Nepali politics may look hopelessly tangled at the moment, but things can be resolved with some fairly easy steps. The prerequisites are broad political will and an agreement by the parties to tone down the grandstanding.

The eight parties need to come together to admit what they have always known: that elections to the constituent assembly are not possible in June. Then they agree on a date in October after the festivals.

It’s not the end of the world to postpone the election, as all lined up and waiting: The Election Commission’s parking lot is filling up with pickups needed for the elections even though the polls now look unlikely before October.

Ian Martin keeps saying, especially when the people, the parties, and the election commission are so unprepared. Better a delayed election than a defective election. The reason this is such a big issue is because the Maoists and the parties have made the date a matter of prestige. Someone just has to make sure the king and his praetorian guards don’t mess around.

The Maoist leadership has its own reasons for talking tough and issuing ultimatums on republic. There is a lot of impatience in the rank-and-file which the top comrades have themselves whipped up. Pressure is building up on Pushpa Kamal Dahal from his deputies on policy issues and on India’s role. But the comrades have to learn to differentiate between radical slogans meant for internal party consumption and what is in the national interest.

To kickstart the madhes negotiations, a symbolic gesture like the transfer of Home Minister Sitaula to another portfolio is urgent. The Maoists refused to let that happen in the interim government, but now they need to be realistic. No one will lose face if health reasons are cited. The madhes needs immediate attention and Peace Minister Punoudel is underestimating the seriousness of the crisis (see p 10-11). And while we are at it, isn’t it time for Girija Prasad Koirala to pass on the baton while he is still relatively well-liked?

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Mohan Cephal Khetan was perhaps Nepal’s most famous diabetic. He always had an extra shot of insulin in his kurta pocket when he partied, which was quite often—he rarely refused an invite. For a man who fully lived every day, insulin injections were mere hassles. He was only 61 when he died last week. But it was a life full of vitality and variety.

During the late 80s and early 90s, the flamboyant Khetan courted controversy and inspired awe. He was unapologetic about the methods he employed to advance his business interests. He refused to be cowed down when arrested for alleged violation of the Foreign Currency Regulation in 1993. Irregular meals and stress soon overwhelmed him and custody was placed! with his health. But Khetan kept up his unconventional ways, ignoring powerful friends who suggested that it didn’t pay to be a Marwari maverick in Nepal. He sided openly with Ganeshman Singh in the internal power struggles of the Nepali Congress. He supported the UML, bragged that he had helped the Maoists at the beginning of their armed struggle, and eventually was involved in the death of one of the former-Maoist JMM factions is led by Jwala Singh, an ex-hack and Siraha PNU secretary.

The country is submerged in identity politics, led sometimes by groups which no one has heard of before. Their method is to try to manipulate the media and if reporters are unwilling use threats and violence. A correspondent in Nepal was beaten with iron rods recently by janajati protesters. There is photographic evidence proving who the assailants are, and they happen to be associates of various militant groups. For the past nine months, the threats are ethnically based. Journalists are being targeted because of their race, their name, where they live, their appearance. The Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNU) has counted more than 100 cases of intimidation and beatings of journalists in the past year. After the madhes uprising in January, more than a dozen journalists have been visually displaced. Many still don’t dare return. Various militant mades factions regularly call reporters and threaten them with death for not printing press releases prominently enough, or for news critical of them. Ironically, one of the former-Maoist JMM factions is led by Jwala Singh, an ex-hack and Siraha PNU secretary.

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NEW ORDER

Ashut Ghairi says that the intelligence and experience of Nepal’s need to be used (‘New order’, guest column, #346). Right on. What stops this prescious but accurate prescription from being followed is the fact that most of our countrymen and women are sick and tired of being used and abused by politicians and policy makers. Ghairi’s reading of the situation is exactly correct, though, as was Yash Gahi’s (‘One more chance’, #345).

U Thapa, email

CK LAL

CK Lal’s ‘The price of radicalism’ (State of the state, #346) paints a clear picture of life as it is lived today in the tarai. Even liberals, whether they admit it or not, have found it hard to take the growing madness sense of entitlement without flinching. How much easier it would be to accept the aspirations of all underrepresented, socially discriminated groups if only we knew more about how they live. Lal helps us all understand our compatriots better.

Shanti Aryal, email

I found ‘The price of radicalism’ to be arrogant and callous. Is CK Lal thinks it is wrong to be a law unto oneself, not even so-called educated, middle class of the country. To deserve public security and law and order, one has to be willing to ask for accountability repeatedly, again and again, and leave one’s leaders with no choice but to ensure.

M Gurung, email

SNOBISH

In ‘Bright and brightest’ (Strictly Business, #346), Ashushot Tiwari makes a disturbing argument. But it is a little too easy. I think, to write such analyses. On sure, he covers all his bases, and no one will ever accuse him of being one of those ‘people like us’ types. But he is surely not being as irresponsible or illogical as he sounds? Regular, bright, motivated folks should be leaders accountable if it always holds them ever-so-slightly in contempt? This is exactly what is happening now, and look at the price we are paying for it.

Kiran, email

POVERTY CYCLE

Last weekend in Syabrubesi I witnessed an incident which seems symptomatic of the state of affairs in Nepal. Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP) had organised a mountain bike race to promote their work on the Tamang Heritage Trail. I had just completed my fourth trek in this area, and was fascinated to see almost a dozen Kathmandu babus arrive in a fleet of new-looking 4WDs. While the 21 eager participants waited at the starting line for the 7AM whistle, these self-important bigwigs delayed proceedings for almost 30 minutes while they took photos of each other grasping the event. When the race was finally underway, the ‘organising committee’s returned to their guesthouse lawn to exchange promotional t-shirts and caps, and congratulate themselves on their cleverness.

Yet four hours walk along the trail, the village of Tungnen has no visiting healthcare workers or toilets, and its 200 or so residents exist in dire poverty. The more than Rs 5 million spent by TRPAP on cars, t-shirts etc would provide healthcare, teachers, and toilets for millions for such a village.

