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Weekly Internet Poll # 353

Q. Should bandas be banned?

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A few days are good 12%

No, who's enforcing it 6%

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KIRAN PANDAY

**WALKING TALL:** Nepali politics may look hopeless, but house speaker Subhas Nembang, seen here on Tuesday outside parliament, is making progress.

# Moving ahead

JB PUN MAGAR

The interim parliament is sitting regularly again. Electoral bills are being discussed. The government is talking to janajatis and madhesi activists and is nearing agreement on November polls. After months of deadlock and delays, it looks like everyone is finally focused on ensuring that the constituent assembly doesn't leave anyone out.

"Everyone agrees with the demand for fair representation in the assembly to draft the new constitution. We just have to find the right mechanism," says Speaker Subhas Nembang, whose considerable negotiating skills in the past week have helped bring all sides together.

At the State Affairs Committee on Monday, Minendra Rijal of the NC-D looked tired but happy. Barely 100 m away at the Peace and Reconstruction Ministry, Ram Chandra Paudel was closeted in meetings with the Nepal Adibasi Janajati Federation to discuss proportional representation.

After a meeting with the MJF in Birganj last month, most of the 26 demands of the madhesi activists have been addressed, and MPs stopped obstructing the House after a commission was set up to investigate the tarai incidents and an agreement reached to review demarcation of constituencies.

Even Prime Minister Koirala was upbeat. "This is good," he told janajati activists on Monday in Baluwater. "If ethnic participation makes democracy stronger, let's negotiate and make it happen."

Janajati and dalit activists are sticking to their demand for full-proportional representation, but they too do not want to make this a reason for another postponement of polls. A constitutional provision to give women 50 percent of the seats under proportional voting and 33 percent in the first-past-the-post ballot is seen as a model. Dalits are generally satisfied with their 14 percent, but are angling for another six percent. If constituencies are delineated on the basis of population, madhesi activists say they will be satisfied.

The one-ethnicity-one seat demand of the janajatis and a plus-minus 10 percent leeway for parties in their closed lists are stumbling blocks. But both sides have decided to study the issue in detail and negotiate again. Says Rijal: "We have to find a middle ground between the needs of the parties and the demands of the ethnicities."

In an ideal world, all elections should have proportional representation, and even the first-past-the-post voting lists should be proportional. A way out could be to get the parties to set aside seats for ethnicities just as they have agreed to have 33 percent women in the voting lists.

To be sure, negotiators are now getting to the core issues of representation that challenge the status quo. But if the past two weeks in the meeting rooms of parliament are anything to go by, there is now strong political will to move forward. ●

**Editorial** p2  
**Half full**

SUCCESS KEEPS YOU ON YOUR TOES





editors@nepalitimes.com  
www.nepalitimes.com

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# Hydraulic failure

## Water wars may soon be our greatest problem

## HALF FULL

This paper has tried over the years not to give in to the waves of pessimism that have swept the country. We have refrained from repeating jaded clichés about feckless politicians, and tried not to spread scepticism about the future. We have spoken out against those who use violence as a political weapon, for tolerance and inclusion, and for democracy.

Even so, every now and then, we despair at the calibre of our top political leadership, their lack of self-esteem, their chronic paranoia, their inability to rise above narrow partisan rhetoric, and how they squander hard-won freedoms.

Every time they open their mouths, they run someone down. In every corrosive speech, the leaders of the UML, the NC, or the Maoists blame each other. When they meet Kathmandu-based ambassadors or leaders in New Delhi they backbite about their colleagues, instead of coming up with viable strategies to take the country forward. No wonder King Gyanendra doesn't look that worried.

In times like these, there is always the temptation to look for another knight in shining armour to rescue us from the mess. We've tried that before. It doesn't work. The knights usually end up being despots.

Our best bet is to leave it up to the multi-partisan, pragmatic, and pluralistic members of the interim parliament and its committees who are toiling behind the scenes to come up with the political compromises that will unlock the current stalemate on representation, electoral constituencies, and amendments to the constitution. Their work rarely gets the headlines, and maybe it is better that way, so there is less temptation to grandstand.

