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Times

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Weekly Internet Poll # 350

Q. Do you expect that the government can pay the country's petrol bills and ease the supply crisis any time soon?

Total votes: 3,079



Yes 13.1%

Likely 13.1%

Unlikely 17.3%

No 56.5%

Weekly Internet Poll # 351. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. Should all sides cut their losses and let Melamchi die?

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OFF ROAD VEHICLE: This tractor accident near Kagbeni in Mustang killed two people on Sunday. The road from Myagdi to Mustang is claiming fatalities even before it is finished.

GRAHAM TILLOTSON

Falling off the road

On Sunday afternoon, trekkers relaxing after crossing the Thorung La at Muktinath's Nightingale Lodge heard a loud bang.

Police from a nearby APF camp were seen running with stretchers. The driver of a tractor who was racing another one down the mountain died instantly and his helper died later. Even before the Kali Gandaki highway to Tibet is completed, the road has claimed more lives. Last year two people died south of Jomsom when their tractor fell

into the river.

The accidents have also drawn attention to what the roads are doing to a once-pristine Annapurna Circuit trekking route. Most locals in Jomsom, Marpha, and Tukuche welcome it, saying it will make food items cheaper and also give access to markets for the region's apples and plums. Many Indian and Nepali pilgrims going to Muktinath pay Rs 700 roundtrip from Jomsom on tractor trailers.

But tourism entrepreneurs and trekkers say road access has

already altered the aura of this arid and scenic valley located in the Himalayan rainshadow.

"There are already hundreds of motorcycles and tractors on this road, it may turn away tourists," says Jomsom lodge-owner Santosh Sherchan.

On the Manang side, the road from Besisahar to Chame is under construction and has received unfavourable comments on trekkers' blogs this season. Lodge-owners in Manang say their once-remote valley would be better served by upgrading the airport

and telecommunications than bringing in a road.

For trekkers Judy Smith and Robin Boustead, the Kali Gandaki may now become like the Karakoram in Pakistan. "Like here, the locals wanted the road and the outsiders didn't," says Smith, "but seeing the endless stream of lorries, motorcycles, and SUVs on the Karakoram Highway you wonder at what cost."

Adds Boustead: "The accident is ironic, really, proves that haste makes waste." ●



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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd, Editor: Kunda Dixit
Executive Editor: Anagha Neelakantan
Design: Kiran Maharjan Web: Rupendra Kayastha
Director Sales and Marketing: Sunaina Shah marketing@himalmedia.com
Circulation Manager: Samir Maharjan sales@himalmedia.com
Subscription: subscription@himalmedia.com, 5542525/535
Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu 5543333-6, Fax: 5521013
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5547018



Critical masses

They will force open the doors to the fears

CAN'T HAVE IT BOTH WAYS

If you thought the prolonged closure of all the nation's schools is about education, you better think again.

'Education Republican Front', even the name gives it away. This is the hitherto unknown group that has forced nearly eight million students to stay home for the past week. Most people ask: how can they do that? Why don't the parents rise up? Why don't teachers defy the call?

Two reasons. First, there is a genuine crisis of commercialisation of the country's education system. This has pushed costs and put quality education out of reach of most Nepali families. This is a genuine grievance, and represents the failure of successive governments to regulate private education. Second, students, teachers, and parents are not defying the strike call because it comes with the direct threat of violence. Militant teachers and students padlocking schools have warned staff that those who remove locks can have their hands chopped off.

In an ironic twist, the Maoists have achieved a classless society, at least temporarily. If this long-term, nationwide closure of schools was really about improving education, the Maoists would have tried to upgrade the quality of government schools so we wouldn't need private ones.

Simply put, this is mass political action by the Maoist party to keep up the pressure on the governing alliance. It is a cynical use of children for political ends which has been condemned in the strongest terms this week by human rights groups and child rights activists. This outrage is bound to politically boomerang on the Maoists, but the culture of violence seems so ingrained in the comrades' psyche that they seem oblivious.

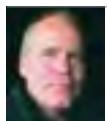
The Maoist affiliated teacher's union, its strong-arm student wing, the militant trade union, or the YCL, are all part of the Maoist attempt to assert power during their transition. Implicit in the modus operandi of all these groups is the threat of violence.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal and the YCL can't have it both ways. The chairman has to convince his militants in mufti at their central committee meeting this week to start behaving, otherwise they will undermine his own effort to project himself as a legitimate political entity. But if the threat of force continues, we can only conclude that Dahal can't face free elections.

In a recent tv interview, the Maoist leader presented a pragmatic face, trying to convince a skeptical interviewer that doctrines change with time. He sounded like he meant it. But can he convince his own young hotheads before it is too late?

Demographics are the viruses of the human race. They are far from obvious, but they quietly replicate and assert their version of a new reality as inexorably as the passage of time.

What are seen as realities today are forgotten conceits tomorrow, after demography has



HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

unfolded. India rockets along its economic arc, becoming a global business giant and multilateral political player. Yet, at home, some 300 million people—most of them young, low caste, excluded, and angry—await their

turn at the wheel. The recent Uttar Pradesh election result is just the first of many. India's demographics cannot be denied.

Iran's mullahs and cavorting prime minister cock a merry snook at the United States and its ridiculously inept administration. They are nurtured in the petridish of Washington's ire and cloak themselves and their words in Islam's cadences, flicking their eyes towards god's realms at every opportunity. But their fellow citizens are young, unemployed, and fed up with empty rhetoric and corruption. Iran will change beyond all recognition soon.

Western Europe lurches along, taking lengthy vacations to escape the angst of change in post-World War II realities. France atrophies but dines well even as its self-conceived civilisation becomes ever more irrelevant. Germany deludes itself that German genius will overcome all obstacles. Only Britain shows the slightest awareness of the coming assertion of demographics.

Sometime this century, Islam will become the most important faith in a continent that has long regarded itself rather militantly as Christian, and that has a history of war with Muslim civilisation. This change will be brought about by immigration and family dynamics, not war or policy. What's alarming is not that change is coming, but that Europe's leadership is wilfully blind to this prospect. Even the simplest step, admitting Turkey to that Christian club called the European Union, has them reaching for crucifixes and

shields and talking like medieval popes.

In the United States, Spanish speakers are already the largest non-white minority and Asians are the most economically successful. Poor whites and African Americans aren't invited to the party. What do politicians do? They pretend they can build walls and enforce official language policies to reverse the tide of history. The real threat to American prosperity is not foreign waves but neglected backwaters within—communities and people mired in poverty and exclusion, left alone with their anger.

What about demography in Nepal? This too is a young country, where most people beyond a narrow ethnic and religious definition are left out of power and prosperity. Count on that youthful dynamism forcing open the doors to the feast and stealing dishes from the banquet or privilege. It's happening already. Count as well on the disappearance of national tropes that seem so relevant now—anthems, costumes, religious practice, and political symbols from Marx to the Shah dynasty—to be largely forgotten in a decade or two.

Human history moves at a stately pace, through generations, fuelled by demographics, new critical masses in the making, and the cumulative aspirations of the young, the excluded, the newly arrived, the ambitious.

If I had two words of advice for anyone in power anywhere in the world right now they would be: stand aside. ●



SAGAR SHRESTHA

The Prajatantrik party is over

Deuba will have to go his own way if he doesn't unite with the NC

Journalists waiting to ambush Sher Bahadur Deuba after his meeting with Girija Prasad Koirala this week in Baluwatar didn't have to chase him for a soundbite. The five-time prime minister got out of his car and did a standup on the sidewalk. His message: prospects of NC unification are dim.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Because the split in the NC five years ago wasn't over principles there is actually nothing to prevent unification. In 2002, Prime Minister Deuba had declared a state of emergency, dissolved parliament and split off from Koirala's party. He positioned himself as a strongman to counter the spread of the Maoists.

Within six months it became clear he had been taken for a royal ride. On 4 October 2002, King Gyanendra dismissed him. In hindsight it is clear the split in

the NC was engineered by the palace to derail democracy. Deuba just didn't get it. But instead of reuniting with the parent party, he went crawling back to the king two years later with his tail between his legs only to be sacked again on 1 February 2005.

