Bridge-building

The people don’t want more squabbling, they want to see their country being re-built

EDITORIAL

On the first anniversary of the April Uprising, there is cynicism inside the Ring Road. In most other parts of the country there is hope for the future.

Many people from Jhapa to Kanchanpur that we spoke to in the past week count their blessings: the end to fighting, the dramatic achievements of the past year from the ceasefire to the interim government, mainstreaming of the Maoists, being able to travel along the highways without checkpoints, the night buses running again, police posts being re-established, and a general feeling that things are returning to normal.

But the expected peace dividend is conspicuously missing. The people expected the government to be efficient about service delivery, about fast-tracking showcase projects like the Sindhuli Highway or the Hetauda shortcut to the tarai, about quick decisions on hydropower. But all they got were fuel shortages, power cuts, and a business-as-usual attitude. Only the army seems to have its wits about itself and has rushed the completion of the Karnali Highway to Jumla.

The eight parties now need to focus on development, the economy. These things do not have to wait for elections, and ignoring them creates conditions not just for anarchy and lawlessness, but for another, far messier revolution.
One more chance
The risks and opportunities of delaying elections

The decision to postpone elections to the constituent assembly came as a dump truck rather than a bombshell. Perhaps this is an indicator of the leisurely style of the transition to the new political and social order.

Cancellation of June elections has led to disappointment, confusion, anxiety, and even anger among the people. But even those who hear a sigh of relief did so, not because they did not see the value of a June election, but because they were afraid of the consequences of flawed elections and contested results.

The postponement gives much-needed time for a number of processes. There is an opportunity to provide people with information about the constitution-making process and the role of the constituent assembly, and time to promote the participation of the people in constitution-making. Perhaps voters can now cast their votes knowing its consequences, something that would have been denied if not have been the case in June.

The longer interregnum allows time to prepare for the elections and for the protection of the facilities of the constituent assembly. The parties—and other groups who have been focusing solely on elections—have a chance to reflect on the nature of the constitution-making process. The present occupant of this crumbling edifice is COO Ratan Raj Pandey, who remains the madhusuddin by his pursit clarsman. It has been home to powerful agents of the crown, badahams, and anarchists like Damodar Sumsher and Lita Raji Basto.

Here it is about Madhesi representation and the unfinished revolution. There is an element of truth in all the allegations about the fires that raged here in January; royalist meddling, a ‘foreign hand’, forces of Hindu fundamentalism, disgruntled, discontented members of society disturbing the democratic process, the government’s inability to maintain law and order. But none of these explanations gets to the heart of the problem.

Decades of discrimination, neglect, and oppression have alienated a large section of madhesi. Being moderate here these days earns you a ‘coward’ tag. In Mahottari, it’s easy to see why, and to catch a revealing glimpse of the emotional distance between Kathmandu’s rulers and the tarai.

At the age of town, flying the national flag, is an early-20th century building made with Ram Sahum, a C-Class donkey, and the one banished to the madhus by his pursit clarsman. It has been home to powerful agents of the crown, badahams, and anarchists like Damodar Sumsher and Lita Raji Basto.

The present occupant of this crumbling edifice is COO Ratan Raj Pandey, a descendent of royal priests. Kathmandu’s top man here, the most powerful person in the district, and opens the door. Administration Office are fine men, of pahadi bahun stock, and the Superintendent of Police is a Chand.

Individually, most pahadi officers and employees are well liked and respected. There is an incongruity in the fact that, in a district where four out of five population is madhesi, almost every office is staffed exclusively by pahadis. There’s the matter of how little noble pahadi settlers have been invited in the communities around them. In a district where the big landlords are Sharmas, Upadhys, Ghimires and Pantas, the first school had to be built by a Marwari Murarka. The college had to be built for a Yadav donor.

In Janakpur, the town that Koiras, Ranas, Sharmas, Thakur Sahis, and Ghimires claim as theirs there is no philanthropic effort bearing these names. The first few schools, the college, the hospital, and several temples were built by the Sah family, members of which are hired workers in comparison with the Ranas and Giris who made fortunes off the tarai’s. In Janakpur, the town that Koiras, Ranas, Sharmas, Thakur Sahis, and Ghimires claim as theirs there is no philanthropic effort bearing these names. The first few schools, the college, the hospital, and several temples were built by the Sah family, members of which are hired workers in comparison with the Ranas and Giris who made fortunes off the tarai’s. It is about the people who have been allowed to slip away. But the postponement of the elections will give time to reflect on all that, and open the way to a more participatory and legitimate process. One way forward would be to appoint an expert commission to consult widely on constitutional options and prepare recommendations for the constituent assembly. This will reassure the people that the process is on track and that they are being listened to.