If it weren't for them, we'd be left with the holy trinity of GPK, MKN, and PKD and be in an even bigger mess than we are now. The three obviously decided this week that they'd gone too far and had become objects of public ridicule. So they've patched up and promised not to call each others names in public.

Maybe now they will show collective responsibility to think beyond being just kangresis, emaleys, and maobadis and look at the national interest. Will they put their individual political agendas on the backburner for now, to find the middle ground on the madhes, proportional representation, announcing an election date? Hope so.

Chairman Dahal is talking ominously about "a final battle" in the tarai. He is obviously still finding it difficult to rein in his guerrillas-in-YCL-clothing and convince them that the intimidation and militancy is ruining Maoist chances in polls. Ian Martin is right to ask for clarification about the YCL chain of command. And until we get an answer about the Red Guards, it is clear that clean polls are not possible.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently released alarming data on the consequences of global warming in some of the world's poorest regions.



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Mikhail Gorbachev**

By 2100, one to three billion people worldwide are expected to suffer from water scarcity. Global warming will increase evaporation and severely reduce rainfall—by upto 20 percent in the Middle East and North Africa—with the amount of water per person possibly halved by mid-century in these regions. This sudden scarcity of an element central to human life will exacerbate conflicts worldwide.

But while conflicts may be inevitable, wars are not. Our ability to prevent "water wars" will depend on our collective capacity to anticipate tensions, and to find the technical and institutional solutions to manage emerging conflicts. Such solutions do exist, and are proving their efficacy everyday.

Dams, if adequately sized and designed, can fight climate change and regulate water supply. Yet in a new context of scarcity, upstream infrastructure projects on international rivers may impact water quality or availability for neighbouring states, thus causing tensions.

River basin organisations such as those for the Nile, Niger, or Senegal rivers help facilitate dialogue between states that share hydraulic resources. These regional cooperation initiatives work to common ownership of the resource, thereby reducing the risk that disputes over water use will escalate into violence.

Most international waterways have such frameworks for dialogue, though at different stages of development. The international community should strengthen these initiatives. Where they do not exist, they should be created in partnership with all the countries concerned. Official development assistance can create incentives to cooperate by financing data collection, providing technical know-how, or by conditioning loans on constructive negotiations.

Yet the most violent water wars take place today *within* rather than *among* states, fuelling ethnic strife, as communities seek to capture the resource. In Darfur, recurrent drought has poisoned relations between farmers and nomadic herdsman, and the war we are helplessly witnessing today follows years of escalating conflict. Chad risks falling prey to the same cycle of violence.

The basic human needs of populations must be satisfied through local development initiatives. Rural hydraulic projects, which ensure access to

water for these populations over large stretches of land, can be efficient conflict prevention tools. So can secure grazing corridors established with the help of satellite imagery to orient nomads and their herds to appropriate areas. Such initiatives provide rare opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between rival communities. The key is to anticipate the need for action before tensions escalate boil over.

Water *consumption* also must be addressed. Agriculture accounts for more than 70 percent of water use in the world. Agronomical research and technical innovations are crucial to maximising water efficiency in this sector, and they must be taken much further. The development challenge no longer solely consists in bringing agricultural water to deprived areas. As the dramatic shrinkage of the Aral Sea, Lake Chad, and the Dead Sea illustrate, it is now preserving scarce natural resources and ensuring their equitable distribution. In West Africa or the Middle East, Central Asia or India, this, too, can contribute to abating clashes over water.

The Cold War ended peacefully thanks to realism, foresight, and strength of will. These qualities should be put to work to stave off major water wars. This also demands innovation in global governance, which is why we support the creation of a UN Environment Agency, endowed with adequate legal and financial resources.

● (Project Syndicate)

*Mikhail Gorbachev is chairman of the board of Green Cross International.*



KIRAN PANDAY

# Footnotes to history

## Opinion polls in Nepal are mostly harmless indulgences

In an instance straight out of 'This happens only in India', premises of the *Dinakaran* newspaper in Madurai were vandalised by arsonists who disagreed with the findings of an opinion poll it had published. Three employees were killed.