The creation of the NC-D was conceived in conspiracy. Bogus convention members were enumerated, forged signatures were used, and padded numbers shown to the Election Commission. The Prajatantrik faction was a branch pretending to be a tree. Gyanendra's re-instatement of parliament last year should have finally made Deuba realise his blunder and return to the NC, but he lost another opportunity of political rehabilitation.

Those who created the Prajatantrik faction have drifted apart. Khum Bahadur Khadka has flown back to the old tree. Jaya Prakash Gupta, Deuba's fire-breathing Communication Minister helped set up the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum (MJF). Bijaya Gachhedhar is positioning himself more as

a madhesi/janajati leader than an NC-D. Sharad Singh Bhandari and Narayan Khadka find solace in the company of Krishna Prasad Bhattarai.

The only people Deuba has around him are those who will dump him at the drop of a hat. It's only their shared antipathy towards Koirala that keeps the flock together.

Deuba has never pretended to be aligned to any political philosophy. Other than a vague aversion for communism and a commitment to some form of democracy, he is unencumbered by principles. In recent days he has confined himself to translating the statements of the US ambassador and serving it up as his own. That's the reason he sounds even more confused than he actually is. By publicly declaring that there is less chance of unification, he has freed himself from the pressure of having to toe the Koirala line and show flexibility towards Maoists.

He now needs to take the process to its logical end and rule out all possibility of

rejoining the NC. Diehard kangresis will then go where they belong. Opportunists will weigh their options and chose between RPP, Janshakti, and MJF, parties that are even more anti-communist. Deuba will then be left to build his own centrist party with high stakes in hydropower.

History will perhaps be kinder to the first kangresi who was decorated by the king. But even his contemporaries realise Deuba has been a victim of circumstance rather than a conspirator. He is a tool used by more adventurous personalities to write history. But history remembers, kindly or unkindly, only those who take decisions during times of crisis.

Deuba has one last chance to dissolve his party and begin afresh. Since the word Prajatantrik has already been taken by his in-laws in the RPP, how about Rashtriya Loktantrik Party? Who knows, at some point even Gyanendra and Paras may find it expedient to jump in if ex-royals ever take on a political avatar. ●

LETTERS

SAME OLD NEPAL

The almighty parliament has turned into a lame duck house, an all powerful government is lost in political bickering without any sense of direction, and an untamed Young Communist League has run amok ('Same Old Nepal,' 'Burned Again', #349). The King must be laughing all the way to Dakshinkali and truly believing that his 'tantrik' acts are really more powerful than the 'loktantrik' desire of Nepali people. It is obvious that the 7+1 is again putting its own petty interests before that of the Nepali people. What is the 7+1 waiting for to bring it to its senses: another coup a la 1 February 2005, conversion of the YCL into Mao's Red Guards for another experiment of cultural revolution, or Tamilisation of the tarai?

Sandesh Hamal, Lalipur

● So we've got our comrades and everyone else now ruling the roost with Girija Ji and all the ji-s together ('Same old Nepal', #349). What has changed, then? Still the same violence and populist statements that hold no backbone. Who will we blame now that the king is gone? We have the power, the people, the machinery so why are we still in the same rut? Somebody should tell those inefficient and corrupt leaders that they are all the same. It is so sad that all we can do is laugh at ourselves.

Dhoj Khadka, UK

PLAN B

I agree with Daniela Ponce ('Got Plan B?', #349). Nepal is in need of leaders with understanding and commitment to help the people of Nepal.

Name withheld, email

● I was surprised to learn that at the pinnacle of Jana Andolan 2, Daniela Ponce managed to do her graduate research on the role of student movements in Nepal. As a graduate student, our professors tell us to pick topics which grab the attention of the evaluators. I just hope that Nepal doesn't turn out to be a haven for research scholars.

Dino Shrestha, email

SAVE DEMOCRACY

K B Gurung, the general secretary of the Nepali Congress in an interview with BBC Nepali Service said unification of the NC and the NC-D is necessary to save democracy. It is difficult to understand how democracy can be saved by doing that especially since corruption at all levels of the government has increased compared to the one-man rule of the Narayanhiti Palace. To save democracy, the government, the reinstated parliament, and the interim parliament should make urgent laws to discourage corruption,

especially at the executive and the judiciary levels. If a law that confiscates the property of corrupt judges and officers comes into effect, corruption would be discouraged, minimised, and eradicated to ensure a long life for democracy.

Ravi Manandhar, Kuleswor

SPIN

Artha Beed's ('The Art of Spin', #349) was interesting. He definitely wants everyone to see the silver lining. He suggests we begin to talk positively about our country rather than bashing it. Going abroad is not the solution. Let's be optimistic and have pride in a new Nepal.

Jenny Pandey, Chandol

● During the 1990s, people's attitude influenced Nepal's economy. At the beginning of the decade, industries mushroomed because of peace and free economy which in turn created new jobs. It was all hunky-dory until the Maoist problem. Today, every sector is ill because of pressure tactics. People have become selfish in the process and started taking either themselves or the management hostage to fulfil demands. People stopped having faith in democracy and so have the industrialists.

Today, because of this change, my prospect to retire does not exist. I am taking a younger man's job. I know, but I had to change my plans.

Kripesh Shrestha, email

LET DOWN

"Biratnagar's bookkeepers" ('State of the State', #349) somehow feels like a dumb abstract from C K Lal's tour diary of Biratnagar. It is unexpectedly cold and painstakingly resembles a cheap local daily writeup. Lal is one of the best writers around but he somehow manages to let us down every now and then.

Name withheld, email

ASS

During a hot debate in class, my professor smiled at me and said, "Do you know that the world is run by people who have more influence and contacts than you? He can be a complete nitwit but he has complete control over your future."

I was flabbergasted and was troubled for days until I read the Backside column in your paper written by none other than the Ass. Thank you, Ass. You proved the hypothesis my professor made. The sad part is, you've been proving it every week.

Gayesh N Goyal, email

● The only person (animal?) that calls it like it is in the Nepali media and your own illustrious paper is the backside Ass. Loved 'Let us bray' (#348). May the Ass live a long and productive life so we can keep on reading *Nepali Times* back to front.

G B Rai, UK



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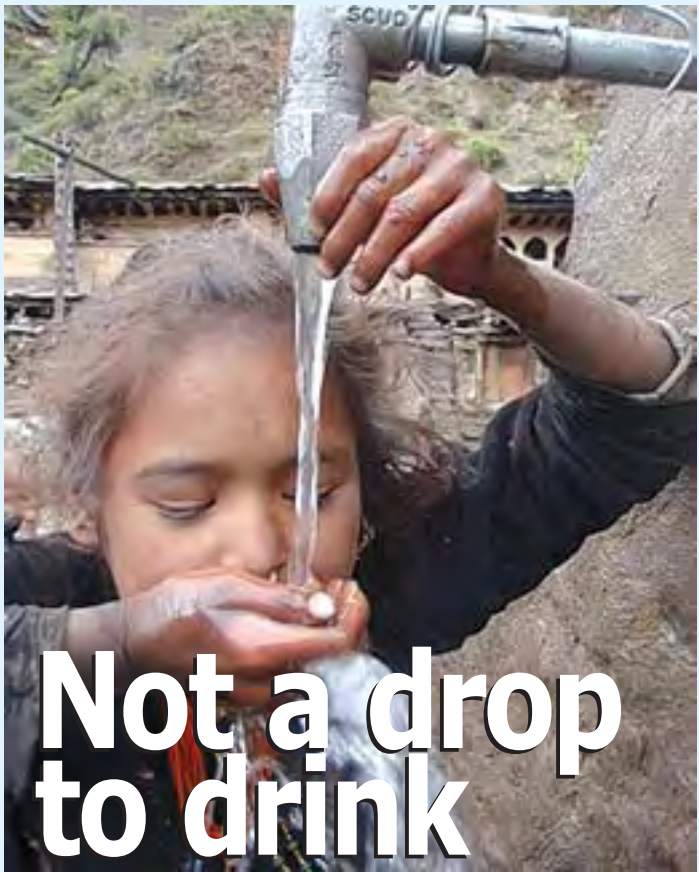
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Not a drop to drink

IRN

It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white as long as Kathmandu Valley gets proper water supply

A country so rich in water resources has been a chronic failure in ensuring proper drinking water for citizens. Forget about the rest of the country, it can't do so in its own capital. It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white as long as it catches mice. It hardly matters who manages the water system for Kathmandu as long as the people get a reliable and affordable supply. The Nepal Water Supply Corporation (NWSC) is getting most of the flak for mismanaging water supply. There are many countries in the world where public enterprises are as successful as private ones. Not so in Nepal. Most government corporations here have accumulated huge losses, their net worth is mostly negative.