Yash Ghai is professor emeritus at the University of Hong Kong, was chief of the Kohler constitutional assembly, and has been senior advisor to the constitution-making process in Afghanistan and Iraq.

JALESHWAR — Things look different a year after the April Uprising here in this Mahottari border town. But what changes you see depends on where you stand.

In Kathmandu, the concerns are about the delayed constituent assembly elections and the shenanigans of the Young Nepal see through your self-righteous grandstanding. You say the right things, you have to do the right things. Nepalis in the districts seem to have a totally different set of values.

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OLD HABITS
Your editorial was an excellent analysis of UML and Maoist politicians. ('New year, old habits', #344). But how about the Congress? All politicians of all parties should be able to take criticism. Hastily declaring a republic and blaming everything bad on the monarchy is not going to solve all our problems. It takes time to repair the damage that has been done over 10 years. The country needs strong law and order. Businessmen and ordinary citizens still fear Maoist extortion. Everybody wants an election, but not everyone can participate without fear. One wonders whether the parties will be able to present the people with proper agendas, and what will be done to educate all Nepalis about what elections to the constituent assembly mean. We don't need a rushed election, we need one where there is maximum voter turnout.

Bimal Raj Bastola, New York

REFERENCES
There is a danger that regressive elements will infiltrate the constituent assembly, and engineer an undemocratic constitution. The only way to protect the achievements of Jana Andolan II is for the interim parliament to come to a political decision to declare a republic and amend the interim constitution in a way that satisfies mother tongue communities, dalits, castes, and women. As Malalalal Gurung writes, a national referendum for the ratification of a republican constitution by the people would be the safest and quickest way to consolidate the achievements of the Jana Andolan II ('Horse before the cart', Guest Column, #344).

Ravi Manandhar, Kuleswor

VOTE CONFUSION
Navin Singh Khadka’s ‘Vote Confusion’ (#344) clearly shows that our leaders, Girija Prasad Koirala, Madhab Kumar Nepal and the rest of the eight-party crew should stop worrying about the election date and focus more on election preparedness, in particular voter education. If that weren't enough trouble, there are burning national issues—in particular the demands of the madhes community—that need to be hammered out through roundtable consultations. Also, UNMIN has to carry out the second phase of its mandate, verifying Maoist combatants. Nepal has joined, dropped out, and rejoined the Global Democracy Club a few times by now. We don't want an exclusionary election do we, after vouching for democracy all along for the last 17 years?

Surya B Prasai, email

MISSING WOMEN
Re: Where are the women? (Here and there, #342). Women bear the brunt of the different kinds of discrimination in Nepal on the basis of class, caste, and ethnicity.

I agree that the major problem is patriarchal thinking. But more than that, it comes down to the financial position of women: A woman who is economically independent can challenge patriarchal thinking, and social prejudices. A woman who is not, needs a lot more courage to do so.

Gender inequalities are rooted in the way in which relations between men and women are structured and determined. This is clearly reflected in everything we do. Creating opportunities for economic and social empowerment are essential to combat social discrimination and economic vulnerabilities. Women and men must both be targeted through awareness raising campaigns about human rights and social equity. And this must happen in real life, in the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of men and women, not just at speeches, seminars, and workshops. Perhaps men should start small, making their own tea, noodles, and rotis—not only as chefs in fancy hotels, but right at home.

Bhawana Upadhyay, Jawalakhel

UNDER MY ASS
Why has 'Under My Hat' been discontinued? Amidst all that is going on now, we really need a humorous poke at Nepali politics. I hope Kunda Dixit will resume writing the column.

Name withheld, email

LETTERS
RAMESWOR BOHARA in NEPALGANJ

Known by their English acronym YCL, the Young Communist League has emerged as the strong arm of the Maoists as the party joins the government and prepares to campaign for elections.

In the cities, the YCL has now come to be known for its summary justice and intimidation and is dreaded for the practice of roughing up anyone who stands in the way. In the tarai, the YCL has been blamed for its militant tactics that have alienated the middle classes.

The YCL doesn’t even try to hide the fact that it is composed of former battalion and company commanders of the People’s Liberation Army—a personnel who should theoretically be inside UN-run cantonments under last year’s peace agreement.

“The YCL is a fusion of the party’s military and political character,” admits the league’s chairman Ganesh Man Pun, “it is composed of PLA members who have an interest in politics.”

Political analysts say the league has been created to keep former guerrillas occupied and in control, but also plays an organisational and security roles for the party. Indeed, in Kathmandu the YCL has been involved in high-profile street cleaning, demolition of illegal structures, crime control, and planting trees along Tundikhel.