The political repercussions of the poll shook the ruling DMK dynasty. Successors to 82-year-old Tamil strongman Karunanidhi stand deeply divided as the patriarch takes his time choosing an heir-apparent.



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
**C K Lal**

In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, psephology has been discredited because it didn't foresee the Mayawati majority last month. Pollsters and pundits were completely wrong: the closest seat forecast for Bahujan Samaj Party was off the mark by 20 percent.

Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh perhaps have compelling reasons to conduct

opinion surveys. But does Nepal really need market research to gauge political preferences of its electorate when it's still going through the convulsions of transition? It seems some of our influential donors think that we do. The Asia Foundation and IDEA International sponsored separate surveys to map the mind of the Nepali electorate. Their findings were released last week.

Unlike Madurai or Lucknow, Kathmandu greeted the forecasts with a wall of silence. Perhaps the Nepali public is really the politically most mature in South Asia. This is also proven in the findings of the opinion polls. A majority of respondents in recent polls have declined to open up and commit themselves to any cause, party or leader (see 'Undecided', #352). They may be undecided, or they may be refusing to take polls seriously. In all probability, enumerators got the answers that they were looking for, and not what the interviewees actually thought.

At best, opinion polls are like any other applied research, seeking to set a

political agenda. This is why some media treat opinion or exit polls as political interventions rather than news stories.

Then we need to scrutinise poll methodology. What was the purpose of the poll? Who sponsored it? What is the background of the polling organisation? What kinds of questions were asked? What was the order of questions? Who asked them? Who was polled? How were the interviews conducted? What was the timing of the poll? Has statistical rigour been observed? Is the analysis contextualised? Are the conclusions substantiated? Are findings theoretically sound? The media often lacks the incentive to examine poll findings so minutely.

Unexamined reports fail to inspire confidence and that is why the two recent polls created hardly a ripple in Kathmandu, let alone the rest of the country. Despite this opinion surveys are popular for several reasons. Statistics give credence to the

commonplace, provide respectability to bias and give solidity to hot air.

Polls create short-term job opportunities for half-educated middle class youth. Enumerators are paid well for travelling places in Nepal that they are unlikely to visit for any other reason. Poll analysts, many of them my friends and colleagues, are respectably compensated for stating the obvious in pseudo-academic jargon. Opinion polls provide the veneer of recipient legitimacy that donors desperately seek to keep HQ in good humour. The best part is that opinion polls in Nepal are mostly harmless indulgences.

Journalists prepare the first draft of history. Scholars go through the rough copy for posterity. But in a strange reversal of roles, our academic research generates footnotes in the name of psephology. And this journalists serve up as science. Since most Nepalis don't care much for the results, let's have as many opinion polls as donors are willing to sponsor. The more the merrier. ●



## LETTERS

## DISAPPEARED

It was heart-rending to read the sad tale of the Chaudhary family from Bardiya ('937', #351). Let us publicise cases of missing civilians like Bhaban Chaudhary and pressure for them to be addressed. The village of Baidhi of Bardiya is still missing a large number of its young men. These stories of hidden pain must be remembered so the families can have justice.

*Surendra Malla, Belawa, Bardiya*

- Jitman Basnet is a brave and selfless man. Thank you for bringing out his story ('Disappeared, dead or alive', #351). He suffered so much and survived, never buckling under severe torture. And then he found the courage to help fellow inmates and their families when he got out. Now, despite threats, he is continuing his struggle. Let's hope Jitman Basnet and others like him finally get the justice they deserve.

You have done a great service to the families of the disappeared by highlighting their tragedy in your special coverage (#351). The Supreme Court order on 1 June, the same day your issue came out, was perfectly timed to give additional impact. This verdict is a glimmer of hope from the justice system, recognising the plight of the families of the disappeared and the state's responsibility in making their fate known. Unfortunately, as you say in your hard-hitting editorial ('Disappearing truth') Prachanda and Girija are protecting their armies and don't want the truth to come out. The UN's OHCHR sent a report on Bhairabnath to the government last year. Never mind taking action on the recommendations, like setting up an independent investigation, the government never even responded. It may just ignore the Supreme Court order like it has ignored everything before this. But one day, with reports like yours, the complete truth will come out.