COMMENT
Ratna Sansar Shrestha

Political interference is usually the reason. The board of directors are packed with cronies and there is non-transparent, non-

competitive selection of chief executives who stay as long as their political bosses are around. Politicians use public enterprises as recruitment centres and as a source of perks and pelf for themselves and their kith and kin. Bottom line: most corporations lack corporate governance.

In order to insulate public sector enterprises from these evils, Kathmandu-based multilaterals have a standard prescription: foreign management. Two of Nepal's largest banks were handed over to outside managers under the financial sector reform with ambitious targets to be achieved in two years. Five years down the line and after spending Rs 7 billion of borrowed money, these banks have not shown substantial improvement. On Melamchi, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has made funding of Melamchi conditional on the government handing over management of NWSC to foreign management.

The debate today is not for or against the Melamchi project. The government seems to be all for it. Yet, the ADB wants Kathmandu Valley's water supply to be managed by Severn Trent Water International Ltd, or else. Certain politicians and bureaucrats involved in selecting Severn Trent agree fully with the ADB. Whatever one may think about minister Hisila Yami, she raises valid questions about this deal.

Severn Trent was the only bidder in all four rounds of the selection process, which was a one-horse race. The problem must lie in the criteria that enabled only one bidder to participate. If there was only one bidder, the net should have been cast wider.

But that is not the only problem dogging Melamchi today. Unfortunately for Severn Trent, it has been under a dark cloud in countries ranging from UK to Guyana, thus casting doubts on the ADB's reasons for favouring a discredited company.

It is now time for sanity to prevail. To preserve its own reputation it is not advisable for the ADB to back a questionable party and threaten to withdraw support for Melamchi unless Severn Trent is involved in the project. Now that Severn Trent has withdrawn its bid without even consulting ADB, there is a way forward.

Now, the criteria for the next selection process should be fine tuned so there are more bidders (one week's job), solicit international competitive bids (35 days) and select a party that is not blacklisted anywhere (a month). In this manner we can have an alternative party to work as management contractor in less than three months.

It's a win-win-win. The selection procedure will be kosher, the ADB will come out of it with its reputation largely intact and maybe (just maybe) Kathmanduites will get clean water in four years. It's time to stop over-reacting on this long-delayed project and get on with the job. ●

Ratna Sansar Shrestha is an economic/financial analyst working in the water resource sector.

Troubled waters

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

This is probably another late save for the blighted Melamchi Water Supply Project.

Nepal's largest infrastructure undertaking in history will probably survive this latest tussle between the government and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) simply because neither the Maoist minister Hisila Yami nor the ADB want to be the one to pull the plug.

Yami is from Kathmandu, and her constituents who are reeling from unprecedented water shortage even for drinking are not going to forgive her. The ADB has too much invested in this and too much at stake to pull back now. The challenge for both is how to do that without losing face.

The bank's statement last week announcing the planned closure of the project on 30 June began with the conditional "as it stands now". Yami, who insists that the contract to manage Kathmandu's water supply to the British firm Severn Trent was not transparent, says she is reading between the lines.

"The bank would not have put out that kind of statement if it simply wanted to wash its hands of the project," she said, "the bank knows these are abnormal days for Nepal and would certainly reconsider its decision."

ADB officials in Manila who spoke to us on condition



MIN BAJRACHARYA

SAVING FACE: Neither Hisila Yami nor the ADB want to be the one to pull the plug on Melamchi

of anonymity say they want to send a strong message the government. "It's schooling time for them," one said, "we have waited long enough, it's time to learn to play by the rules."

And those rules are precisely what Yami has problems with. She has questioned ADB's procedure for selecting Severn Trent, which she says was flawed. The Maoist minister has dramatically toned down her rhetoric this week and made conciliatory statements about having no problem with the

project or the ADB, just Severn Trent and the way it got the contract.

The alternative, she says, is a public-private partnership to manage the capital's water supply until Melamchi kicks in. The project will take five years to build and involves digging a 26 km tunnel from a mountain river north of Kathmandu.

"We aren't asking for much," Yami says, "it's just about whether the ADB accepts the initiatives we are trying to take."

The meeting on Wednesday between Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and ADB's country director Paul Heytens was inconclusive. But it came hot on the heels of a meeting between Dahal and Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala on Tuesday at which Koirala is said to have warned Dahal to sort out his minister's mess as a precondition to improved conditions at the 'PLA' cantonments.

Yami admitted that the two issues were related. "Our main concern is that the peace process should move ahead," she said, "only if that happens can we talk about construction projects like Melamchi. But you know that the peace process is heading nowhere, and neither are the elections."

Senior ADB officials are wary. "If we listen to what Yami is saying, tomorrow we will have to listen to another disgruntled minister of another party, and it would go on like that forever," said the official from Manila. ●

BoK's deals

Bank of Kathmandu has been awarded a line of credit by the World Bank's International Finance Corporation (IFC) under its Global Trade Finance Program. BoK has also signed an agreement with the South Asian Enterprises Development Facility (SEDF) in order to develop small and medium businesses. The bank has a \$2 million line of credit with IFC and will now be associated with hundreds of banks around the world.



Taking a train

Indian railway tickets are now available for booking from Nepal through Orient Paradise Tours and Travels. Indian Railways and the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) have officially appointed Orient Tour, a subsidiary of KL Dugar Group, as their general sales agent. Ticket reservations will be available in all major cities in the near future.



Lenovo in Nepal

Cybernetics has been appointed the official distributor of the Lenovo brand. Lenovo products include laptops, personal computers, printers, servers, mobile phones, and more than 200 types of branded computer peripherals. The Lenovo showroom is located at Babar Mahal.



Internet link

WorldLink has recently introduced a new series of wireless modem. This modem is targeted towards customers living away from city areas where proper telephone lines and cables have not yet reached. WorldLink has also designed five new Wi-ZOOM Internet service packages - Wi-ZOOM Nite Lite (Regular, Standard and Premium) and Wi-ZOOM Hours (Residential and Business). The speed range of these services is from 64-96kbps.



Cheaper calls

United Telecom Limited has slashed its international call rate to India from Rs 20 per minute to Rs 15 plus taxes, during peak hours. It has been further cut down to Rs 12.50 for off-hours from 8PM-6AM. UTL is the first private telecommunications company and boasts the cheapest phone rates at Rs 1 per minute.



Asahi

Asahi, the Japanese beer, is being launched in Nepal for the first time through Evolution Trading. Brewed with malted barley, the beer uses the Asahi yeast strain No. 318 to ferment. Launched in Japan in 1987, the beer is now being brought to Nepal. Evolution Trading has also already made trade deals with Apple, Bose, Panasonic, Sanyo, and Optoma.





Why is it we are here?