But the YCL has also been active in continued intimidation and extortion despite the fact the parent party is in government. It was in response to complaints from the public that police made the unprecedented move of searching three YCL offices in Kathmandu on Sunday.

In Nepalgunj, the YCL office is located in a five-storey house belonging to a royal relative that was confiscated by the Maoists last year. The head of the league’s office in Kathmandu is now a senior league figure. Sabitri Gurung used to be deputy battalion commander and is now a senior leader figure.

In a speech during the memorial in Kathmandu for a cadre killed in Gaur, YCL general secretary warned: “If attacks against us continue, we will mobilise the 21 divisions of YCL and seven divisions inside the camps.”

It seems clear that the Maoists have sent their militia and trainees to the camps and kept hard-core fighters outside as deterrence against “reactionaries”. In fact, Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Thapa (Badal) said at a YCL national convention in Kathmandu in February: “If there are conspiracies against us, the league will lead another revolt.”

As in Nepalgunj, the YCL in Kathmandu is housed in private homes and factories in Balaju, Gongabu, and Bhaktapur. Although the league says the premises were given to them, owners say they were taken over by force.

Here in Nepalgunj, the YCL has been seen sporadically in urban cleanup and was involved in an intimidation against UML cadre attending a rally by Madhab Nepal in Kailali. Recently, the group claimed—but did not follow through—that it was going to the border region of Laxamapur that is insulated as a result of an armed conflict building on the Indian side to draw attention to the problem.
New shoes
The Baja Group has opened a showroom for the Malaysian multinational footwear brand Bata at the United World Trade Centre in Thripureswar, Baja Group, which was established in 1985, is Baja’s 13th franchise and holds a five-year contract to market their products. The product line includes outdoor classic, occupational, and fashion footwear.

Lucky 13
The carwash also offers membership for quick cleaning at subsidised rates. Hansraj Carwash opens from 10AM-8PM, seven days a week. Customers at Bluebird Mall can have their cars washed and detailed while they shop. Hansraj Carwash’s Easy Car Wash is open from 10AM-4PM, seven days a week. The carwash also offers membership for quick cleaning at subsidised rates. Hansraj Carwash opens from 10AM-8PM, seven days a week. Customers at Bluebird Mall can have their cars washed and detailed while they shop.

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Done good
On 14th anniversary of Pasang Lhamu Sherpa’s ascent of Chomolungma, Yet Airlines is offering a 30 percent discount to all female passengers from 3 May. Yet Airlines, which has the largest domestic air network, also has an active corporate social responsibility program. Over the past six months, Yet has collected Rs 222,000 by contributing Rs 4 for every passenger for Nepal Leprosy Relief Fund, Organisation for Community, Child and Environment Development, and TEWA.

We are confident in Nepal
As citizens we all need to engage with informed, moderate debate.

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Logging in
Himal Khabarpatrika, 14-30 April
DHANGADI – It took less than a week after the Maoists were given the Ministry of Forests for the group’s Seventh Division at Gorampaign in Kailali to chop down 60 fully-grown sal trees ostensibly to build beds for their cantonment. The Maoists hired local timber contractors to illegally fell the trees in plots protected by three community forest user groups in the neighbouring villages. Instead of being used for camp furniture as stated most of the logs were taken to saw mills by the contractors. But two trucks carrying the logs were stopped by villagers who unloaded the timber and have kept them near the camps.

After complaints from the community forestry groups and orders from the CDO, the police apprehended another truck at the saw mill in Dhangadi and sent the timber to be deposited at the District Forest office. This is not the first time that the Maoists have taken part in illegal logging sprees in Kailali using the argument that they need timber for camp construction. IFO Mohan Koirala said the Maoists had told him they needed 3,000 cubic feet of timber to make beds, and said his office was investigating the matter. Maoist Kailali deputy in-charge Shrawan said the trees were felled with full knowledge of the DFO. Villagers say the Maoists had asked for permission to fell trees in their forest, but even before the users’ committee could make a decision the Maoists had already started felling.

Madhes mess
Tarun, 16 April
It looks as if Upendra Yadav, who has been accused of forming alliances with the palace and betraying the madhesi movement, may be saved by Minister of Peace and Reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel. The palace is said to be instrumental in this.

Human rights activists have filed charges of murder against Yadav for the Gaur massacre. Since then, the Madhesi Janadikathak Forum has kept a low profile, in contrast to their strident demands in the past, including the resignation of Home Minister Krishna Prasad Shastri. A toned-down MJF is now saying that it is ready to talk to the government. This is being seen as an attempt by Yadav to dodge responsibility for the deaths in Gaur.