*Gyan Subba, Kumaripati*

- What about the hundreds of army and policemen slaughtered in cold blood by the Maoists? ('How Krishna Sen was killed', From the Nepali Press, #351). Your paper should give equal coverage to such criminal cold-blooded atrocities committed by the Maoists, who do not have the mandate to rule us Nepalis. Fear keeps the media and civilians quiet, lest the monster rear its ugly head again. Only free and fair elections can set us free.

*Name withheld, email*



## UNDECIDED

You rightly point to the importance of the half the electorate who are still undecided about which way they will vote in the next election. But this is not unusual, and points to political consciousness of the Nepali people. Political parties better start re-examining their platforms.

*Guna Panday, email*

## MATCHES

In 'Playing with matches' (State of the state, #352) CK Lal's predictions regarding the Maoist threat are utterly convincing, considering the increased activities of the Madhesi Mukti Morcha and the YCL. Lal is among the few intellectuals in Nepal who raised the madhesi issue long before MJF was even formed.

*Name withheld, email*

## ALL NEPALIS

Thank you for printing Daniel Lak's 'Stir it up' (Here and there, #352). It was like a ray of sunshine amid those biased articles that lambaste Nepal's horrible situation. Don't Nepal-bashers realise that they are just feeding the fire? It wouldn't be surprising to find out that that most of the know-it-alls live outside Nepal. We all love Nepal. Let's put all our energies together and push her in the right direction, instead of just skewering the Maoists, the Congress, etc. They are all Nepalis, after all

*Name withheld, email*

- As long as my mum doesn't have to stand in line for cooking gas, my father doesn't have to wait seven hours for a little petrol, and my niece doesn't have to watch the news to know whether she can go to school or not, I don't care about politics. I would never vote for these so-called people's leaders and their empty promises unless I see them queuing up with me in queue for water, petrol, and cooking gas.

*Prasanna KC, Pokhara*

## DEAR ASS

The Backside piece on the US Embassy in Nepal's travel advisory was excellent ('From socket bombs to whips', #349). Do consider expanding your recommendation to Kaiser Mahal to include not only all Nepalis in, or travelling to the USA, but also all US citizens. Unlike the Maoists, we Americans are in dire need of someone—anyone, whether citizens of our country or not—to talk sense to us on this matter. Thank you for your column, dear Ass. You have turned out to be a worthy replacement to, and of the same calibre as, Kunda Dixit and his Under My Hat. I benefit from and enjoy your writing weekly.

*Charles Sydnor, Kathmandu*

## CLARIFICATION

The pottery workshop in 'Get your hands dirty' (#352) is organised by ArtworksCHK and is sponsored this month by the BP Koirala India-Nepal Foundation.

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JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

As the repatriation vs resettlement debate heats up, refugees wonder about India's words and deeds

# Long way home

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI in JHAPA

**T**he Long March planned by Bhutani refugees in camps in Jhapa has been postponed again. Refugee leaders, who had planned to resume their thwarted journey back to Bhutan through India today, appear temporarily mollified by the seeming softening in India's position earlier this week.

The 10 June statement by India's minister for external affairs, Pranab

Mukherjee, that the Bhutani refugee issue is an international problem was, on the surface, a sharp departure from India's previous position, that it was a bilateral problem between Nepal and Bhutan.

Yet, in the same statement Mukherjee also said that "if these 100,000 people enter Bhutan it would create a demographic imbalance"—a line regularly taken by Bhutani authorities and apologists for the expulsion of Bhutanis of Nepali origin. It seems unlikely,

therefore, that India's new position includes being directly involved in or mediating talks between Nepal and Bhutan.

In the camps here, such statements are taken as an indication that India will again look away as Thimphu prepares to disenfranchise and expel the over 80,000 Bhutanis of Nepali origin still in Bhutan ('Replacement population', #348).