The pompous of smug babus who think giving each other t-shirts ‘alleviates rural poverty’ is a sad indictment of those who believe that Nepal ends at the roadhead.

Perhaps TRPAP should change their name to Can’t Really Alleviate Poverty (CRAP).

Judy Smith, email

HUMAN COST

Anuj Tamang was recently mentioned in a few by-the-way lines of a national daily because he died. We do not blink an eye or pause to think about individual deaths anymore, but they all have stories to tell. Anuj was fighting kidney failure and liver cirrhosis at Patan Hospital. He requested that he be taken back home to Darjeeling, perhaps to bid farewell to his wife and daughter, perhaps to seek forgiveness from his parents for not being a good son, or maybe just for a final homecoming. He embarked on the journey all right, but never made it home. He was stranded on the way due to the Ochre Bhawar bands and died.

How many Anuj Tamangs get stuck in these bands? We cannot fulfill a dying man’s wish, and have even less hope of addressing the dreams of those still living.

Yadav Bantawa, email

YES AND NO

Thanks for the brilliant, succinct analysis in your editorial ‘A public republic’ (#346). I think it is also time that the media in general get more vocal in resisting the antics of the Young Communist League.

On another note. I will ask all week for your paper, but then get done with it rather quickly. It would be good to have more articles and reports to read. And more good news, please—this is a country of 27 million, there must be something good happening somewhere.

Shreeyana Singh Buddhathoki, email

I thought your New Year’s issue (#344) was splendid, a visual delight. Ignore the people who say that Nepal Times does not have enough to read. We all get tired of pontificating pundits and nattering nabobs, and sometimes you don’t need anything but pictures—‘the goal in ‘Coles of fear’ (#346), the built and re-erected bridge (‘Bridge building’, #345), the cautiously optimistic ‘Time flies’ (‘New year’s wishes’, #344) say it all.

Tina K, email

LETTERS

Nepal 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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KIRAN, email

Name to Can’t Really Alleviate Poverty (CRAP).
Nepal’s health care system is crying out for change

Getting doctors to stay

In our last morning in Bajhang, a man walked up and asked me to see his son. Kiran was a seven-year-old and his father had carried him eight hours down from the hills. The boy had two weeks of fever and a tender bulge on the left side of his neck. The father showed me a paper from Chainpur Hospital written the day before: ‘Refer to higher centre for treatment’.

Unfortunately, no anesthesia or pain relief medicine was available. The incision into his neck, though successful, was very painful. He had to be held down, his crying filling the hallway. As we were cleaning up, we watched the grateful father laying his son on the porch outside the hospital to warm him in the winter sun.

In towns and villages across Nepal, scenes like these play out every day. There is a hospital building and some staff, but not a doctor to care for the people who come. The father showed me a paper from Chainpur Hospital written the day before: ‘Refer to higher centre for treatment’.

In the last ten years Nepal has seen tremendous growth in medical colleges and the annual production of new doctors will soon cross 1,000. We now have over 40,000 active nurses in Nepal. Each year, the 125 separate medical institutes under CIETV produce over 4,000 new health assistants, nurse midwives, and community medical assistants. Where do they all go? Why are there not enough doctors to care for Nepal’s people?

We need a paradigm shift in our thinking about health care in Nepal in three fundamental areas:

1. Provide quality care to the greatest number
   Are we aiming for highest quality care for a few or quality care for many? The Health Ministry is now creating posts for health care workers who can cover much wider areas. The ministry expects that this approach will provide care to the greatest number.

2. Support health care workers in the field
   Why do doctors, nurses and mid-level health workers refuse to stay in rural hospitals? First, there is a strong pull to earn more in England than in Nepal. Second, there is a strong push to earn less crying in the countryside.

3. Build beyond MBBS
   I am a doctor, and I have trained young doctors in Nepal for the last 20 years. Doctors are certainly needed in Nepal but they are not a remedy to all of our problems. In medicine, there are the 5 Cs. Sometimes, they sometimes count even more than fine training. Know of experienced health assistants who can diagnose a patient better than most new doctors. And ANMs are far more skillful at delivering babies.

Those who stay need to be taken care of. Our rural doctors are not all-rounders. They are trained to be doctors but multiple levels of health care workers are needed. An MDGP can do operations, deliver babies, take care of kids and adults. Nurses and ANMs can do more skillful at delivering babies. Doctors are certainly needed in Nepal but they are not a remedy to all of our problems. In medicine, there are the 5 Cs.
“Business hasn’t grown as expected”

Vijay Gajananda Vaidya, chairman of United Traders Syndicate, started his business career as an exclusive dealer for Toyota 40 years ago. Vaidya spoke with Nepali Times about the importance of first impressions and how to build a career as an exclusive dealer for Toyota.

Vijay Gajananda Vaidya: Before I started working with Toyota, I worked for other organisations and got a lot of good experience. The six years I worked at USAID were especially great because I got to travel a lot. On the flip side, it also made me realise that I did not want to work for anyone. After I returned from the US, I went to meet the Toyota people in Japan. They asked me at our first meeting how many cars I could sell in a year, because in the seven years prior to that, just seven Toyota cars had been sold in Nepal. I was offended and walked out, but we did make a deal later.

How did you sell yourself, having had no business experience? It’s all about making a good impression. I couldn’t afford it, but I stayed in a five-star hotel when I was there. I made them pursue me. I did all this to impress them, and it worked. When we signed the deal, I organised a big party. Nepal’s ambassador to Japan asked me why I was spending all this money, and I remember telling him that all this would help me build connections. It did help in the long run.

So how well have you done? I suggested six, they wanted 500, and after a lot of discussion we agreed on 12. That year I sold 96. Now we sell more than 500 cars a year.

When I came back from the US I had $700. I also brought back a gramophone, which I sold for another $300. Today I have a lot more than other people. But the support I have from my employees means much more to me than my property. Over 7,000 people work for me directly. If you include seasonal workers, it’s over 9,000.