Time for businesses to stop being defensive and start putting their good sides on public display

It isn't easy being a pro-market person in Nepal. Columnists on op-eds of the vernacular press routinely equate markets with a few big private businesses run by 'greedy capitalists'. These fat cats cut corners, exploit

STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

workers, waste natural resources, bribe bureaucrats, fool customers, and are lackeys of those in power. To this drumbeat, add years of socialist governance, communist ranting, and domestic conglomerates that treated banks as slush funds. Is it surprising that the image of markets as

playpens of a few big bad business houses is boldly etched on an average Nepali's psyche? This is one reason why there's little hue and cry when businessmen get beaten up, when they are forced to donate and when, because of strikes, they find it to impossible to, well, mind their own business. Indeed, in the court of public opinion, a Maoist can get a second chance, but a businessman remains guilty of all real and imaginary charges until proven otherwise. In times ahead, that perception is going to make it difficult for our business communities to explain what competitive markets, of which they make up a part, effectively

facilitate: provisions of goods, services, jobs, taxes, investment opportunities, and increases in levels of innovation, trust, transparency and accountability. But that difficulty poses a problem and an opportunity. The problem is that with the Maoists in government, we are likely to hear, as we did from Hisila Yami last week, the usual more-concerned-about-Nepali-than-thou rhetoric against privatisation and foreign investments. The opportunity is that now is the time for businesses to stop being defensive, and start putting their good sides on public display. Not only does this help them do good (i.e. restore the very purpose of their existence to serve customers, suppliers, employees, and shareholders) but also do well (i.e. earn competitive advantages). One way a Nepali business can honestly and confidently display its good side is by being serious about how it carries out its

corporate social responsibilities. CSR here does not mean diverting a part of a company's profits into pet projects designed to make the CEO and his wife look smart in lifestyle magazines. Nor does it mean doing generic 'feel good' activities by throwing money at charities and NGOs. The latest thinking on CSR is that it's about creating a shared value between a business and society in such a way that the activity undertaken is meaningful to society and tangibly valuable to the business. Viewed this way, leading Nepali businesses may need to rethink how they practice CSR (see interviews below). It is, for instance, a complementary activity for a car distributor to engage in ways to reduce road fatalities. But it's hard to see what tangible shared value really comes out of a well-intentioned bank supporting a well-run hospital. Likewise, for a Kathmandu-based supermarket, paying for scholarships in a remote district

makes sense. That's because most salespersons in that supermarket come from that district. But another financial institution presenting a scattershot list of CSR activities indicates that unfocused enthusiasm has won over rigorous thinking. What if banks got involved in raising the levels of financial literacy of NGOs and charities that do good work but can't balance their books or don't know how to do more with less money? Nepali businesses have long been defined by others as exploitative and extractive. Though true in large part, it's time businesses too charge to start changing that definition. Reaching out to complementary social spaces to do CSR activities is one way our businesses can help restore our faith in the power of competitive markets to do good for more Nepalis than any of the alternative ideology currently hogging much print space in our newspapers. ●

Suraj Vaidya
CEO, Vaidya's Organisation of Industries and Trading House



CSR should be an integral part of every business and should not depend on the profits. In our tea estates in Dhankuta, we produce certified organic tea, 70 percent of our workers are women and we have a welfare fund run by them. At Toyota we are starting a new pedestrian safety program because we realise that the number of road accidents in Kathmandu is increasing. Our staff will be directly involved, and will put in six hours a week.

Shekar Golchha
Director, Golchha Organisation



Every corporate house should make CSR a priority, and it is at the top of our list. We are supporting two hospitals in Biratnagar, we help charities, and we have set up welfare funds within our group. We don't use our social contributions as a marketing tool, which is why we don't make too much noise about it.

Anil Shah
CEO, Nabil Bank



CSR is an evolutionary concept. When a corporate house is in primary stages, they are most concerned about making profits so social responsibilities are not thought about. Nabil Bank supports health, education and sports. In health we support Tilganga Eye Centre's glaucoma initiative. In education we have supported kids from 8-10 grades at Mary Ward School where girls from usually low income background study. In sports we have set up Nabil Three Star where we encourage young kids to play. We are involved in issues that are closer to home. We assess need and are careful while choosing our partners.

Min Bahadur Gurung
Owner, Bhatbhateni Supermarket



When Bhatbhateni supermarket was being built, the roads were narrow, so we made it broader. We renovated the temple next to it that was in ruins. We helped flood victims during the 1994 and 1997 floods in my native Khotang. We are planning to be involved in a project to take drinking water to some 2,000 households in a small

village in Darchula. I have personally been involved during the design and implementation of the project and so far we have been able to do it ourselves without support from anyone.

Prithivi Pande
CEO, Nepal Investment Bank Limited



We have a deep commitment to social upliftment, sustainable economic development and to creating a good working environment. Our most recent CSR event was the 'Run for Fun' 2007 Annual Marathon, which raised Rs 5,000,000 for the Katmandu Valley Preservation Trust. NIBL has provided monetary support of over Rs 1.2 million for the renovation and restoration of several temples, we assist the Heart Foundation, provide monetary support to Bal Mandir and Pashupati Bridhashram, and Nepal Apanga Sangha, Khagendra Nava Jeevan Kendra to help disabled people. We have helped the UNHCR mission to Nepal in their work in improving the living conditions of Refugees. CSR is instrumental in generating goodwill towards the bank and in helping us to brand and position our corporate name in the business world.

PICS: MIN BAJRACHARYA



Murder testimony

Parshuram Kafle in *Naya Patrika*, 20 May

Dilip Kumar Prajapati ('Bhisma'), general secretary of the Young Communist League, and Krishna Hari Saiju ('Bibek') have spoken out for the first time about their involvement on the murder of first Inspector General of the Armed Police Force Krishna Mohan Shrestha, his wife Nudup and bodyguard Surya Regmi, who were killed on 26 January 2003.

"The orders to kill the IGP came from the central committee and Nishchal Nakarmi, Surendra Shrestha, Rajkumar Shrestha and Bina Magar of PLA Special Task Force were also



MIN BAJRACHARYA

involved during the planning stages. Nakarmi and Magar were arrested later and are among the many who were disappeared at the Bhairabnath Battalion," said Saiju.

"At first we did not know much about the plan to kill the IGP or about his lifestyle, soon we sent our people to snoop around his residence and later learnt that he goes for regular morning walks, but

would change routes for security purposes. Shrestha was under surveillance since July 2002 and our plan was to take action by September 2002. We failed 16 times because he was always changing his routine," adds Prajapati.

"In mid January 2003 PLA's special commander Umesh Lama and I, section members Rolpali Magar and Juju Bhai Guerrilla arrived in Bagdol, Lalitpur. Guerrilla is now company commander of PLA's Third Division and Lama is not in the PLA anymore. On the night of 25 January, I was called by Lama and was informed about the plan to attack IGP Shrestha in front of a restaurant while he was walking on the road," said Saiju.

Magar, Guerrilla, Lama, and Saiju set out early in the morning on 26 January. "When we saw IGP Shrestha, his wife, and his bodyguard coming down from Ekanta Kuna, Lama took charge. Our plan was to kill Shrestha and shoot his wife in the leg. At 7.30 AM we came face to face with Shrestha, but he and his bodyguard did not recognise us because we were in civvies. The plan was to have Magar in the middle of the road, Lama, Guerrilla and I on the side. We were standing 2-3 metres apart and were to finish our job in two minutes, but it did not take us that long. They were killed in a few seconds. Guerrilla's pistol was not covered, so when he took it out, it fired by mistake and hit me in my thigh. I lost consciousness. Just as I opened my eyes Magar and Guerrilla shot the IGP, and his wife. Magar then aimed at the bodyguard but his pistol didn't fire. Magar was coming to grab mine when Lama fired at the bodyguard. After he was hit, Magar ran to a secure place and Guerrilla and Lama came to get me," Saiju added.

Police later arrested Saiju from Patan Hospital where he was undergoing treatment.



Melamchi sinks

Former minister Gopalman Shrestha in *Samaya*, 24 May

Just like during the royal regime, Melamchi has again become fodder, this time for the Maoists. A project that was moribund after the royal takeover in February 2005 was finally restarted. We had to work hard to convince the UML to agree to the Melamchi legislation. The Maoists had never been happy about it. If the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works had remained with us, we wouldn't have had this problem. The hullabaloo over privatisation of the Nepal Water Supply Corporation was nonsense. It was a six-year management contract to streamline water supply. I had warned Sher Bahadur Deuba and Girija Prasad Koirala about giving the ministry to the Maoists who

were already saying "melamchi bye bye". Yet, we offered it to them on a platter. The UML devoured the Arun III project in 1994, this time the Maoists devoured Melamchi. Now who will suffer? It will be the thirsty lower and middle class citizens of the Valley. The eight parties better think about this seriously.

