster from 10-12 April. Saturn is prominent and at its highest point between 8-9PM all month. The predawn scene will start to get lively, with Jupiter at its highest point each night before daybreak. The Moon meets Mars during the early morning hours on the 14 April. Also enjoy watching—through binoculars is best—the reddish Mars and faintly green Uranus in close conjunction on 30 April an hour before dawn. The Lyrid meteor shower peaks on 22 April.

The search for planets around other stars is now a heavy observational field. I haven't done too much work in this field in recent years, but hope to get back to it soon. I'm especially interested in planetary systems that might have habitable planets like Earth, and the conditions that might be necessary for life to develop on these worlds. I'm also interested in spaceflight, particularly in advancing commercial human spaceflight and eventually creating a spacefaring future for humanity.

The hunt for Earth-threatening objects, and the search for planets around other stars, are 'hot' items right now in astronomy. Other areas include the age and evolution of the universe, the nature of 'dark matter' and 'dark energy,' and the nature of gamma-ray bursts. There is also a lot of interest in spacecraft missions to the planets and other bodies of the solar system.

How can countries like Nepal get ahead in astronomy?

One doesn't need much in the way of expensive equipment to study the night time sky. If schools could be provided with binoculars and/or small telescopes, that would greatly help science education, and create interest in science amongst some of the students.

Science education would be greatly facilitated by access to remote telescopes and government investment in computers and internet technology so this equipment is available to as many students as is practical. Locating one or more such telescopes in Nepal (for example, working with private groups that are building networks of them) would further help.



Can astronomy be used to promote peace?

We all see the same sky at night, regardless of where we are on Earth, and this connects us all. Realising this, together with other things astronomy teaches us (like how small Earth actually is compared to the universe as a whole, and images of Earth taken from space) is a large step towards understanding that we're all in this together.

International collaboration, such as via the telescope networks, can help enormously to create environments where students from various nations can work together. Participating in international conferences and travelling to watch events like solar eclipses allows students to interact with people from other countries, and creates a solid foundation for communication and understanding.

kedarbadu@gmail.com



MARK TURIN

A mother of mother tongue education

MARK TURIN

"I hope members of different language groups may attend such a workshop and produce a book in their mother tongue. That way they motivate others to learn to read and to keep reading", says Noriko Matsuura, in the gentle but animated manner that is her trademark.

Noriko, or Nori for short, first came to Nepal in May 1996 as a member of SIL International. She first worked with the Research Centre for Education Innovation and Development at Tribhuvan University (CERID) and the Department of Education, and presently runs Mother Tongue Pipal Pustak. Matsuura is also a visiting scholar from Sophia University in Tokyo, attached to the Linguistic Institute for International Communication.

In 1997, when Matsuura was working on one of the Rai languages spoken in eastern Nepal, members of the community became interested in having translations of the Nepali language Pipal Pustak books in their own language. Pipal Books was developed by the non-formal education support office of the United Mission to Nepal to support literacy by easing the transition from oral communication to the conventions of print. Starting with only four titles, by 2002 Matsuura had already organised for sixteen different story books to be translated into eight of Nepal's ethnic mother tongues.

The next step was to provide a structured framework for people to write narratives in their mother tongues rather than simply translating stories from Nepali. With this in mind, the first Mother Tongue Pipal Pustak workshop was held in 2005, at which members of four language communities were given two weeks in which to write a book in their mother tongue based on their own life experiences.

Some basic agreement about orthography must already exist for the production of a story book to be worthwhile, limiting participation to speakers of languages with a written form already under development. However, we should not forget that most written systems are standardised by and through use, and not by committee, so having a diverse set of printed materials in circulation is an important first step in the often long process of standardisation.

In the yearly January workshop (planned at a quiet time in the agricultural cycle), the fledgling authors formulate written texts from oral narratives drawn from their own lives under the supervision of trainers. With an artist, a graphic designer and computer staff on hand, each participant creates a dummy book for field-testing. After revisions and edits, 500 copies of each book are produced and sold to the author at a reduced rate, which they are then able to sell on for a few extra rupees.