What’s your outlook on the agriculture sector? There are lots of possibilities in Nepal in agriculture. If we develop workers’ skills and produce goods that the modern market demands, the results will be辉煌. The six years I worked at USAID were especially great because I got to travel a lot. On the flip side, it also made me realise that I did not want to work for anyone. After I returned from the US, I went to meet the Toyota people in Japan. They asked me at our first meeting how many cars I could sell in a year, because in the seven years prior to that, just seven Toyota cars had been sold in Nepal. I was offended and walked out, but we did make a deal later.

What changes have you seen in the government and private sectors since you started out? There’s more work being done in both areas. The pace is slow though, and the foundations could be stronger. Even the private sector has not grown as much as we might have expected.

Nepali businesses still do not understand discipline and ethics. In other countries the business and corporate sectors understand that they are taxed heavily. The private sector here is trying to earn more money by evading taxes. I know people in government and I could have earned a lot via commissions, people from the government have approached me with deals that involved selling goods for more than their actual worth. I could have been the richest person in Nepal.

Are you saying you’ve never bribed anyone? I’ve never paid anyone to work illegally. My sons and the people in my organisation will not bribe anyone because when you pay someone, the price of that good automatically rises. When the Maoists asked for money I refused. I’m generous and have gifted TVs and cars to those who’ve done good work for me, but I have never bribed anyone.

Economy’s up or is it? And how can we know?

Rojas! In dollar terms, our GDP has grown by 10 percent in the last two months. Kind of. We need to understand where the growth has come from. The appreciation of the Indian rupee against the dollar means the same for the Nepali rupee. Which means that the denominator by which we divide the GDP in Nepali rupees has reduced over the last few months, which in turn means: a fixed exchange rate actually does to our economic analysis. Intriguingly, no one is blaming this on regressive forces either. The current exchange rate against the dollar, Rs 66, is close to the rate we had nine years ago. We need to know from the government and the Nepal Oil Corporation what impact this has had on the price of petroleum. If we were brave, we could use this time, when the price of oil is so low in rupee terms, to deregulate the sector.

There is a high import component, which has dollar-based power purchase agreements with some power producers, is also benefiting from the weakness of the dollar vis a vis the rupee. It’s time that they passed these gains on to the end consumer.

The pricing of projects where there is a high import component will also have to be reviewed. For every million dollars of committed project costs, the exchange rate appreciation has reduced costs by Rs 1 million.

The current exchange rate has reduced the rupee in dollar terms, to deregulate the sector. The six years I worked at USAID were especially great because I got to travel a lot. On the flip side, it also made me realise that I did not want to work for anyone. After I returned from the US, I went to meet the Toyota people in Japan. They asked me at our first meeting how many cars I could sell in a year, because in the seven years prior to that, just seven Toyota cars had been sold in Nepal. I was offended and walked out, but we did make a deal later.

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The current exchange rate has reduced the rupee in dollar terms, to deregulate the sector. The six years I worked at USAID were especially great because I got to travel a lot. On the flip side, it also made me realise that I did not want to work for anyone. After I returned from the US, I went to meet the Toyota people in Japan. They asked me at our first meeting how many cars I could sell in a year, because in the seven years prior to that, just seven Toyota cars had been sold in Nepal. I was offended and walked out, but we did make a deal later.

What changes have you seen in the government and private sectors since you started out? There’s more work being done in both areas. The pace is slow though, and the foundations could be stronger. Even the private sector has not grown as much as we might have expected.

Nepali businesses still do not understand discipline and ethics. In other countries the business and corporate sectors understand that they are taxed heavily. The private sector here is trying to earn more money by evading taxes. I know people in government and I could have earned a lot via commissions, people from the government have approached me with deals that involved selling goods for more than their actual worth. I could have been the richest person in Nepal.

Are you saying you’ve never bribed anyone? I’ve never paid anyone to work illegally. My sons and the people in my organisation will not bribe anyone because when you pay someone, the price of that good automatically rises. When the Maoists asked for money I refused. I’m generous and have gifted TVs and cars to those who’ve done good work for me, but I have never bribed anyone.
Sick politics

Naya Patrika, 2 May

When Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula started having hearing problems, he left for New Delhi. Doctors say he needs a shot to fix the vessels connecting his left ear to his throat. Sitaula also has diabetes and has been watching what he eats for two decades. In addition, he is a strict vegetarian, does not drink, and avoids onions.

The whole country knows about Prime Minister Koirala’s health problems. He is on oxygen for much of the day. He suffers from chronic bronchitis and emphysema, which means he has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. He has to have an MRI every two days. Doctors suspected that Koirala had TB and started treating him, but the nasty side effects of the medication outweighed the illness, and he is no longer on TB drugs.

Madhab Nepal suffers from cardiovascular stenosis, or the narrowing of a heart valve. He says he is very careful about his health. He has been exercising and doing yoga and lost 6kg recently.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal has high blood pressure. “I did not have this problem during the ‘people’s war’, but developed it after I started living in Kathmandu,” he says. His brother Prakash Dahal is an asthmatic chain-smoker. He has a stomach ailment that has in the past taken him to Bangkok and Delhi for treatment. He is also diabetic. Shalaja Acharya has breast cancer. She announced last year that since she has to go to India for treatment regularly, she wouldn’t mind being Nepal’s ambassador there.

Baburam Bhattarai says his stomach problems have started to get better after he started regular yoga. Mohan Barday, a voracious reader, has undergone many surgeries for the removal of cataracts, but still cannot see very clearly. Other Maoist leaders like Ram Bahadur Thapa and Post Bahadur Bogati say they do not yet have serious health problems. However, Krishna Prasad Mahara does have a sight problem for which he was operated upon last year at Tilganga. He is on regular medication, must use medicated eyedrops, and frequently visit hospitals.

Ram Dev Gautam and Ram Chandra Poudel both have back problems. Gautam has gained some weight in the last few months and now weighs 80kg. He was in New Delhi last year for treatment and also goes for acupuncture. Ram Sharan Mahat and his brother Prakash Sharan Mahat both suffer from back problems. Arjun Narsingh KC also has back problems, likes to drink, and chews around 15 leaves of tobacco everyday.