Open schools

Editorial in *Abhiyan*, 21-27 May

अभिियन

There is a positive correlation between education and the socio-economic development of a country. Countries with high quality education are ahead in terms of economic development. That is why most countries in the world never allow political



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instability to affect the education system. Even during the worst days of civil war in Sri Lanka and the Philippines, the schools remained open.

Nepal is just the opposite. Education was affected during the royal dictatorship and even though peace has been re-established, schools are still being closed. Yet, there is no outrage or serious effort to resolve the prolonged closure of schools by

the government or the political parties. And the groups that have enforced this strike, which directly affects half the country's population, seem to be little bothered about its impact. Some of their demands may be legitimate, but closing down schools to have them addressed is illegitimate.

It shouldn't just be child rights organisations that rise up with one voice against the closure of schools, but also guardians,

teachers, civil society, and political forces. The state must also make sure that its investments in education are effective and regulate the commercialisation of the sector. This government may not be able to make education child-centred, but it must do more to reopen schools right away despite threats from the Maoists. Otherwise, no one will save us from the fate of being a failed state.



Nepal Oil Corporation: No petrol
Nepal Airlines Corporation: No planes
Nepal Electricity Authority: No electricity
Nepal Water Supply Corporation: No water
Nepal Telecom: No circuit
Constituent Assembly: No idea

हिमाल Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-29 May

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The Bhairabnath and Juddha Bhairab incidents were even more atrocious than Hilter’s gas chambers. This is why the struggle against those involved in disappearances hasn’t stopped. Once we establish a republic, we will raise our voices from parliament, from the government, and on the streets.”

CPN-M leader Baburam Bhattarai quoted in *Rajdhani*, 22 May.

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

“They have sucked NAC dry”

Interview with Minister of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation
Prithibi Subba in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-29 May

हिमाल

As soon as you were appointed minister, Nepal Airline Corporation’s planes were grounded.

All the planes are old and we can’t buy new ones right now. The engineers must be corrupt, else how could they not have known that the aircraft were not in working condition? Meanwhile, after the planes were grounded, tickets were still being sold. All this is under investigation.

How is NAC doing?

During the panchayat, democracy, and the royal regime, the corporation was sucked dry. Everyone from prime ministers and ministers to corporation bosses and employees misused the corporation. We should be ashamed, especially now since all its international flights are cancelled.

How was NAC misused?

An unnecessary new company was set up to siphon way money. The Lauda scandal drove NAC to bankruptcy.

Is it true that of late NAC has made a lot of money?

After the April Uprising, more tourists started coming in and we changed a few internal policies. The Rs 1 billion profit we earned during this period was used to pay back loans. We’ve seen positive results with just minor policy changes. If there had been stringent rules before, NAC would be flying to 70 international destinations by now and our hangers would have been full of new aircraft. Thai started the same year, and now owns over 100 planes. And if foreign airlines can attract tourists to Nepal, so can we.

Why is the government unwilling to bring in desperately needed new aircraft?

The purchase of new planes has always been controversial. NAC insiders are now scared of being accused of corruption. I am new, I work for the people, so I am not scared. The process of buying new planes will begin when applications come in. National pride is attached to the national carrier, and we must stop it from sinking.

Will the government stand as guarantor during the purchase?

It has to! We are working towards NAC eventually being a public-private partnership enterprise. The government would own 50 percent, the private sector 40 percent, and the public and employees the remaining 10 percent.



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Someone to watch over us

Take away contemporary clothing, the taxi, tourists, railings, and Basantapur seen from the Shiva-Parvati temple looks gratifyingly similar to how it did in the early 1940s when Ganesh Man Chitrakar photographed the square. The old building in the left corner is missing, but today's stone pavement is an improvement.



KIRAN PANDAY



KIRAN PANDAY

Ba

The darbar squares are our only architectural heritage of the last century, the changes that determined the city's growth. The 1934 earthquake destroyed some of the new commercial and administrative buildings in the area around Tundikheli and Singha Darbar. These photographs by Ganesh Man Chitrakar and his son Ganesh Man Chitrakar show a modern city in the making.

Dirgha Man Chitrakar accompanied Shumshere to England as a photographer and painter. He was a member of the Rana families, and a social reformer. His photographs of Kathmandu's cityscape. He used a 165mm f/25 Anastigmat lens with lens and accessories. He used a Meyer German lens. Ganesh Man Chitrakar's photographs of the Valley of Kathmandu were taken with a Rolleiflex and a Zeiss Ikon camera.

The copyright to the photographs belongs to the grandson, Kiran Man Chitrakar, who lives in Kathmandu, where many of these old photographs are kept.

Ganesh Photo Lab: 01-4260898. ganeshphoto, 4260898.

Time passes

The old Ghantaghar with its Moghul-Victorian masonry stood proudly next to an ultramodern electricity pole in this 1915 photograph by Dirgha Man. Nepal was one of the first Asian countries to generate electricity in 1903 with the Pharping power station. This tower came down in a heap of rubble in the 1934 quake and was rebuilt in its present shape and the political graffiti matching the jacarandas in full bloom.



KIRAN PANDAY

Still abuzz

On this scorching day in 1920, Dirgha Man climbed to the roof of a nearby building and captured the spiritual and commercial transactions that made Indrachok the nerve centre of old Kathmandu. To shoot the scene today, with the renovated Akash Bhairab temple and electricity pole and the unimpressive brick and concrete box that has replaced the high temple on the right, you have to clamber atop a car in the thick of traffic.



In dreams

This photograph of Kaiser Mahal was taken in approximately 1915 by Dirgha Man Chitrakar. It showcases the old world beauty of Field Marshall Kaiser Shumshere's much loved garden. Alongside is the newly renovated Garden of Dreams.



KIRAN PANDAY



Back in time



and temples of the Valley aren't
ural touchstones. At the turn of
e city was already undergoing
e its present appearance.
destroyed the city and created
ours that we see today. The
rative hub of the city shifted to
hel: New Road, Putalisadak,
tographs Dirgha Man Chitrakar
Chitrakar took from 1901-1945
e making.
nied Prime Minister Chandra
d in 1908 as royal court
r. He took life-size portraits of
eries of wide angle shots of
e used an American RB Graflex
gmat lens, an English Camper
from Altrincham's and a Hugo
sh Man, who took the first aerial
y, used a Rolleiflex/ Rolleicord
M Prontor SV.
images is with Dirgha Man's
o owns the Ganesh Photo Lab
lass negatives are archived.
www.nepalhomepage.com/

Nearly a century after these
photographs were taken much has
changed in Kathmandu, but much
remains the same



KIRAN CHITRAKAR

A bird's eye view

In 1910, when Dirgha Man took this picture from Dharara, Tundikhel looked almost barren with just a solitary statue watching over it. Ninety-six years later, his grandson Kiran Chitrakar re-enacted the scene from the top of the tower and printed his photograph in sepia to give the same texture and mood.



KIRAN PANDAY

The long view

This shot of Ranipokhari with the Darbar High School behind it was taken in 1918 by Dirgha Man. Today, from the balcony of Ghantaghar, the temple is still set against a distant backdrop of hills, but the vista is marred by the high concrete matchboxes of Asan.



PADAM GHALE

It is a basic human right to live free of fear Innocence lost

Remember the good old days when all we had to worry about was the earthquake? Compared with the plethora of concerns facing society today, this primal fear shared by our ancestors seems almost quaint and folksy.

The 1990's brought pollution, overcrowding, and a rapidly deteriorating environment to the nation's capital.



MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

Urbanites fretted about smog and effluents, the air was filled with toxic emissions, and the beloved Bagmati River degenerated from holy to filthy.

These perils have not gone away, but who has time for such mundane matters nowadays? New dramas, far more tangible

and immediate, currently preoccupy us.