With the third-country resettlement option becoming a reality, the frame of reference of the repatriation argument has

shifted from Bhutan's evasive excuses to India's refusal to accept responsibility for its role in the refugee crisis.

India, which shares a border with Bhutan, should have been the first country of exile for the refugees. Instead, "India loaded Bhutanese citizens onto trucks and buses and dropped them off in Kakarvitta," says Vidhyapati Mishra, general secretary of Association of Press Freedom Activists-Bhutan (APFA-Bhutan).

Now, the refugees say, they want passage back home. "India should do the same now and drop us off in Bhutan," argues Ratna Maya Giri, who lives in the Beldangi II camp.

Meanwhile, there is growing tension between those who want to return and those who want to move to third countries. Two refugees were killed last month in the Beldangi camp in riots over precisely this question. Many refugees insist that resettlement is capitulation to Bhutan's tactics.

On 29 May, about 15,000 refugees—mostly women and teenagers—took to the Mechi Bridge, in what they described as their 'long march to Bhutan.' The Indian Border Security Force baton-charged the crowd and then fired live bullets to stop the refugees from entering India. Saha Bahadur Dewan, a refugee from Pathari camp, died of bullet wounds, and over 100 were injured in the clash.

The temporary lull that followed after meetings between refugee leaders and Indian and Nepali officials continues, though the Long March was meant to resume today. Yesterday the National Front for Democracy, a coalition of Bhutani political parties working towards repatriation, announced that the march would be postponed by a month.

Refugee sources say that the deal will hold as long as India honours its promises to provide compensation for Dewan's family and free treatment for those injured last month, and more important, convene four-way talks between refugee groups, and Indian, Nepali, and Bhutani authorities.

"India should prove that it really is a great democracy by respecting the right to return of every exiled Bhutani," says APFA-Bhutan's Mishra. ●

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### Banking for women

Clean Energy Development Bank has launched an exclusive savings account for women that requires no minimum deposit, and offers a free debit card, free internet banking services, and a 50 percent discount on locker rental.

### Banks everywhere

**NIBL's 16<sup>th</sup>:** Nepal Investment Bank's recently opened its 16<sup>th</sup> branch in Thamel. In addition to any branch banking, this branch will also provide foreign exchange facilities, retail banking services, import and export letters of credit and guarantees, and remittance and credit facilities.  
**Kumari's eighth:** Kumari Bank opened a new branch in Kumaripati, its eighth in the country. New branches are planned in Darbar Marg and Gongabu in Kathmandu, and in Narayanghat.  
**BoK's 14<sup>th</sup>:** Bank of Kathmandu has now started operations in Gongabu in Kathmandu, and in Kohalpur in Banke. Its total number of branches in the country is 14.



### The Rs 50 bike

The Rs 102,900 Bajaj Platina motorcycle can be purchased for a 30 percent down payment, zero percent interest, and monthly instalments of Rs 1,499, which works out to Rs 50 a day. The Platina has a two-year warranty. Hansraj Hulaschand is the sole authorised dealer for Bajaj in Nepal.



### Plum finds

Plum, the fashion lingerie store, has opened its newest outlet in Hotel Woodland, Darbar Marg. Plum offers lingerie from brands such as Enamor, Jockey, and Victoria's Secret. Prices range from Rs 400-2,000. Plum has another outlet in the Bluebird Mall.

#### NEW PRODUCTS

**FEMÉ:** Magna Max has launched three variants of Femé sanitary napkins, Classic, Dry, and the ultra-thin Ritz, priced at Rs 28, 32, and 48 per pack, respectively.



**SWING:** Safety sanitary pads' new offering Swing boasts a dry net cover and five-layer protection. An eight-pack cost Rs 30.

# Appearances count

## Our global identity needs a good burnishing

Last week we heard a lot about the agitating Nepali workers facing jail sentences and deportation in Doha. In Malaysia, Nepali migrant workers are occasionally in the news, for the wrong reasons. In



**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
**Artha Beed**

India, courtesy the media, Nepali domestic help are seen as a thieving lot. The image of the Nepali worker overseas has taken quite a beating.