The UML leader’s eyes were diagnosed with leukemia recently and has been undergoing chemotherapy in New Delhi. Khum Bahadur Khadka has kidney trouble. “When my kidneys were good, I didn’t have the money for alcohol. Now I have some money, but my kidneys have failed me,” he was heard joking recently. Sujata Koirala has uterine problems and has been treated at Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital.

The crowd at last week’s Democracy Day celebrations at Basantapur pelted stones and water bottles at Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel because he did not speak in favour of republicanism. In gatherings across Nepal, Poudel has said he is against the establishment of a republic through a referendum and elections to a constituent assembly.

Poudel is thought to be flip-flopping because he wants to hold onto both his positions, those of party president and minister. Sujata Koirala’s camp in the party is said to have asked him to give one up. When it started to become clear just how power hungry he was, those in the party in favour of a ceremonial monarchy started to manipulate him.

Those close to him are not surprised that Poudel is so adamant, but they worry that his beliefs are giving the Nepali Congress a bad name, and the left parties an edge.

NC party workers throughout the nation have been pressuring the party to clarify its stance on the republic issue, saying that they cannot go to their constituents until they know this.

Since he became minister, Poudel has been diverting money
We are providing security and services to the people where the state is absent. The Young Communist League and Jana Seva Samiti are doing the same in various places.

We aren’t saying others should adopt our methods. But when the state is inept, we are forced to take on its responsibilities. Various factions are saying that in combating crime, we are taking the law into our own hands. We do intend to transform completely. But we have been forced to project ourselves strongly because of the legacy of the previous government and the lack of a state.

The big drama about the seizure of land and property distinguishes the people’s war. The government is forced to take on its responsibilities. Various factions are saying that in combating crime, we are taking the law into our own hands. We do intend to transform completely. But we have been forced to project ourselves strongly because of the legacy of the previous government and the lack of a state.

It is true that in some places we are running ‘parallel governments.’ The transitional period between the fall of the previous government and the formation of a new one has left people without the services one associates with a government. Social crimes such as murder, rape, and kidnap are on the rise. Many criminal groups are working in sync with the authorities.

In these circumstances, we cannot be reduced to mere observers. Either the government has to commit to curbing crime or it should let us work unhindered.

Minister of Physical Planning and Works Hisila Yami quoted in Deshantar, 21 April

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

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Selected material translated every week from the Nepali press

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39 million children living in conflict affected states are out of school

but ONLY 18% of all education aid is given to conflict affected states

education needs MORE priority

children should not be made to pay the price for adult’s war

Save the Children

Rewrite the Future

RIP

Himal Khabarpatrika, 29 April-14 May

Narsings Bahadur Shrestha, renowned entrepreneur and one of the pioneers of the democratic movement, passed away on 23 April at the age of 82. Three days later, the country lost another prominent entrepreneur, Mohan Gopal Khetan. Khetan died at the age of 61 due to a heart attack at the Norvic Hospital in Kathmandu. He was also suffering from diabetes.

Shrestha was the founding president of Himalayan Bank and had also filled various advisory roles. He was an industrial-businessman who backed economic liberalisation. He was a renowned social worker and an active contributor to the 1950 democratic movement.

Shrestha started his business career in transportation, and followed with a successful and heart trouble were cited as the reasons for his demise. Khetan went into business while still a student and had early success. After starting his career in the sugar industry, Khetan established the Khetan Group, which quickly became one of Nepal’s leading business institutions. He moved into the corporate industry with the establishment of Mutual Trading in 1986. Khetan then invested in other business and industrial sectors such as banking, insurance, beer, and instant noodles.

Khetan also headed social welfare organisations that focused on education, health, and religious efforts. Khetan helped build numerous schools and hospitals and was also the honorary consul general for Turkey in Nepal.

Khetan was known for his direct approach to matters and was held to be a good public speaker. While the business community in general has kept politics at arm’s length, Khetan occasionally attracted attention with his controversial political opinions. He won over the hearts of many people in his eventful life.
This month, a Swiss climber will attempt to finish a treacherous route on Annapurna I.

Halfway through this spring climbing season, a lot has already happened on the world's highest peaks. Two climbers from Kazakhstan, Maxut Zhumayev, 30, and Vassily Pivtsov, 31, summited Everest on 30 April via the North Col without using supplementary oxygen. Their summits of Everest are said to be the earliest so far from the north side. According to the Discovery Channel, five sherpas, led by Phurba Tashi, reached the top of the world on the same day Zhumayev and Pivtsov topped out. The dispatch also describes the ordeal of the Kazakhs' descent and how they had to be assisted by the sherpas to make it back to Advanced Base Camp. "At ABC the men revealed that they had gone 48 hours without a drop of water and no extra oxygen during their summit push and descent", the website said. They are reported to be well.

Everest has also claimed its first casualty of the year. Dawa Sherpa, who was from the Makalu region, was killed between Camp II and Camp III on the Nepal side. The Ministry of Tourism says he fell down the Kharpas crevasse while on his way up to Camp III on 26 April.

Another mountaineer going for all eight-thousanders bagged Dhaulagiri I, his eleventh. Spaniard Inaki Ochoa de Olza reached the summit at the 8,167 on 26 April. His teammate and compatriot Jorge Egocheaga followed shortly after, but later had to be evacuated from Base Camp due to frostbite. Other Dhaulagiri ascents reported include those of Romanian Horia Colibasanu and Kazakh team members Sergey Samoilov, Svetlana Sharipova, and Eugeny Shutov on 1 May, and a speed summit by Denis Urubko on 2 May.

An Italian climber is said to have fallen to his death just below the summit the day Ochoa topped out. There have already been a few summits of Cho Oyu, the world's sixth highest mountain, with Italians Silvio Mondinelli and Marco Confortola reaching the top after an impressive 20-hour push from Camp I.

Despite the early summits on Everest, most teams are still waiting for the weather window, which traditionally arrives between 15 and 25 May. However, last year was a late Everest season with climbers reaching the summit as late as early June.