With crime soaring, theft is the only 'old fear' still in the news, holding our attention by mutating into ever more alarming forms. Home invasion by armed gangs is burglary's latest and nastiest manifestation, outdone only by the Maoist innovation of evicting house-owners and stealing all property outright. Simple, time honoured anxieties like losing valuables to a thief in the night have been ousted by the fear of dispossession at gunpoint.

Worries once considered irrational have become dreadfully real for many.

Outrageous crimes like extortion and kidnapping inflict psychological terror leaving scars that may never heal.

The introduction of such wholesale fear in society can be blamed on the war and its perpetrators. Kathmandu was recently one of the safest capitals in the world, and the

countryside even safer, until the flood of guns fuelling the conflict changed everything.

The use of intimidation and terror for political ends is a well-known Maoist trademark, employed for decades with brutal efficiency by the Chairman himself. Human wave attacks on isolated police posts and mass abductions of school children for propaganda indoctrination are among the many Maoist introduced traumas that no society should ever have to endure.

Mainstream politicians blundering their way through the war launched clumsy reprisals notable only for their brutality, bringing state sponsored terror home to many of Nepal's villages. Things got even weirder after the second People's Movement, when the police seemed to follow the monarchy into a purely

ceremonial role. Reports of widespread demoralisation in the force were confirmed when emergency calls for help went unanswered, leaving the citizens to fend for themselves in a country riding a crime wave. Rumours of off-duty officers in uniform stealing whatever they could grab during spurious house searches added new fears we never wanted to think about, especially the part about liquor on their breath.

The social cohesion that helped control crime and provided moral support in the past has been wrecked by the displacement of millions, shredding the fabric of both the villages left behind and the cities flocked to. One can't count on the neighbours in a pinch if you've never met them, or they've already fled.

As civil society remains under siege, our repertoire of dread grows. The recent incarnation of Mao's infamous Red Guards in the guise of the YCL has introduced fear of the mob, every bit as primal and unpredictable as that of the quake.

The fact these thugs haven't been thrown in jail causes yet more anxiety, leading many of us to suspect the state has broken down. Given the track record, we can expect the firearms hidden by the Maoists in contravention of the peace accord to be used against us in the near future. Since the guns don't officially exist and surely won't be thrown away, at the very least they'll add to the huge quantity of illegal weapons already in circulation and skew the odds in favour of criminals for years to come.

The Hand salutes the Nepali spirit for its remarkable resilience in coping with these insane developments, but wonders how the perpetrators of such abuse are allowed to get away with it.

If adapting to new sources of stress is necessary for survival these days, it's important to remember life wasn't always like this and doesn't necessarily have to be this way in the future. To live free of fear is a basic human right we have been robbed of, and the worst uncertainties plaguing Nepal these days are manufactured by those with a political agenda who will have very little left once the fear is gone.

Innocence lost may never be regained, but given time and a bit of luck even these troubles will pass. ●

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Voice of the party

The Maoists have bought a powerful FM station in Palpa

GOVINDA LUITEL in TANSEN

Aruna Rayamajhi likes to be known as a “revolutionary journalist” During the conflict she was a radio reporter for the Maoists’ clandestine Radio Ganatantra.

“My comrades carried guns, I carried a broadcast antenna in my hand and a transmitter in my backpack and went to scenes of battle to cover the news,” recalls Rayamajhi.

Today, Rayamajhi is no more underground. She is a radio news reader for Radio Paschimanchal 99.4FM in Tansen and her voice can be heard all over Palpa and eight surrounding districts.

Radio Paschimanchal was set up in 2003 by a group of pro-Nepali Congress businessmen and headed by the NC’s district president. The station never really got back to normal after it was damaged during a fire here in February 2005 (see: ‘Radioactivity in Palpa’, #310). The station, which has been under pressure to repay its bank loans, was bought by the Maoists on the 11th anniversary of their ‘revolution’ in February.

Loyal 99.4 listeners noticed a dramatic change. The news coverage became focused on Maoist events and brought a heavy dose of Maoist propaganda everyday. The news even used the derogatory word “mandale” to describe anyone critical of the Maoists, and regularly referred to the king as “Gyane”.

Early morning, when the other three FM stations in Palpa are broadcasting religious chants, 99.4 belts out revolutionary songs like the hit song, ‘Avalanches



GOVINDA LUITEL

unite to make glaciers... the people unite into a flashflood’.

“When we ran our underground radio we were trying to make the people politically aware, and now that we are in the mainstream we are still doing the same thing but much more effectively,” explains Rayamajhi. Her boss Kishore Panthi is head of news and has been involved with Radio Ganatantra ever since it started broadcasting from clandestine mobile transmitters during the war.

Listeners’ reactions are mixed. Under its original owners, the station was perceived to have a pro-Congress stance and many took it as a given that change in ownership would mean a change in slant.

Initially, people in Tansen

listened to the new 99.4 out of curiosity, but now the townsfolk are tuning out. “It’s clear that the station is just a mouthpiece for the Maoists,” says Saroj Shakya, who runs a shop in the market and used to be an avid Radio Paschimanchal listener.

The station was itself caught in the crossfire during the Maoist attack on Tansen in February 2005. The transmitter, studios, and offices were riddled with bullets as an army unit on the roof of the building exchanged fire with Maoists atop nearby houses. The station owners received compensation from the government, which they divided among themselves, and then used the proceeds from the sale of the station to pay back the banks.

Locals blame the Congress as much as the Maoists. “All this wouldn’t have happened if the NC workers had been more committed to democracy and press freedom,” said one.

The station was finally sold for Rs 4.5 million to a consortium of Butwal businessmen known to be sympathetic to the Maoists. An employee says the radio is now run directly by the party, which has purged most of the journalists associated with it earlier.

“This is the first radio station that is being used to promote the party’s ideology,” admits station in-charge, Balak Ram Buda without any hint of irony. Buda wants to upgrade the station’s 400W transmitter to 1,000W to extend its reach and adds that the station is careful not to be too



RED RADIO: Aruna Rayamajhi of Radio Paschimanchal in the studio of the station that was recently bought by the Maoists.

propagandistic.

But station manager Satis Chapagain openly admits that “this radio is being run more as a party organ than a professional station.” Chapagain is one of the few journalists who have been retained from the previous avatar of the station. “We have been told by the new owners that our mission is to argue for the republican cause,” he says.

Indeed, 99.4FM launched transmission under its new owners with a live broadcast of Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s public speech in Kathmandu in February. ●

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A state-supported talibanisation of Islamabad is underway

Moderate to militant

First, his ill-advised dismissal of the chief justice of Pakistan's Supreme Court ignited a firestorm of violent protests. Now, President General Pervez Musharraf may be banking on Islamic fanatics to engineer violence in Islamabad, leading to army intervention and the declaration of a national emergency. This would allow him to postpone the October 2007 elections and continue his dictatorial rule into its eighth year, and perhaps well beyond.



COMMENT

Pervez Hoodbhoy

Musharraf, who President George W Bush calls his "buddy" and who supports "enlightened moderate" Islam, wears as a badge of honour two attempts on his life by religious extremists.

But as his authority weakens, so increases his reliance on the Taliban card—which he has been accused of playing for years. Signs of government-engineered chaos abound. In Islamabad, vigilante groups from a government-funded mosque, the Lal Masjid, roam the streets imposing Islamic morality and terrorising citizens in full view of the police. The two cleric brothers who head Lal Masjid are openly sympathetic to the Taliban and tribal militants fighting the Pakistan army and have attracted to their side hardcore banned militant organisations, including the Jaish-e-Muhammad, the pioneer of suicide bombings in the region.

The clerics openly defy the state. Since 21 January, baton-wielding, burqa-clad students of the Jamia Hafsa, the woman's



DECORUOUSLY VIOLENT: Students from the Jamia Hafsa University demonstrating in Islamabad last month, demanding the imposition of Islamic law.

Islamic university next to Lal Masjid, have forcibly occupied the government Children's Library. This veiled brigade stormed a house they claimed was a brothel and kidnapped three women and a baby.