Some argue that such incidents will naturally happen more often as a simple factor of increasing numbers of Nepali workers overseas. But the Beed doesn't buy that throw-your-hands-up *ke garne* attitude. We need to take a hard look at our global pan-Nepali identity.

This has little to do with the new million dollar industry devoted to examining Modalities of Nepali Identity, but it still has to do with money all right. We've often established in this column that service sector jobs are only going to become more, not less important for individual Nepalis' careers and for economic growth in general. Given that, it matters very much how our workers abroad behave.

Since 1996 when the current labour laws were promulgated,

political leaders have used, abused, and misused the workforce for their own objectives. We all know the harm done by opportunistically radicalised pseudo-militant labour forces. Workforces now try to out-extreme each other. Their actions range from closing down factories, locking away managers, creating security hazards at the workplace, and straight out assaulting business owners. The objective is to destroy as much as possible of the institution that has given people employment.

The Doing Business Report dutifully spells out, year after year, how Nepal's labour laws and labour force are the biggest competitive disadvantages. We're so happy to just be in the report, we don't take on board the reasons for our inclusion—dismal business conditions. Then there's the other paradox we have to contend with—our trade unions are often donor funded, and that is the support which makes their efforts to spread inefficiency all the more, well, efficient. Factory owners might be scared to ride around in SUVs, but union bosses are happy to flaunt theirs.

It takes a long time to build a brand especially when the image in question is that of a country,

and just a little to destroy it. We're midway through a peace process, but still seen as a strife-torn country. On the other hand, there are also a lot of positive perceptions that we can leverage. Generations of enrolment in the British Army mean our reputation as good security personnel for global jobs is unsurpassed. Our legendary loyalty, hospitality,



and caring nature makes us good domestic workers. The politeness of Nepali waiters and hotel staff and their willingness to go the extra mile for customers means you find many of us in the hospitality industry around the world. We need to work to keep these sides of our identity bright and visible. Stories of militancy, whether political or union, will do nothing for the tens of thousands of Nepalis who work overseas and keep this country afloat with their remittances.

We need a Young Constructive League to get our place in the world back on track. ●

# “A mobile telecom revolution”

**Nokia is entering the Nepali mobile phone market in a big way, hoping to cash in on the rapid growth of the mobile telecom market. Prem Prakash Chand, general manger of Nokia's Emerging Asia spoke with Nepali Times about combating smuggling and Nokia's plans for the future in Nepal.**



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**Nepali Times: What sort of mobile telecom potential do you see in Nepal?**  
**Prem Prakash Chand:** At present there are two billion mobile subscribers globally. It took us over ten years to get the first billion, and five years to get the next. Eighteen months ago we believed the total would reach three billion by 2009. Now, however, we think that will happen by the end of this year. Countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives are what we call Emerging Asia. The next billion subscribers will come from these emerging markets. In Nepal, the government is ready to deregulate the market and it is ready to take off. That's why Nokia needs to be here.

**How do you see the market in Nepal evolving?**  
Nepal is where countries like Australia used to be ten years ago. The biggest advantage here is that these markets do not need to evolve. In countries like Australia, the market evolved from voice-centric devices to SMS, then MMS, and now they have web browsing and email. But Nepal can go straight through, because the technology is already there. Markets like Nepal will go through a revolution and not have to wait 10 years to get

to where Australia or Singapore are today.

**What are some of the challenges you foresee?**  
Of the handsets available in Nepal, 90 percent are brought in illegally, thus depriving government of revenue. Consumers are also being cheated of value, because they may end up buying a handset that is perhaps not genuine, is refurbished, or has counterfeit batteries. Illicit trade is a big challenge, but you can control it. For example in Bangladesh, when we entered, illicit trade was 80 percent, but in 12 months we'd halved that. It is about having the willpower, having media advocate for authorised handsets, and a government that understands the long term gains that come by supporting the industry.