BILLY BIERLING

A Swiss climber is just about to attempt a new solo route on the sheer south face of Annapurna I (pictured above). The 8,000m peak is one of the country’s most treacherous and avalanche-prone. Ueli Steck wants to finish a route first tried by two French climbers in 1992. Jean-Christophe Lalaville and Pierre Beghin attempted to conquer the world’s tenth highest mountain via its south face. Their expedition had a tragic end when Beghin fell to his death at about 7,100m. It took Lafaille five days to get back to base camp.

Annapurna I is Steck’s second big project this year. In February he set a new speed record on the notorious Eiger North Face in Switzerland, whitewashing up the icy rock wall in 3 hours and 54 minutes, a full 46 minutes faster than the previous record (pictured below). The 30-year-old Steck, who is considered one of the strongest mountaineers climbing now, said he even surprised himself: “I was
A thief’s tale

The start of Studio 7’s production of Abdul Tanov’s ‘The Honest Thief’ is dramatic enough. “Truth is divine… divine is the truth… nothing compares… with the sacred, the holy… the power of truth…” The play chronicles the life of Charandas, a thief who promises his gun to never tell lies. In one comic episode after another, Charandas dodges the law and over時間を Joey Robin Hood type status. He eventually decides to quit the game—but not before robbing the state treasury.

He pulls it off but also steals the queen’s heart, which brings us to the heart of this play. There are four other verses Charandas has made—he will not eat from a golden plate, ride an elephant leading a procession, marry a queen, or become king. Whether he can stick to them—whether any of us can stick to our principles and morals in a world filled with compromises and moral corruption.

Each character in The Honest Thief is an archetype from contemporary society: the dishonest constable, the corrupt minister, the greedy landlord and his wife who refuse to share their sacks of grain with starving villagers, and the sadhu who is

Amazed, I hadn’t thought this was humanly possible.

Steck came to Nepal fresh from this remarkable achievement ready for more challenges, in particular, the 3,000m-high wall of the south face of Annapurna I. And he certainly hit the ground running. He went to the Everest region to acclimatise and quickly nipped up Cholatse (6,335m), a technical trekking peak in the Khumbu.

To the scale that the south face of Annapurna I was born in 2004 when Steck bagged two major Himalayan peaks in a row. He soloed the north face of Cholatse, which is a 1,500m high vertical rock and ice wall, and the East Face of Tichoche. “After I had finished the Khumbu Express I knew I had climbed an 8,000m peak. So I had to come up with a good plan and the south face of Annapurna I looked most appealing to me,” he said. “All his climbs so far have been done without oxygen, as for Steck using ‘gas’ would be cheating. “The experience would not be the same without oxygen. People are fooling themselves, only pretending to be at a certain altitude,” he argued. The trained carpenter is also critical of the commercialisation of Everest, but says he’d love to stand on the top of the world one day— if wall and time allow.

But for now all Steck wants is to get up Annapurna I, his way. He says he isn’t scared, but seems a little nervous sitting by the pool in his hotel. 

“I have to pull myself together and avoid thinking about it too much… otherwise the face will even become higher and more overwhelming,” he said. “But I think I’ve reached the limit of my physical abilities. I can’t get any stronger or faster—the only thing I can do is go higher.”

Annupurna I for beginners

• Annupurna I (8,091m) is the tenth highest mountain in the world and the eighth highest in Nepal.
• Annupurna was first climbed via the North Face by a French expedition led by Maurice Herzog in 1950.
• Annupurna I is notorious for its avalanche danger. Legendary climbers like Anatoli Boukreev from Russia and Christian Kuntner from Italy have died on the mountain.
• Lalit, who attempted the south face 1992 but turned backed when his partner fell to his death, died on Makalu (8,463m) in January 2006 while trying a solo winter ascent.
• Related links: www.mountaineverest.net, www.wenflthest.ch (German).
The rulers in Kathmandu, preoccupied with giving pro-republican speeches at Tundikhel, don’t seem to realise how fast the situation is deteriorating in the mid-eastern tarai. Worse, they appear not to care.

The appearance of pamphlets in the past week by militant tarai groups giving Nepalis of hill origin a two week ultimatum to leave the plains proves they are deliberately igniting ethnic violence to trigger a backlash. The question is: who benefits from such a conflagration and why are the eight parties not showing the urgency to douse it?

Here in the tarai, the threat of ethnic cleansing is now real. The trouble is, it is difficult to tell who is in charge and who to negotiate with. An extremist pamphlet from the self-styled ‘Tarai Tiger’ group issued two weeks ago gave hill-ethnic civil servants one month to leave the madhes. On Nepali new year’s day on 14 April the underground JTMM-Jwala also threatened action against hill-ethnic officials who didn’t quit, then the JTMM-Goit in Bara issued a similar threat but gave only a week’s deadline.

Bara CDO Bhola Sibakoti says: “Civil servants here are all terrorised by threats from Tarai Tigers, Tarai Cobra, MJF, or the Chure Bhabar Ekata Samaj. Many have simply quit.”

To get an idea of just how bad things are, one has to make the rounds of the post office, land revenue office, survey department, land reform and education offices, municipality, or even hospitals. No hill-ethnic bureaucrat is left in most districts: some have taken extended leave, others have requested transfers but most have just fled.

The methods are simple: civil servants of hill origin are first asked to hand over between Rs 25,000-100,000 and if they refuse they are threatened or killed. That is the fate which befell Basudeb Poudel of Kalaiya in Bara who was abducted and...
during the Maoist war.”

The threats are obviously having their desired effect. Officials in Dhamrau, Surkhet, Sindhupalchok, Rautahat, and Bhojpur report civilian leaders queueing up waiting for transfers or leave. Rautahat OIC Danga Prasad Bhandari has put it all in writing and sent a two-page memo to the Home Ministry in Kathmandu.

Kathmandu has reacted by toughening security. Some district administration offices have armed police guards and in Mahottari government offices that had been closed are opening again. The Home Ministry is planning to put 75 additional armed police officers in each district capital. But many fear it is precisely this attitude in Kathmandu of treating the tarai as a law and order problem that is delaying resolution.