Male students from Islamabad's many madrasas are even more active, terrorising video shop owners they believe are spreading pornography and starting bonfires with seized cassettes and CDs. Most video stores in Islamabad have closed, particularly after a 4 May campaign blew up a dozen music and video stores, barbershops, and a girl's school in the Northwest Frontier Province.

The Pakistani state which, on other occasions, has used air and artillery power to combat such challengers, is showing astonishing patience. The Lal Masjid

clerics operate with impunity and there has been no attempt to cut off the mosque's electricity, gas, phone, website, or illegal FM station. The chief negotiator appointed by Musharraf, Chaudhry Shujaat Husain, called the veiled kidnappers "our daughters," with whom negotiations would continue and against whom "no operation could be contemplated."

The clerics' initial demand—the rebuilding of eight illegally constructed mosques that had been knocked down by Islamabad's civic administration—became a call for the enforcement of Sharia law across Pakistan. In a radio broadcast on 12 April, the clerics threatened: "There will be suicide blasts around the country. We have weapons, grenades, we are experts in manufacturing bombs. We are not afraid

of death."

The Lal Masjid head cleric, a former student of my university in Islamabad, had the following chilling message for our women students: "The government should abolish coeducation. Quaid-e-Azam University has become a brothel. Its immoral female professors and students roam in objectionable dresses. They have to hide themselves in hijab... [My daughters of Jamia Hafsa] have not threatened to throw acid on their uncovered faces. But that could be used to create the fear of Islam among sinful women. There is no harm... There are far more horrible punishments in the hereafter for such women."

On 7 May, a female teacher in the QAU history department was assaulted in her office by a bearded, Taliban-looking man who screamed that he had instructions from Allah.

As Islamabad follows Pakistan's tribal towns, the next targets will be girls' schools, internet cafes, bookshops, and stores selling western clothing, followed by purveyors of toilet paper, tampons, underwear, mannequins, and other un-Islamic goods.

Until a few years ago, Islamabad was a quiet, orderly, modern city. Still earlier, it was the abode of Pakistan's hyper-elite and foreign diplomats. But its demography rapidly changed, bringing with it hundreds of mosques with audio cannons mounted on minarets and scores of madrasas illegally constructed in public parks and green areas. Now, tens of thousands of their students dutifully chant the Koran all day and in the evenings roam the city, gaping at store windows and lustfully ogling bare-faced women.

The stage is being set for transforming Islamabad into a Taliban stronghold. When Musharraf exits he will leave a bitter legacy that will last for generations, all for a little more power. ● (Project Syndicate)

Pervez Hoodbhoy is professor of physics at Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, Pakistan.

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WAVE magazine in association with World-CARP Nepal is organizing the WAVE Mister & Miss University Nepal 2007 (WMMU) to be held on 15 June in BICC, Kathmandu. The contest aims to bring together student representatives from various backgrounds from across the country, to present a model of one world family to all people through the medium of a contest.

WMMU seeks beauty not only externally, but also in the quality of character with which people carry out their lives. The participants are encouraged to pursue personal excellence through challenging one's limitations and to use their capacities for the sake of others by promoting a life of service dedicated to creating harmony in all aspects of life. WMMU encourages delegates to become campus peace ambassadors who can spread the culture of peace throughout their campuses.

This is also one contest where Nepal has been able to make a mark, for Mister University Nepal Niraj Baral is the reigning Mister University International. He outshone contestants from 27 countries to win the title on August of 2006 in Philippines. The winners of this year's contest will participate in the Mister and Miss University International to be held on July 7 in Seoul, Korea.

The entry form for this year is available in the May issue of WAVE magazine as well as in its website www.wavemag.com.np. The last date of entry is 18 May. Interested individuals or colleges can send in their participants. For further details visit www.mmul.org. Application form can be submitted at GPO Box: 7251, Kathmandu or Himalmedia sales office, Kupundole Height, Ph: 554 3333, 552 3845.

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Running riot in Christiania

Something is still rotten in the state of Denmark

Coming out of a café one evening while talking with friends about the uncertainties of Nepali politics, we immediately noticed the familiar and unmistakable smell of burning tyres in the air.

We followed the fire trucks as they ran red lights at intersections, their sirens screaming. Crossing a bridge to the southern fringes of the city, we saw traffic being diverted because a riot was in progress. Police vans with blue lights flashing were tearing out of the side streets.

No, this wasn't the start of Jana Andolan III in Kathmandu. These were anarchist youth groups fighting pitched battles with riot police in Copenhagen last week. Something was definitely rotten in the orderly and laidback capital of Denmark, because this was the last place on earth I'd have expected to see a street riot.

But there it was the next morning in the Christiania section of Copenhagen: barricades still smouldering, burnt out skeletons of bikes, broken glass everywhere and the familiar circular stains where the asphalt had melted. All this was just a short walk from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and 200m from parliament.

A Danish friend who lived through the Kathmandu Spring of April 2006 couldn't help making comparisons. "A bit like Kalanki," he said. Indeed, for a visiting Nepali there was an odd sense of satisfaction that it's not just us who have the world monopoly on incinerating tyres and bikes on the streets.

In Kathmandu the uprising was fuelled by a desire for democracy and perhaps a sense of hopelessness on the streets stemming from social inequities and joblessness. Here in Copenhagen it seemed to be young people bored with affluence and a welfare state that leaves nothing to chance.

The 'Free City' of Christiania was established by a group of hippies in 1971 who had just returned overland from Kathmandu and Afghanistan. They 'liberated' a military base to set up a commune and declared independence from the rest of Denmark. They made their own rules, tried to be self-sufficient, and lived close to the wild earth. A liberal state allowed the experiment to flourish even though its laws did not apply in this flower power enclave. Indeed, over the years Christiania became of a symbol of Danish tolerance and the second biggest tourist draw in Copenhagen after the mermaid.



Around the corner from a street littered with debris from last night's battles, the Nepali got another jolt: there was a replica of the Boudhanath stupa on a street corner (see pic) and Buddhist prayer flags fluttering above the sidewalk. Christiania is like walking into a space-time machine. The bars are inhabited by ageing hippies with white beards smoking hash. In Kathmandu they used to be on Freak Street, here they are on Pusher Street. Houses are painted with 70s style psychedelic art with peace signs, an elderly woman transports firewood by rickshaw.

The ageing demographics of Christiania are probably one reason for the tension. The original inhabitants of the collective are in their 60s. Many have grown comfortable in their surroundings and now want ownership of property in this prime real estate area that only the state can give. But there is pressure from youth groups from across town who represent the entire spectrum of rebels ranging from anti-globalisation activists to anarchists and Hells' Angels motorcycle gangs attracted by Christiania's outlaw character.

Trouble had been brewing ever since youth groups were evicted from an abandoned building they had occupied last December, and what better way to draw attention to their anger than to stage a riot in Christiania. Most ex-peaceniks here took a dim view of the youngsters, and for the young anarchists the bearded ones had gone soft and lost the fire in their bellies.

As a Nepali, I could only extend an invitation to the hippies to return to Jochhe and re-establish their Free City in Kathmandu. And perhaps leave the groovy experiment called Christiania to be chewed up by Copenhagen's refined and relentless gentrification. ●

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Sacred realms** mixed media works by Seema Sharma Shah at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, until 26 May, 11AM-6PM daily. 4218048
- ❖ **My World, My View** photographs by the girls of SOS Bahini, Pokhara, until 30 May, 9 AM-5.30PM at the British Council. 4410798
- ❖ **Colors of the sepals and petals** an exhibition of paintings by Neera Joshi Pradhan, 25 May-mid June, at Park Gallery, Lajimpat. 4419353