Our sources say Yadav had to flee to the border town of Bangariya because even people within his own organisation have stopped trusting him. When news of Yadav’s alliances with the royal palace and Indian criminals became public, the MJF broke into three different groups, one of which is working hard to remove Yadav as the chairman of the forum.

Bijaya Singh, chair of the Madhesi Student’s Union and Madhesi Intellectual’s Forum, and Ramesh Raya of the Madhesi Dalit Forum have publicly announced that their organisations have split from the MJF. Similarly Madhesi Youth Forum chair Sujan Baniya has said repeatedly that the MJF failed because of Upendra Yadav’s leadership.

At a recent MJF central committee meeting there was a heated discussion about the issue of Yadav’s allegations. The central committee decided to keep Yadav on as chairman only because the 27 April deadline for the registration of parties [to contest the constituent assembly elections] made it complicated to appoint a new leadership in time.

But even this point is contested, with general secretary Ram Kumar Sharma arguing that the organisation should not be registered as a political party, in order to avoid conflict with madhesi leaders in other parties. He believes the MJF should remain a pressure group.

The Maoists have warned Ram Chandra Poudel to not encourage the Forum. When they learnt about Poudel’s recent talks with Yadav, they asked Prime Minister Koirala not to make Poudel the coordinator of the talks committee.

The Maoists won sympathy after Gaur, but the incident has caused a rift within the party. The Madhesi Janamukti Morcha’s Satya Narayan Bhagat and Prabhu Sah have accused Matrika Yadav of providing Upendra Yadav with information about how their organisation was planning to launch an attack in Gaur using Young Communist League members and fighters from the Chitwan cantonment. Yadav thus hired professional sharpshooters from Bihar. These criminals were the ones who hunted down YCL activists and fighters from the Chitwan cantonment in Gaur and killed them. The Forum says 11 fighters from Chitwan were killed, but neither the Maoists nor UNMIN have confirmed that.
Kailali’s forests have always been a source of resource for the Maoists even during the conflict when they taxed the timber trade. Now, they have stopped taxing timber but seem to have directly chopped down trees to raise money.

**Citizen papers**

Editorial in Himal Khabarpatrika, 14-30 April

The current citizenship distribution exercise has taught us all a lesson: never take any accepted theory or statistic as a given. We take motivated or amateur information as a given and through constant repetition turn them into accepted truth. Such mistakes and myths distract the country’s resources and we end up wasting decades in pointless debate.

For the past decade we have been talking about the millions in the tarai who don’t have citizenship. It turns out we were barking up the wrong tree: the number of people deprived of citizenship is much higher in the hills.

Political parties like the UML and the NC set up their own commissions to study the question of citizenship in the tarai. Both concluded that there were up to three million Nepalis who didn’t have citizenship living in the madhes, not even the entire tarai. And that became a fact.

Neither the commissions nor civil society ever imagined that the hills and himaal would have the same problem. That is why for more than 25 years, Nepal’s citizenship problem became synonymous with the madhes problem.

The citizenship team has nearly completed its work, and they have so far distributed a total of 2.2 million citizenship certificates in three months: 1.1 million in the tarai and 1.2 million in the rest of the country. This shows how political slogans based on regional, or partisan interest are wrongly turned into a matter of national debate.

Even while we are happy that Nepalis, wherever they live, have belatedly got citizenship papers, this example teaches us to be more careful about jumping to convenient conclusions in the future.

**Hemanta after four years**

Dhangadi Post, Dhangadi, 18 April

Hemanta Bista was born in Kailali in 1996, the year that the Maoists started their ‘people’s war’. When he was six the police station next to his home in Motipur near Lamki was attacked and seven policemen were killed. The police station lay in ruins and students from a nearby school didn’t venture in because they thought it was haunted.

But in 2003, when two photographers were in the building curiosity got the better of them and Hemanta and his friend Aman went inside and were peering through a mortar hole when Amrit Gurung clicked the now-famous photograph which was chosen for the cover of the book, *A People War*. Published by nepalaya, the book is a pictorial story of Nepal’s ten-year conflict.

Four years later, when a travelling exhibition of pictures from the book arrived in Dhangadi on Tuesday Hemanta was asked to inaugurate it by unveiling his own photograph (see picture). “I never thought I’d be asked to inaugurate this exhibition,” Hemanta said, “but the pictures also made me sad. I hope we don’t see a war like this again.”

Hemanta misses his classmate Aman, who is also in the picture. Aman’s mother died after the picture was taken and his father took him away to India where he doesn’t go to school anymore and works in a restaurant.