The prolonged closure of district offices has hit ordinary people the most: many wishing to go abroad can’t get passports and necessary documents, cross-border trade is at a standstill, sales transactions have stopped. Bara lawyer Ramkrishna Kafle.

RAMESWOR BOHARA in BANKE

For the past seven years during the conflict, the Suiya border checkpoint in Banke has been known as a den for smugglers and dacoits. Gangs poached timber from Banke’s dense sal forests, taking the logs across the border to India. The Maoists offered them protection during the war and collected their cut.

But with the peace process, police posts were re-established across the country. Here in Suiya, the smugglers and Maoists found their lucrative timber smuggling business threatened by the presence of the police.

At 6.30 in the evening on 30 April a large group of well-known local thugs led by the Maoist Banke member Nandakishore Pandey attacked the police post with swords and knives. They looted money, valuables, and guns and then set fire to furniture and uniforms. Policeman Purna Bahadur BK fled and hid nearby, and says: “If we hadn’t run away we’d have been cut down with swords.”

Police in-charge Mukesh Kunwar was captured and detained overnight by Pandey at his house. “It was pre-planned, they wanted us out of there,” he told us.

The Muslim-dominated border village has been terrorised by both the Maoists and the smugglers, and most were fed up. “It was becoming impossible to survive here and to protect our women and daughters,” says Sadruq Hussain (pictured), “but things had improved somewhat after the police arrived.”

However, the lightly-armed police were themselves being threatened by the Maoists and couldn’t control the rampant timber smuggling. In fact, two Indian smugglers whom the police had kept in custody were freed by the attackers on Monday night.

Now, the villagers are being terrorised again. Pandey and his cadre found out that villagers and local party leaders had complained to reporters who had arrived from Nepalganj on Tuesday and threatened to kill them. Now the villagers say they don’t feel secure and may have to run away.

The Maoists threatened to kill Mohammed Dalil for talking to reporters and said: “If we don’t get protection we will have to go across to India for safety.”

An Armed Police Force unit has been placed in Suiya for now, but it is only a temporary measure.

“is worse than it was during the Maoist war.”

The wild west

The Maoist attack on a border police post was to protect a lucrative timber smuggling interests

Sarlahi lawyer Ramkrishna Kafle has been threatened, and says there has been a criminalisation of identity politics in the tarai. “It is now clear this is a meticulous and deliberate attempt to disrupt ethnic harmony, and whoever is doing this is trying to provoke a backlash. And it’s shameful that politicians of tari origin philosophise in Kathmandu but don’t speak out against the violence here.”

It is clear that elections cannot be held in such a terrorised state. And this has made some ask: are the political forces who don’t want elections allowing the tarai to fester precisely for that reason? ●

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The history at the end of history
No one can force a society to be modern or liberal

Fifteen years ago in The End of History and the Last Man I argued that there was no alternative to a market economy and a democratic political system for a society to be modern. Not everyone wants to be modern or can set up the institutions and policies that make democracy and capitalism work. But no system yields better results.

Bush argued that the desire for freedom and democracy was universal and that America would support democratic movements “with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.” Supporters saw their views confirmed in the queues of Iraqi voters in the various elections held between January and December 2005, in the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, and in the Afghan presidential and parliamentary elections. These events were inspiring, but the road to liberal democracy in the Middle East will probably be extremely disappointing in the near to medium term. The Bush administration’s efforts to build a regional policy around it are headed toward abject failure. The desire to live in a modern society and to be free of tyranny is universal, or nearly so. This is why each year millions try to move from the developing world to find the political stability, job opportunities, health care, and education they lack at home. But this is not the same as a universal desire to live in a liberal society, that is, a political order characterised by a sphere of individual rights and the rule of law. This desire, acquired over time, is often a by-product of successful modernisation. Moreover, the desire to live in a modern liberal democracy does not translate into an ability to do so. The Bush administration assumed in its approach to post-Saddam Iraq that democracy and a market economy were default conditions to which societies reverted once oppressive tyranny was removed. Rather, they are complex, interdependent institutions that have to be painstakingly built over time. Before you have a liberal democracy, you need a functioning state (which Germany and Japan still had after they were defeated in World War II). This is not the case in countries like Iraq.

The End of History was never linked to a specifically American model of social or political organisation. I believe the European Union, not the contemporary US, more accurately reflects what the world will look like at the end of history. The EU’s attempt to transcend sovereignty and traditional power politics by establishing a transnational rule of law is much more in line with a “post-historical” world than Americans’ continuing belief in god, national sovereignty, and their military.

Finally, I never linked the global emergence of democracy to American agency, particularly not to the exercise of American military power. Democratic transitions need to be driven by societies that want democracy, and since they require institutions, are usually drawn out processes. Outside powers can help by the example they set as politically and economically successful societies. They can also provide funding, advice, technical assistance, and yes, occasionally military force to help the process along. But coercive regime change was never the key to democratic transition. • (Project Syndicate)

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

China’s economy needs more fiscal and social reform

China also needs to shift from its export-driven economy to a more integrative, inclusive development path. Although high growth requires large-scale capital formation, the relation between investment in real capital assets and human capital in China seems to be out of proportion. The current investment in the former is 43 percent of GDP, and for human capital, in the form of education, 4.3 percent. For more efficient growth this ratio should be changed in favour of education, including vocational training.

Eliminating today’s vast wastage of natural resources, which underpins excessively high pollution, will require a reformed regulatory framework, including higher user prices for energy, raw materials, and environmental resources. A less resource-dependent development strategy would free up resources for improvements in the country’s much-neglected social arrangements, particularly among rural citizens (“urban outsiders” (individuals in informal urban sectors). This includes patchy arrangements for income security, and unevenly distributed social services, such as health and education.