Alongside the mother tongue story, each book also contains summaries in Nepali and English, and a short author's biography. To date, thirty Mother Tongue Pipal Pustak books have been produced in nine different languages. Deeply committed to mother tongue education and to the sustainability of Nepal's endangered speech forms, Matsuura would like to train more Nepali facilitators so that they can run workshops in villages, and not require participants to come all the way to Kathmandu. ●

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Exhibition of photographs** by Dhurba Ale, NayanTara Gurung Kakshapati, Om Prakash Yadav, and Sagar Shrestha, 7 April, 9.45 AM-12 noon, at the Sundhara Bakery Café.
- ❖ **Flowers in the Garden of Dreams** an exhibition of photos by Leonhard Stramitz at Kaiser Mahal, 10AM-6PM, except Mondays, from 6-20 April.
- ❖ **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, until 20 April, 11AM- 6PM at Siddhartha Art Gallery Babar Mahal Revisited. 4218048
- ❖ **In Search of Bliss** an exhibition of paintings by Chirag Bangdel at Baryo Fiesta, Naxal. 4414395

EVENTS

- ❖ **Youva Chalfal Shrinkhala** on the 'republican campaign and the Young Communist League,' 6 April 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107599
- ❖ **Civic Concerns** youth workshop by Youth Initiative at PIC, Heritage Plaza, 7 April, from 10AM-5.30PM. Rs 100 registration. 4107599
- ❖ **Toyota Women's Motor Rally** starting 9AM from Tinkune and ending 12 noon at Park Village, Budhanilkantha, 7 April.
- ❖ **Millennium Mambo** a film by Hou Hsiao Hsien presented by the Kathmandu Film Society, 8 April, 5.30 PM at the Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikutimandap.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Film@Chautari** showing of Micheal Caton-Jones' *Shooting Dogs*, 12 April, 3 PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Toastmasters** communication and leadership program, every Wednesday 6PM at the Institute of Environmental Management, Tripureswor.



MUSIC

- ❖ **Deep Shrestha sangha ek saanjh** solo performance by Deep Shrestha on 12 April, 5.30 PM onwards at the Rimal Hall, Gurukul, Old Baneswor. Rs 500 entrance. 4466956
- ❖ **DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers** live at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Fusion and classical Nepali music** by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien, Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800. 4451212

DINING

- ❖ **Mongolian BBQ** with exclusive Mongolian cuisine starting 6 April, every Wednesday and Friday, 6.30 PM onwards at the Splash Bar and Grill, Radisson Hotel. Rs 1,000 per person including unlimited barbeque with Carlsberg beer, sandy and Splash special cocktail, also featuring live music. 4422828
- ❖ **The Easter Bunny** at Kilroy's Thamel, with plenty of chocolates, roast lamb, and carrot cake, 8 April. 4250440
- ❖ **Saturday Brunch** at the Waterfall Garden, Radisson Hotel. 11.30 AM-3PM. Rs 799 net inclusive of free flow of Carlsberg and soft drinks. 4411818
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Senoritas & Margaritas** Inner Groove live at Fusion—the bar at Dwarika's, Rs 599 includes a Mezza platter and a Margarita pitcher. 4479488

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **New Year's Eve 2064** overnight package at Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, Dhulikhel, including accommodation, one evening 'Himalayan Hour' with snacks, dinner, and New Year's day brunch. 4479488
- ❖ **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

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NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



Spring delights as much as it frustrates, with its unpredictable weather. Early this week, temperatures rose by three degrees. But that changed just as quickly, and the days are back to being moderately warm, and the mornings fresh. The reason for the meteorological flip-flopping is the westerly jetstream that has just moved north from the main Himalaya but keeps oscillating. Thursday afternoon's satellite picture suggests weekend uncertainty, when the westerly clouds collide with a warm southerly front, causing thunderstorms and shot spells of afternoon rain. Valley residents can expect partly cloudy days with stable temperatures and light, short showers towards evening.