In Motipur itself, the hole in the wall has been patched up and the police post is being rebuilt—a sign that the country is finally coming out of the ravages of war.
One year later.

Chautara’s hospital rises from the ashes of war
April 2006
Scenes from an uprising

RIDICULE, RAGE, RECRIMINATION: These scenes from Ason, Kirtipur, Tahachal, Gongabu, and Dilli Bajar chronicle some of the many ways in which demonstrators kept the protests going, kept their spirits up, and forced a king to take back his words.
The real story

Nepalis don’t want to hear glorious myths, they want to work for a glorious future

I t’s easy enough, in the tiny cloistered compounds of the discourse of Nepal’s elite, to believe in that most damaging national myth—that of uniqueness, of exclusivity. Of all the nonsense perpetuated by authoritarians, feudals, and the royal culture here, none has done more harm than negative and narrow exclusivity. The notion that somehow this slice of real estate is utterly unique, beyond geographic and cultural context, and possessed of innate virtue by its very existence.

As a patriotic mythology, this is nothing new. America, France, Egypt, and other modern states bask in delusions of uniqueness that serve largely to emphasise exaggerated notions of national decline. The United States has manifest destiny, the French nation is a castle on a hill that all others strive for. Or these days, despire. The truth is less dramatic and more malleable. French politicians are uniquely boring in their constant paring of the nature of France and her ‘civilisation’. Never mind that France is an influential, but no means overly-powerful, European state that has contributed much to global society—not least the notion of malaise, a national sickness of heart that moves the locals but bares the rest of us.

Egypt’s idea that it is the centre of the universe would be laughable if it weren’t so relentlessly and humourously promoted by national media and political types. But Cairo is the seat of a towering dictatorship which must associate itself with the glories of Pharaohs and pyramids to stay relevant, not to mention sucking up to Washington while at the same time spouting anti-American rhetoric.

What is the challenge in controlling the trade of endangered species?

Policing is hard. You can smuggle rhino horns or tiger bones in a bag, suitcase or a sack. Second, illegal traders are businessmen, they adapt, and are often one step ahead of the law.

It’s not just a poor country thing—in Europe 27 wealthy countries are campaigning to enforce laws against the trade of endangered species. That said, in South Asia, there aren’t adequate resources for law enforcement. Even if there are government officers carrying out regular checks and they catch someone, what happens next? Are they prosecuted? Do they stay in jail? If you can get away by paying a few hundred dollars and are in business where you make profits of thousands of dollars, you will pay and get away. Poorly-paid government officers doing dangerous jobs are more likely to look the other way or be involved in illegal trade. We’d like to call that a failure of governance.

For Nepal geography is a big challenge, being between the massive, growing economies of India and China, where illegal trade of wildlife is thriving.

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What is TRAFFIC International’s reading of the rise in rhino poaching in Nepal?

Let me be very dear about one thing: the end market for rhino horn is not strong because the demand is not high at the moment. We do surveys of traditional medicine in China and east Asian countries and the laws are respected. This isn’t a demand-driven trade, but if you had some rhino horns, you’d probably find someone willing to speculate.

Rhino protection depends on the security you can provide for the population in the protected areas, and the ability to predict where there are possible poaching problems. Chitwan has devised some model approaches; the communities around the park benefit from protecting the areas, and
informers come forward if they hear of businessmen looking for rhino horns in the villages. My own view, and I talked about this in detail with my colleagues in Chitwan, is that the rise in poaching is a symptom of the security situation. The unpredictability of what will happen creates opportunity. The army, a big part of wildlife protection, has been otherwise occupied. The good news is, I hear from government officials and my colleagues, that they are seriously thinking about getting a grip back on the situation.

What does it take to address problems of trafficking and poaching?
Political will—an interest and desire right from the top to make sure the controls work. We need people who are trained, who understand the legal framework in which they work, what approaches are available, what skills we need. Forest guards need to be trained to save the scene of crime so evidence is not destroyed. Wildlife crime investigation should be intelligence-driven. Cooperation between forest protection, wildlife and national parks, customs, army and border control is vital, as is cross-border cooperation, which almost never happens. South Africa and China have put together very successful need-based trainings. Intelligence gathering works, with basic tools to work with international organisations like the Interpol, World Customs Organisation, and specialist agencies. There are good examples of that, especially in the UK, where key government agencies, NGOs, and other groups come together to share and set priorities. India is thinking about replicating this model.