The case for combining further government withdrawal from the production system with more engagement in the social field is compelling. • (Project Syndicate)

Assar Lindbeck is professor of international economics at Stockholm University. His most recent work is An Essay on Economic Reforms and Social Change in China.
Conflict in the 20th century reached new levels of depredation through the introduction of ideology. For the first time, territorial wars and other conventional excuses for mayhem took lower casualties and ruined fewer lives than state-sponsored purges and repression. As an optimist, I stand by history, the Hand fears and loathes ideology for the blind faith it demands and the devastation unleashed in its name. Every thinking person is bound to despise those who glom onto doctrinaire beliefs and allow such abuses. The atrocities committed for political conviction are too numerous and nasty to forgive and forget. Fascist regimes in Spain, Italy, and Japan united unionists, executed leftists, and brutally suppressed dissent before collapsing in the dustbin of history. Stalin wiped out the landed class, demonised kulaks (‘rich’ peasants), and exiled countless to the gulag to preserve ‘superiority systematically crushed opposition and terrorised the governing clique, who inevitably benefited anybody except the service mentality and spiritual politics. Stalin’s straightforward point, that under capitalism the state is sovereign and independent thought are only academic. No, mass movements cannot be fatal, cultural diversity is to be desired, and political freedom is the first victim. Fascists dehumanized and wiped out minorities, while communists suppressed and fetishized traditional cultural expression as superstition, reactionary, and irredeemable in the workers’ paradise. The uniformity imposed by ideological governments is to be desired. Ideologues control human nature and creative expression, ideologues control human nature and creative expression, ideologues control human nature and creative expression. Suppression is not enough. The Hand admits no doubts that denial of the human spirit ultimately damned these systems to disarray and failure. The soul seeks more out of life than fulfilling party dictated quotas for the current five-year plan, and societies that ignore material and spiritual needs can no longer remain unified. Latin America ‘disappeared’ and other hotter hell holes are displacing the comfortable classes. The Hand entertains no questions. It does, like it or not. Time, chance, and whatever else you fear, all catch up with you. This useful thought can tame most egos, given a chance. It does, like it or not. Time, chance, and whatever else you fear, all catch up with you. No one can say, none of the above qualifies as progressive. Communism and capitalism emerged from the ashes of World War II to compete fiercely for the next 50 years. The Cold War provided a handy excuse for a rash of arms races that ignited proxy wars throughout the third world, propping up tinfoil dictators from Mobutu to Musa. Millions more were thus sacrificed to the weird 20th-century phenomenon of ideological struggle.
EXHIBITIONS

- LAST DAY A People War travelling photo exhibition, 5 May Saturday, 10AM-6PM, at Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal.
- Individuality through creativity photography by the visually impaired at Nepal Art Council, 5-7 May.
- Photo.Circle.V exhibition of photographs by Bikas Ranaurik, Anuj Chitrakar and. Subel Bhandari, 5 May, 9.45 AM-12PM, at the Bakery Café, Sundhara.
- Colours of the sepals and petals an exhibition of paintings based on botanical art by Neena Joshi Pradhan, 10.30 AM-6PM, except Saturdays at Park Gallery, Pulchok, until 15 May. 5522307
- Moments of passion an exhibition of collage paintings by Gaurav Shrestha, 6-15 May, 11AM-6PM daily at The Art Shop, Darbar Marg. 9814341810
- Sacred Realms mixed media works by Seema Sharma Shah at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, until 26 May, 11AM-6PM daily. 4216048

EVENTS

- To Kill a Mockingbird starring Gregory Peck, based on Harper Lee’s novel, 4 May, 6.30 PM at the Lazimpat Gallery Café.
- Yuva Chalta! Shrinkhala, an exhibition of democratic practices, 4 May, 3.5 PM at Martin Chaukar. 4107959
- The Honest Thief performed by Studio 7, opening weekend 4-6 May, further performances on 11-19 May and 18-20 May, 7:15 PM at the Naga Theater. Hotel Vaaja. 4271545
- Lectures, therapies, and workshops on memory, self-confidence, stress and health by Dutch psychotherapist F. Langedijk, 7-12 May at Nepali Japan Children’s Library, Lainchaur. 42979712
- Second Israeli Film Festival two films screened each day at 3.30 PM and 5:45 PM, 8-10 May at the Russian Culture Centre, free passes. 4411811
- Aarohan National Theatre Festival 2007 featuring theatre groups from all over Nepal, two shows a day at 12 noon and 5:30 PM, at Gunukul, until 11 May. 4466956
- School Bullying a talk program by Niti Rana, 17 May at The New Era, Kathmandu. 9865230568
- Pottery course by Santosh Kumar from the Delhi Blue Pottery Trust, at Nepal Art Ceramics in Mdyapur, Thimi, 28 May- 24 June. 9814257968

MUSIC

- Kathmandu Chorale Spring Concert 19 May, 3.30 PM and 6 PM, at The British School, Jhamshikel. Admission free. 5521218
- Open Mic Night at Via Via Café, every Friday, 8 PM onwards.
- Live Music at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 8PM with Yanki and Zigme Lepcha, 4416071
- Moksh Live presents live music, every Friday, at the Moksh Bar, Pulchok, 5552612
- DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers live at the Ros Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234

DINING

- Friday evening BBQ with live music, at the Hotel Himalaya, 30 March onwards from 7PM, Rs 499 net. 5525300
- Krishnanan Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika’s Hotel, six to 22 course ceremonial lunch and dinner. 4479488
- Weekend special with sekuwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 4411706
- Mongolian BBQ with Mongolian cuisine Wednesdays, Friday, 6.30 PM on at the Splash Bar and Grill, Radisson Hotel. Rs 1,000 for unlimited barbeque and beer. 4422828
- Flavours of the Middle East every Friday and the taste of Thailand every Wednesdays at The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234
- 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 Kinyas, Thamel. 4520440
- Smorgasbord lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375260
- Gyakok by the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum four diners at Rs 450 per person, two hours’ notice.
- Retro brunch barbecue with Crossfire Band at Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12-4PM, Rs 1,000 including swimming. 4401212
- Calculta’s rolls, biryani, kebabs Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- Woodfired Pizzas at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel 4362768, Bhaktaphal 4426857 and Pulchok 5521755
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4425219
- Jazzabell Café enjoy great food, exotic cocktails and music, Chalukap, 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. 4401212
- Wet and wild package at Godavari Village Resort, every Saturday and Sunday, unlimited swimming, buffet lunch with a bottle of beer or a softdrink, Rs 690 net. 5556075

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

Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire) finally seems to be finding the right balance between being Spiderman and dating girlfriend Mary-Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst), but his new-found happiness is shattered when a meteorite crash to earth bringing with it a slimy black substance that turns Spidey’s suit to give him new powers. Two new supervillians Sandman and Venom enter the fray and to add to his troubles, Harry Osborn (James Franco) is back as the new Green Goblin.