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KIRAN PANDAY

IS ANYBODY LISTENING?: Widows of policemen killed in the conflict stage a sit in at the Maitighar mandala on Tuesday demanding that their husbands be declared martyrs for their 'selfless sacrifice'.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

VICTIMISERS TURN VICTIM: Members of the Young Communist League stage a rally at Tundikhel on Tuesday demanding that the guilty of the Gaur killings be punished.



KIRAN PANDAY

WARRIORS AND TRADERS: Eric Valli, director of *Caravan*, watches the first show of the travelling exhibition 'People in war', with images from *A People War* in Jiri on Friday.



KIRAN PANDAY

FILM SCHOOL: Tek Bahadur Jirel, principal of the Jiri Higher Secondary School receives a gift of documentaries about Nepal at the Jiri Film Festival on Friday. Next to him in the brown jacket is filmmaker Kesang Tseten, director of *Hami Kunako Manchhe* and *We Homes Chaps*.



KIRAN PANDAY

JEWEL-SEEKERS: Devotees submerge the chariot of the goddess Vaishno Devi at the annual Gahanapokhari *jatra* on Tuesday.

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First of all, the Ass would like to take this opportunity to lay out the Red Carpet and give a hearty Lal Salam to our new **Comrade Minister of Mismcommunications and Disinformation.**

Mr Mahara's new office at Singha Darbar still has a portrait of His Majesty Prithibi Narayan Shah the Great hanging on one wall and it is great to see that the good minister has hit the ground running by weighing in on the Miss Nepal Beauty Pageant from being broadcast on state television.

Bravo, it shows the 'Badis have their priorities right. Of all the problems that beset this country that needed urgent attention, of course it was Miss Nepal. That was what was holding us back from ensuring peace, development, and democracy. And now that we've banned it everything will be hunky-dory.

The Ass's mole in the ministry tells him that given the times we live in, the minister may be considering holding a **Miss New Nepal pageant** instead that will celebrate the revolutionary spirit of Nepali womanhood in all her comradely glory. That contest will do things differently: the Interview Round will be replaced by a Revolutionary Speech Round, the Swimsuit Round with the Sub-machinegun Round and the Miss Photogenic Smile with the Miss Red Salute.

At this rate and given the historical Maoist penchant to manage media, it will be only a question of time before they also suffer from the 'Aishwarya Effect'. Remember how under the Panchayat NTV was turned into a home movie broadcasting service of the royal family and ultimately made Queen Aish as unpopular as she was? Comrade Mahara, a word of advice: Maoism has been tried on humans before, and it doesn't work.



As the Maoists' Kathmandu in-charge **Comrade Hit Man** (yes, that's a real name) looked on during the memorial at the Khula Munch for 18 of the Maoists killed in Gaur, Awesome surprised Laldhoj by telling him at the last moment to give a speech. Baburam looked visibly surprised. That wasn't part of the plan, but Hit Man seemed to know. Anyway, the Maoist ideologue-in-chief went ahead and delivered the usual tirade against America and then blamed the media for being critical of the Maoists. Exact quote: "**Musa mare pani hulla garne haru.**"



Across the street at the Ministry of Works and Bhautik Karbahi, Baburam's better half **Comrade Hasiya Yami** is settling down nicely and bringing a breath of fresh air to a government department in charge of Melamchi and

other works-in-making. One of the most tangible differences after the Maoists were inducted into government is that the inductees have **replaced their Boleros with Pajeros.** Just hope we're not headed in the direction of what the Mitsubishi SUVs have come to connote in Nepali politics.



Nepal's brain drain was bad enough before, now it is getting worse. Just about everyone in the army is angling for a UN peacekeeping job somewhere, including those involved in some pretty nasty tricks. On the week that two Nepali experts left Kathmandu to join peace monitoring in southern Sudan, the UN brought two Sudanese for peace monitoring in Nepal.

The Ass tried to figure that one out, and has a simple question: why can't the UN keep the Nepalis in Nepal and the Sudanis in Sudan and pay them UN salaries? After all, they **know their own countries better than anyone else.**



OK, time to call a truce in the media's **ongoing battle with UNMIN.** We give up, you win. If you stop poaching our journalists we will stop trying to sneak into cantonments to take pictures of the insides of containers.

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