India has specialist bureaus for information on wildlife crime where people really specialise and are trained in intelligence gathering and investigation. Forensics is important and WWF in Nepal is thinking seriously about it. It doesn’t have to be fancy science, just basic skills that identify whether the bone is from a tiger, whether it is rhino horn or fake skin. It could also be information from the scene of crime. Again, India has a good wildlife forensics department at the Wildlife Institute of India. We’re talking about a similar set-up in Nepal.

Conservation experts from 12 countries lobbied hard at this week’s International Tiger Symposium here to ensure the ban on the trade in tiger parts stays. Tiger farmers in China are pressurising their government to push for lifting the 14-year-old ban, at least on products from farmed tigers. (“Asia’s tiger economy,” #344) Experts we spoke to said lifting the ban would be a death sentence for wild tigers, as it would provide legal avenues for the laundering of wild tiger products through.

“This is not the time to feed the interests of a few already-rich tiger farmers when people in this region have so worked hard for so many years to make the ban successful,” said Susan Lieberman, director of WWF’s Global Species Programme and chair of the International Tiger Symposium.

“A clear consensus emerged in the International Tiger Symposium that poaching of tigers in the wild must be combated urgently and that it requires immediate, coordinated efforts both by countries with tiger populations and countries driving the black market demand for tiger parts,” Lieberman added.

The symposium, organised by WWF and TRAFFIC International, included tiger scientists, policy experts, and wildlife trade authorities. Seventeen representatives from China reportedly attended the conference, eight of them government officials. The Chinese government has not yet responded on the status of the farmers’ petition. 

Matika Aryal
Smile for life

Smiling is a universal human practice, although readiness to smile at strangers varies according to culture. In Australia, where being open and friendly to strangers is not unusual, the city of Port Phillip in the bayside suburbs of Melbourne, has been using volunteers to find out how often people smile at others in the street. It puts up signs which tell pedestrians that they are in, for example, a “10 Smiles Per Hour Zone.”

Futile nonsense? A waste of taxpayers’ money? Mayor Janet Bolitho says the signs are to encourage people to smile or say “G’day” to neighbours and strangers on the street. Smiling, she adds, encourages people to feel more connected and safer, so reducing fear of crime, an important quality of life factor.

The city government also facilitates street parties, offering organisational advice, loans out barbecues and sun umbrellas, and covers the public liability insurance. Many people who have lived in the same street for years meet for the first time at a street party.

All this is part of a larger program to measure whether changes in the city’s quality of life are moving in a desirable direction. The city council wants Port Phillip to be sustainable, not only in an environmental sense, but also in terms of social equity, economic viability, and cultural vitality.

Port Phillip wants to be a good global citizen. Instead of seeing private car ownership as a sign of prosperity, the city hails a declining number of cars—and rising use of public transport—as progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions while encouraging a healthier lifestyle in which people walk or ride bicycles. The city is also seeking less energy-intensive designs for new buildings.

Some local governments see their role as being to provide basic services like collecting the trash and maintaining the roads, and collecting taxes to pay for this. Others promote the area’s economy, welcoming industry and so increasing jobs and the local tax base.

Port Phillip’s city government takes a broader, longer-term view. It wants the next generation of residents to have the same opportunities for a good quality of life as today’s. This is why it measures all the aspects that contribute to it, including friendliness.

Professor Richard Layard of the London School of Economics argues in his recent book, Happiness: Lessons from a New Science that promoting friendship is easy, cheap, and can have big payoffs in making people happier. Why shouldn’t that be a focus of public policy?

Small positive experiences can make people feel better about themselves, and also be more helpful to others. In the 1970’s, American psychologists Alice Isen and Paula Levin conducted an experiment in which some randomly selected people making a phone call found a ten-cent coin left behind by a previous caller, and others did not. All were then given an opportunity to help a woman pick up a folder of papers she dropped in front of them.

Isen and Levin claimed that of the 16 who found a coin, 14 helped the woman, while of the 25 who did not find, only one did. A further study found a similar difference in willingness to mail an addressed letter that had been left behind in the phone booth: those who found the coin were more likely to mail it.

Although later research has questioned such dramatic differences, there is little doubt that being in a good mood makes people feel better about themselves and more likely to help others. Psychologists call it the ‘glow of goodwill.’ Why shouldn’t taking small steps that may produce such a glow be part of the role of government?

One measure of success—over the past year-and-a-half, the proportion of people who smile at you in Port Phillip has risen from 8 to 10 percent.