Call 4442200 for show timings at Jai Nepal
www.jainepal.com

#347
4 - 10 MAY 2007

NGAMINDRA DAHAL

This week has been all about sunny intervals followed by rain that is sometimes furious in the last afternoon. Thursday afternoon’s satellite picture shows Tibet under the influence of huge cyclone-gathering clouds from northwesterly fronts. Breakaway fractions of these containing light moisture are spilling over into the Nepali sky, producing cool breezes, thunderstorms, and showers. The cold, gusting winds and hailstorms are because the clouds come from a polar front. Expect more of the same over the weekend, humidity, cool breezes, thunderstorms, and sunny intervals.
HAPPENINGS

UNHAPPY FAMILIES: Families of victims of Maoist excesses lay out pictures of their loved ones at the Maitighar mandala on Monday asking for justice. Police broke up the meeting and a number of attendees were roughed up.

SPEAKING UP: The Federation of Nepalese Journalists walk through town to mark World Press Freedom Day on Thursday.

WHERE IS MY DRIVER?: UML general secretary Madhab Nepal looks pensive as he waits in the rain after going through the photographic exhibition, A People War. His driver was upstairs, viewing the exhibition himself.

LIGHTS OF PEACE: The Boudhanath stupa is brilliantly lit with thousands of butter lamps and the light of the moon on the occasion of the Buddha’s 2,551st birthday on Wednesday.

OFF WE GO: One of 21 enthusiastic Nepali and foreign participants whizzing along the Tamang Heritage Trail up from Syabrubesi on Saturday during a two-day mountain bike race organised by the UN-supported Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program.

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An Australian Government Initiative

The Australian Government invites applications for the Australian Leadership Awards (ALA) - Scholarships to study at Masters and Doctoral level in Australia.

ALA - Scholarships are for those who have the potential to assume leadership roles that can influence social and economic policy reforms and development outcomes in their home countries and the region. Scholars also participate in a unique Leadership Development Program.

The Australian Government also has a range of Endeavour Awards open to candidates from Nepal. These include: Endeavour Postgraduate Awards; Endeavour International Postgraduate Research Scholarships; Endeavour Vocational Technical Education Awards; Endeavour Research Fellowships; and Endeavour Executive Awards. Details on these awards are also available at www.australianleadershipawards.gov.au.

ALA Scholarship applications can be submitted both online and by post. Online applications can be submitted at: www.australianleadershipawards.gov.au and is open from 1 May 2007 until 31 July 2007. Applications submitted via post by applicants from South Asia should reach the following address by 16 July 2007.

For more information on the Australian Scholarships program please visit www.australianleadershipawards.gov.au.

Please forward any query on the Australian Leadership Award – Scholarships to: ala@ausaid.gov.au.

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Not since the slaughter of 256 rare African parakeets has our cow pasture-turned-international airport seen a week as eventful as this.

First, some bloke ploughed his dozer through the cable running to the VOR DME beacon knocking the airport out of action during the evening rush hour. The very next day a Doha flight had a bomb scare that closed down the airport, this time during the morning rush hour. Despite the Ass’s fine investigative skills she’s not been able to figure out how or why that alert went from Qatar to Mangalore to Kolkata to Kathmandu.

Anyway, no sooner had the airport opened again thousands of passengers were stranded in the terminal because the YCL decided to block the Ring Road. The next day it was the turn of irate passengers on the formerly-Royal Nepal Airlines flight to Dubai that had been delayed by five days who decided enough was enough and gheraoed the security check thereby sealing off the departure area. As this donkey goes to press, the airport is open but we don’t know for how long.

May Day! May Day!

As noted last week, Kingji has intensified efforts to enlist supernatural intervention to preserve his Tantrick Kingdom. After giving new meaning to the phrase ‘let’s all make our sacrifices for the sake of the country’ Big G has deployed an army of Brahmins to stage a mahayagya to stave off the ill Winds Wafting from the South. As the intimate details of these and other palace goings-on (like the top secret meeting between the former Supreme Commander and the Chief of Army Staff) get plastered across Kathmandu’s more salacious (than us) weeklies, efforts are reportedly underway to figure out who the Deep Throat within Naryanhiti is.

It doesn’t surprise your asinine columnist one bit that the comrades are impatient to turn Nepal into a republic and declare victory. You would too if you had hailstones the size of socket bombs raining down on your tents. But you’d be in even more of a hurry if your cantonments are being invaded by snakes. No, not counter-revolutionary anti-proletarian feudal snakes, but real reptiles.

And the comrades may have forsaken the battlefield but they are invading the air waves. Listeners of Radio Paschimanchal in Palpa have suddenly noticed a new slant in the evening news bulletins in which critics of the Maoists are referred to as ‘mandalays’ Gyanoendra the king is called by his friendly nickname, Gyano.

And they are making forays into film as well. The movie Lai Salam has just finished shooting (camera, not gun) and it has revolutionary dance sequences performed by the All Nepal People’s Cultural Federation. The Ass has been told never mind by whom that Comrade Awesome giving his fiery ‘May Day, May Day!’ speech this week at Tundikhel will make a cameo appearance in the 1 hr 26 min feature film. How that bit is going to be woven into the plot, we’re not sure, but we’re convinced it will be scintillating.

By the way, cabinet meetings have been moved from Baluwatar to Singha Durbar.

This week the Maoists tried hard to push through replacement secretaries in the ministries that they control. And they still can’t agree on ambassadors one year after regime change. There are eight cooks and they’re making a mess of the broth.