**What are some of your goals for the Nepali market?**  
A recent piece of research shows that the GDP of a country increases by 0.6 percent per 10 percent increase in mobile penetration. The government needs to be aware of how this industry can contribute to the economy. Deregulating the market and making handsets available to the masses benefits the overall economy. After the government realises what the industry can contribute, it

needs to put into place a system to assist in the acceleration of the industry. The government could start by reducing the heavy duties and taxes Nepali consumers have to pay on mobile services.  
We are lobbying the government and are in the process of setting ourselves up. We've just appointed two distributors—Neoteric and Paramount Electronics. We need to make handsets more affordable and accessible to the consumers, and accessibility comes from distribution. One way to cut down on the number of grey market handsets is to have authorised distributors here. We hope to then embark on consumer education on mobility.

**What are some of the products you are pushing in Nepal?**  
When you are looking at a country which has low affordability, you want products for a critical mass. We want to encourage a variety of entry-level phones like the Nokia 1110i that are easy to use, durable, and have a longer battery life. We will also offer feature-filled devices such as the Nokia Nseries, Eseries, and the Nokia 8800 Sirocco Edition, but our focus will be on low-end devices.

**How do you plan to convince buyers to come straight to you?**  
We want to raise consumer awareness, so we will be involved in doing above the line communication about Nokia's presence in the market. We'll be setting up customer care points, and recruit retailers and train them in what mobility is all about. There will be Nokia branded outlets and concept stores (where you can try out new tools and devices).

**What's the long-term plan?**  
Nepal does not have very high fixed teledensity, so the demand and potential of mobile internet is going to be significant in the future. We see a revolution in mobile internet in Nepal soon—mobile devices used for entertainment, music, video clips, mobile tv, GPS for direction. What's exciting is that for a lot of people in countries like Nepal, the first time they ever talk on the phone will be on a mobile device. Our vision is to be able to provide that experience.



# “This is an interim economy”

Interview with Baburam Bhattarai in *Abhiyan*, 11-17 June

**Abhiyan:** Has there been any change in your party's economic policy now that you are in parliamentary politics?

**Baburam Bhattarai:** First of all your vocabulary is all wrong. We haven't joined parliamentary politics, we are in a transition phase through an interim parliament. Our destination is a transformation of the state through the constituent assembly election. And just like we are in an interim government, we are also in an interim economy.

**What is your party's view on foreign direct investment?**

Our economy needs to be oriented towards self-sufficiency, self-respect, and industrial capitalism. For this we need to lay the foundation by mobilising national capital and using local labour and markets. We are not against FDI, it could complement our efforts. But FDI needs to be in the national interest. We don't think Nepal's economy can grow unless we can completely uproot feudalism and imperialism and replace it with national industrial capitalism.

**You have put forward a populist land reform program but, instead of trying to get it through parliament, you are forcibly taking over private property.**

These are lies propagated by a class of well-heeled, feudal, servile middlemen. If you look at world history a new foundation has never been possible without forcibly demolishing the old state structure. You can't make minor repairs on a tottering old house and convert it into a skyscraper. Similarly, you can't build a new economy without destroying an old one. We have been destroying for the past ten years, and done the right thing. But we aren't finished yet. We are now protecting our achievements of the past through a peaceful campaign.

**Hasn't the violent enforcement of bandas, hartals and other disruptions by organisations affiliated with your party ruined the economy?**

It's a mistake to say these measures are ruining the economy. Annual economic growth in the past 50 years

has barely been more than two percent. You forget about the past 50 years and to hide that non-performance blame our movement?

**What do you say about complaints from businesses that the YCL is creating a negative business climate?**

That's completely wrong. The well-to-do who are being discarded by the people are spreading this disinformation to hide the real truth. The YCL is a political grouping that is doing some important work trying to help development and social service.

**Like what?**

The YCL widened the Kalanki road, it demolished illegal construction on the Ring Road, it cleaned up the streets. It has caught smugglers. Isn't this development work? The corrupt are panicking and blaming the YCL for high-handedness.

**How about the YCL setting fire to government buildings, destroying government property, and beating up civil servants?**

If you don't see the hundred good things we do and only highlight one weakness, I have nothing to say...

**How are you managing your costs? How much are Maoist leaders paid and where do you get the money from?**

We have a regular levy, we do farming, we work. We have collectivised our personal property and we also request sympathetic businessmen to make political contributions.