Making people feel good has a positive domino effect

Peter Singer is professor of bioethics at Princeton University and author of How Are We to Live? and Writings on an Ethical Life.
Images of sounds

THREE MEN BOUND BY A SINGULAR PASSION FOR THE RICH, COMPLEX TONES OF BELLS HAVE PUT TOGETHER A STIMULATING MIXED MEDIA EXHIBITION. THE GROUP SHOW ‘BELLS—SILENCE AND SOUNDS,’ SHOWCASES THE DIVERSE TALENTS OF POET MANJUL, VISUAL ARTIST MANISH LAL SHRESTHA, AND PHOTOGRAPHER HERBERT GRAMMATIKOPOULOUS.

Manjul’s poems translate the sound and energy of bells into words. He says he wants to capture the evocative energy of the bells, and their power to rouse dormant emotions and feelings in people. His poems are sometimes angry, sometimes reproachful, and sometimes just commemorations of the sounds of bells. Manjul has several volumes of poetry, a novel, travelogues, and translations to his credit.

Shrestha’s seven shows so far have all presented bells in some way, shape or form. His vivid canvases are evocative of the feelings inspired by the ephemeral sound of bells, and often mimic the explosion of sound bells can produce. Shrestha believes bells have great positive energy, and so uses bold, vibrant colours, rather than dark and gloomy ones.

Grammatikopoulous, Austrian by birth, has lived in Nepal for some years and photographs everything from street scenes and jatras to the architecture of Tansen and ornate metal locks. Like Shrestha, he says that his intention is not just to capture their cultural and religious significance, but also their sound. The bells take centre stage in his pictures, against backdrops of temples, destroyed buildings, and mountains, reminding the viewer how central they are to Nepali life.

The idea for the show came about when Manjul was composing poems to go along with Herbert’s photographs for a book. As it turned out, many were about bells. Shrestha had separately been working with bells for a long time, and putting together all of their creative output for a show was a no-brainer. On display are seven paintings, eight poems, and sixteen photographs.

The festival encourages improvisation. “Last year, the bands just got together and created a weekend-long jam session,” says Voolstra. “This time the experiment will be even more interesting, because we have a lot of different music styles.”

This year, in addition to Nepali and Indian artists like Stupa, Cadenza, Inner Groove, Lew Hilt, and Arpana, all of whom play varieties of contemporary music, the festival will also feature traditional groups like Kutumba and the young drumming Thimi Boys.

The festival allows would-be singers and musicians to join in the sessions.

Tickets cost Rs 2,000 per head, and include a bus ride from The Last Resort Office in Thamel at 9AM on 28 April, all meals, camping accommodation, and weekend-long music. Those with a need for adventure—and large lung capacity—can bicycle the 100km to the resort. The biking group leaves from the Shangri-La Hotel at 7AM on 28 April. Enfielders leave from their Lazimpat workshop at 8AM. For more information, ring 4700525.

Bill Bierling
EXHIBITIONS

- Flowers in the Garden of Dreams: an exhibition of photos by Leonhard Stramitz at Kaiser Mahal, 10AM-6PM, except Mondays, until 20 April.
- Retrospective exhibition of paintings by Shashi Shah, until 20 April. 11AM-6PM at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal, Revisited. 4218048
- Bells – Silence and Sounds: poems by Manjul, paintings by Manish Lal Shrestha and photographs by Herbert Grannamkopoulos, at Gallery 32, Dent Inn, Heritage Plaza, until 27 April.

Landmarks of New York: a photography exhibition at Tribhuvan University Central Library until 3 May.

EVENTS

- City of God: a film by Fernando Meirelles presented by the FSA Film Club, 20 April at Yala Maya Kendra, Rs 50 entrance.
- Dreamgirls: at the Lazimpat Gallery Café, 20 April, 6.30PM.
- Spring Open Air Market: at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays every Friday and Saturday. 4491234
- Fusion and classical Nepali music at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, from 8PM with Yanki and Zigme Lepcha. 4416071

MUSIC

- Slupa and friends at the Moksh Bar, 8.30 PM onwards, 20 April, no cover charge, 5528212
- Live Music at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 9PM with Yuki and Zgme Lepcha. 4416071
- DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers live at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234
- Fusion and classical Nepali music by Rudra live at the Courtyard, Le Meridien, Gokarna every Friday, 7PM onwards, Rs 800. 4451212