EVENTS

- ❖ **CSGN monthly lecture** 'A People War' - Photo Tour of Nepal by Kunda Dixit, 9.30AM, 25 May at the Shanker Hotel.
- ❖ **Earth** a film by Deepa Mehta, at the Lajimpat Gallery Cafe, 6.45 PM on 25 May. 4416412
- ❖ **Ciné-dîner** showing of *Monsieur Batignole* followed by dinner, 25 May, 7PM at Alliance Française, Rs 300. 4241163
- ❖ **Yuva Chalfal Shrinkhala** on water management in the context of Melamchi, 25 May, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107599
- ❖ **Shastrartha** on 'consumer rights – its Nepali avatar,' 26 May, 4-6PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Riding solo to the top of the world** a film by Gaurav Jani, presented by the FSA Film Club and WAVE magazine, May 27, 5.30 PM at Yala Maya Kendra, Rs 50.
- ❖ **Pottery course** by Santosh Kumar from the Delhi Blue Pottery Trust, at Newa Art Ceramics in Mdhyapur, Thimi, 25 May-24 June. 9841257968
- ❖ **Core Empowerment Training** by writer Paula Laxmi Horan, five day intensive retreat at the Farm House, Nagarkot, 13-17 June. 9803356700

MUSIC

- ❖ **Paleti** mini-concert with Gayak Phatteman, 25 May, 5.45 PM at nepalaya's r'sala, Kalikasthan, Rs 500 plus taxes. 4437893
- ❖ **Soul of Raga** live classical and fusion music, every Friday night at Nhuchhe's Kitchen, The Organic Bistro. 4429903.
- ❖ **Open mic night** at Via Via Café, every Friday, 8PM onwards.
- ❖ **Live music** at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 8PM with Yanki and Zigma Lepcha. 4416071
- ❖ **DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers** live at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234



DINING

- ❖ **Friday evening BBQ** with live music, at the Hotel Himalaya, 7PM, Rs 499 net. 5523900
- ❖ **Walk and lunch** every Saturday at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** 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** Wednesdays and Fridays, 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 Wednesday 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 Kilroy's, Thamel. 4250440.
- ❖ **Smorgasbord** lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- ❖ **Gyakok** at 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. 4451212
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Woodfired pizzas** at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel 4262768, Bhatbhateni 4426587 and Pulchok 5521755
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Jazzabell 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
- ❖ **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. 5560675

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

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Metro is a story of intermingled lives and fast times. Shikha (Shilpa Shetty) and Ranjeet's (Kay Kay Menon) marriage has turned boring and Ranjeet has found solace in the arms of Neha (Kangana Ranaut). Rahul (Sharman Joshi) is another young man who is silently in love with Neha. Shikha meets Akash (Shiney Ahuja) a divorcee and a struggling theatre artist. Their romance blooms even as Shikha is torn between her love for this new man and her fidelity vows towards Ranjeet. With a host of other characters, the film takes off with an intertwining of their various lives.

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NEPALI WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

KATHMANDU

The weather is a-changing. The westerly jetstreams we've been seeing so much of are moving northward, clearing a path for the onset of the warm southwesterly pre-monsoon along the foothills. The steady rise in temperature to close to seasonal highs and calm weather are indicators of this transition. Thursday afternoon's satellite picture shows a cyclone emerging over the Bay of Bengal and a standard low pressure system over Tibet that will pull moisture to the foothills from the cyclone. The monsoon will start on time this year, but that means one more week of scorching days.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri
32-19

Sat
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Mon
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Tue
32-18

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प्रसार हुने समय : हरेक शुक्रवार बिम्वार (१०:१५-१०:४५)
हरेक बाइतबार रेडियो (१:४०-२:००)
रेडियो सगरमाथा विभिन्न मुद्दा, अंग्रेजी सुधार (रेडियो सगरमाथा र अंग्रेजी सम्बन्धमा, अंग्रेजी केन्द्रको सगाउने)

हरेक विहान ६:०० देखि रात्री ११:०० बजे समय सुकसा विहान र सायन कार्यक्रमका लागि बरबर्ती सार्ने रेडियो सगरमाथा १०२ थोप्लो ४ मेगाहर्ज



RAM HUMAGAIN

FACT-FINDING MISSION: Visiting UNHCR chief and former Portuguese prime minister, Antonio Guterres, (middle) with Nepal representative Abraham Abraham briefing the press Wednesday after touring Bhutani refugee camps. Guterres left for Bhutan on Thursday. Tension is rising in the camps between those in support of third country resettlement and those opposed.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

... AND DOUBLETHINK IS DOUBLE POWER: Mahendra Adarsha Bidyashram at Sat Dobato wears a deserted look on Wednesday on the sixth day of the closure of schools nationwide. Nearly eight million children nationwide have been forced to stay home as talks between teachers' groups and the Education Ministry are deadlocked.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

BURNING BRIGHT: A child's curiosity overcomes his fear at the Jawalakhel Zoo as he tries to touch tiger skins and a rhino skull that were taken out of the store-room to dry in the sun.

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Democratic ass-ent of Everest

Your humble Ass has never quite understood what drives mountaineers to risk life and limb, since the only ascent this donkey has ever indulged in is social climbing.

I know, I know, they climb them because they're there. But what could be more absurd than nearly getting yourself killed just for scenery you could easily see from the window of the Lhasa flight.

So, it must be for the pomp and adulation one gets after a record-breaking climb. Like Apa Sherpa's jubilant **homecoming** on Wednesday as he was taken into town from the airport sitting on a sofa balanced precariously on the back of a pickup. As it turned out, Apa and the Ass were both stuck in a monstrous traffic jam in front of the Supreme Court.

There was heavily-garlanded Apa sitting at the back of a stationary truck under the blazing sun waving at bored passengers in surrounding buses and cars who all waved back because they thought he was **tele-evangelist** Shri Shri Ravishankar. Apa has just set foot on the world's highest mountain for the 17th time or so, and such spontaneous appreciation by fellow-Nepalis must make it worth all the trouble.



This year's expeditions really take the cake. Especially the Democratic Everest Expedition led by another multiple summiteer, Ang Rita. This must mean all previous expeditions to Everest were undemocratic. As the Ass duly noted in a previous dispatch ('One giant leap for assdom', #344) the expedition was to have placed flags of the eight political parties on the top and (get this bit) "remove any pictures of the king still remaining on the summit". That must be the picture some of the same climbers left on top after the 2002 royal coup. **Breaking News:** Democratic Everest abandoned its only female climber who was lagging behind during the summit putsch and she had to be rescued by bidesi mountaineers. If this is what happens on a democratic expedition, the Ass can't wait for a republican expedition. Another Breaking News: The man who wanted to be the first to climb Everest in **shorts** didn't make it.



History is repeating itself in Nepal, and every passing day the Ass is reminded of Animal Farm, the book in which some Comrade Donkeys attained

martyrdom. It's getting more and more difficult to tell the present bunch of loktantrik clowns from the previous bunch of royal clowns. Comrade Yummy has removed pictures of the ex-king and ex-queen and replaced them with portraits of Comrade Awesome and Comrade Pushpalal in her corridor of power. NTV has been instructed to begin work on a documentary profile of His Awesomeness called: 'Prachanda, The Man'. And a **cotton swab** used to wipe the sweat off the Dolakha Mahadeb has been re-routed to Baluwatar instead of Narayanhiti.

Not to be outdone, the army has replaced portraits of His Majesty the Supreme Commander in its 2064 calendar and replaced him with (you guessed it) COAS Katuwal in various warlike poses. The month of Jestha during which the constituent assembly elections were supposed to be held has a group portrait of five **Jarsaps** who were recently promoted, all looking rather chuffed.



The YCL's nation-building spree continues apace with the destruction this week of all veggie and fruit stalls along the Ring Road so the Green Belt can be turned into a Red Belt. A-ha, this is what they meant by "climb on the shoulder and hit the head". When the shopkeepers dared to burn a couple of tyres at Koteswor in protest, the young commies gifted them a plot of land next to Gonga Bu Bus Park and promptly sank themselves into a legal **quagmire** because a local businessman has a 50-year lease on that property.

During the next verification, there is one way to tell who is not a minor in the Maobuddies' cantonments: 65 women guerrillas who have given birth in the past month. Although this did not preclude a Maoist MP from marrying a minor recently, and when his party pulled him up by the socks (not for marrying a minor but for marrying without permission) he offered not to have sexual interactions with her till she came of age.

This baby boom in the cantonments will nicely make up for all recent desertions, and the comrades may need to set up a new front organisation called the **BCL**: Baby Communist League.



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