DINING

- Weekend special with sekuwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 4411706
- Mongolian BBQ with Mongolian cuisine starting 6 April, every Wednesday and Friday, 6.30 PM onwards at the Splash Bar and Grill, Radisson Hotel. Rs 1,000 including unlimited barbeque with Carlsberg beer, shandy or Splash special cocktail. 4428282
- Saturday Brunch at the Waterfall Garden, Radisson Hotel, 11.30 AM-3PM. Rs 799 net inclusive of free flow of Carlsberg and soft drinks. 4411618
- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La Soo, Pulchowk, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- Continental cuisine and wine by the fire place at Kiriyo’s, Thamel. 6920440
- Smorgasbord lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4370280
- Trendy martini and appetizers at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency. 4492134
- 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 barbeque with the Crossfire Band at The Postsold, Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12PM. Rs 1,000 inclusive of swimming and complimentary drink. 4412512
- Pizza from the wood fired oven at Java, Thamel. 4425159
- Senoritas & Margaritas Inner Grove live at Fusion—the bar at Dwarka’s, Rs 599 includes a Mezza platter and a Margarita pitcher. 4479488
- Jazz and Cali Café enjoy great food, exotic cocktails and music, Chakupat, Patan. 2114075

GETAWAYS

- Weekend package at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4451212

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com until 20 April.
DANGEROUS AT ANY SPEED: An LPG tanker that smashed into a mountainside at Daunne on the East-West Highway on 12 April still lay on the hairpin bend a week later. The Indian driver and his helper were killed when the truck caught fire and set the surrounding forest ablaze.

FIRE IN THE NIGHT: Members of the Young Communist League on a torch rally at Ratna Park on Tuesday protesting police raids on their offices in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur two days earlier.

RICHARD, MEET RINPOCHE: Richard Gere pays his respects to Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche in Boudha on Wednesday at the end of a three-day visit to Kathmandu.

BARBED TONGUE: With his pierced tongue, Buddho Krishoo Bag Shrestha is at the centre of this throng of devotees celebrating Bisket Jatra in Bode, Thimi, on Sunday.

PRAYER, NOT POLITICS: Public prayers for peace on Thursday at Khulla Manch, traditionally the reserve of political speakers. The prayers are organised by the National Organising Committee of Prayer for Peace from 7AM-6PM until Friday.
Just as the Ass feared all along, Richard Gere is in town. Having witnessed this man’s osculatory prowess, it is surprising the immigration office allowed him into the country. Now that he’s here, the government should issue a restraining order banning him from coming within 35 metres of our very own Shitasma Chand. But the real casualty from Gere molesting Shilpa Shetty in broad daylight in New Delhi this week wasn’t the slur on Indian womanhood, but the Free Tibet Movement which may now need another mascot.

Ironies abound as the Maoists enter government. Kingji is still in Narayanhiti and the ex-guerrillas are in government this makes Nepal the world’s only Maoist monarchy. Minister Deb Gurung has a Nepal Army bodyguard in addition to his own Maoist security. Since we have a parallel government and Maoist ministers have two bodyguards, does this mean Home Minister Krishna Sitaula will also demand a Maoist bodyguard to complement his army security?

Having Matrika Yadav as Forest Minister is like assigning an ass to guard the haystack. In the week when his cadre was invading community forests across the tarai, Minister Yadav was up on the podium in Kathmandu inaugurating a conference on tiger conservation with a speech that focused on habitat destruction. It was perhaps to distract attention from all this that Yadav’s babu went off on a tangent at a cabinet meeting Wednesday accusing the army of cutting down trees in Shivapuri.

Comrade Yummy who was partly responsible for blowing up bridges, booby trapping highways and demolishing telecom towers in the past 11 years is now Minister of Physical Planning and Infrastructure. See how much harder it is to build than to destroy?

Everyone knew the Maoists were engaged in bikenapping and carnapping during their revolution, but what we didn’t know was that it went right to the top. So, the Nissan Patrol that His Fierceness was driving around the country in the past year was actually stolen and they’d changed the number plates and replaced the Blue Book with a Red Book. And what was El Supremo Uno listening to during long drives? Not the Collected Works of Mao Zedong on audio tapes, but Bima Kumari Dutt’s Dohori Album and Nima Rumba’s Greatest Hits.

But you have to hand it to the comrades, they have taken the country by storm with the release of war movies on VCD, you have a pick of Beni Akraman, Mechi Ambush, or Gajuri Bhidanta—all actual footage taken during past battles. And the ‘historical novels’ like Raktakunda and Pardaphas are selling like hot cakes and helping the republican campaign for elections, one shouldn’t be surprised if their next novel will be Bhandaphor.

Fifty the YCL guys who have the misfortune to be posted on the banks of the Bagmati at Kopundole. Given the increment in excrement flowing into Kathmandu’s holy sewer and the ensuing fumes, it’s no wonder the police decided not to raid this particular YCL outpost last week, presuming, the Ass supposes, that the comrades had all fainted. So the young baddies have taken matters into their own hands and have decided to clean up the Bagmati. How exactly they are going to do that is a closely guarded military secret.

Backside

Kissing Ass

John

diss@nepalitimes.com