**Shouldn't you be transparent about how these monies are raised and how they are spent?**

We don't see the need to. If our main leaders have not kept any personal property and they live lives at the same level as the people, this issue of misuse doesn't arise.

**Apparently you haven't yet accounted for money you got for cantonment management.**

That is disinformation propagated by corrupt people of the likes of Ram Sharan Mahat and those who remain in power by being middlemen for foreign forces. We have kept all the accounts and we will make them public when the time comes.

**Foreign investment has dried up and everyone is in wait-and-see mode. They say they have to pay taxes not just to the government but also to the Maoists.**

It is wrong to blame us for the lack of foreign investment. These are accusations made by a feudal smuggling class that doesn't want domestic industrial capitalism to thrive.

**You say you have to resolve politics before the economy can be mended. But what if it takes years?**

We are the only party that is convinced that there will be no political, economic, and social change without ending the 250 year-old feudal monarchy and bringing in a people's republic. The monarchy hasn't ended yet and palace forces still control the economy. It is 50 years too late to end the monarchy. But once that happens we can launch this country into long-term development and in the next 15-20 years we can transform this country into, I wouldn't say Switzerland, but at least the most-developed in South Asia.

**Even West Bengal has given up on communism and is welcoming foreign investment. Isn't there a lesson there?**

West Bengal is a part of a larger capitalist entity that is India. That is why West Bengal's communists weren't able to transform the state. There will never be peace or development until there is an end to feudalism and imperialism in the world. That is why the world needs to move towards socialism.






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Tortured women

Madhab Basnet in *Dristi*, 12 June

Housewives Sarita Sharma and Tara Bhandari and student leader Bina Magar (*from left to right in pictures, below*) still bear the scars of army detention and torture. Many others with them in Bhairabnath have disappeared. The three live with the physical pain and memories of their incarceration.

On 20 December 2003, Bina was dropped off the back of a crowded truck because there was not enough room. She was lucky, till today no one knows where the other people were taken or what happened to them. Bina still suffers from the after-effects of the torture. She was repeatedly dunked in icy water in November and December and has severe sinus trouble. Doctors recommend surgery, but Bina is under heavy medication. She feels uneasy and becomes restless and anxious in the evenings.

Tara Bhandari, a native of Nagarkot, was arrested on 29 October 2003 from Kalimati. She still suffers severely from the torture. She keeps up a constant nervous chatter, her body swells up, her skin burns, and she cannot hear properly. A wound on her elbow, the result of repeated electrocution hasn't yet healed properly.

"Anything I eat or drink, even water, makes my body swell up,"

says Tara. Doctors suspect she also has psoriasis. Bhandari has to take strong medications three times a day, and has severe side effects.

Sarita Sharma was in Bhairabnath for 21 months. The younger of her two sons was just two years old when Sarita, now a librarian at Universal College, was taken into custody. Doctors at Teaching Hospital suspect she has intestinal cancer. Meanwhile Sarita is still on medication to treat the physical and mental effects of her stay at Bhairabnath. But, she says, as much as the physical pain and discomfort, she feels the social stigma is attached to women like her. "Many people dismiss my views with a simple 'why should I talk to someone who has spent so many years in army custody'," explains Sarita.

These three are the tip of the iceberg, and the lucky ones, who survived Bhairabnath. The list of women tortured and still suffering is long.

Impatient PKD

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 12 June

When media reported Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh's suggestion to Madhab Kumar Nepal in New Delhi last week to work with the NC, Maoist leader Prachanda went ballistic in Butwal and warned India not to interfere in internal affairs. Barely two days later, he backtracked and



went into damage control, saying he'd spoken in a hurry.

Since he came aboveground in Kathmandu last year and made a controversial statement about the army, Prachanda has habitually said controversial things, and then retracted them. People almost expect him to regularly make self-contradictory remarks.

Because they took the path of violence in the past, the Maoists perhaps can't help appearing aggressive. It is a challenge for them to present an acceptable image to the public. They need to make their ideology and politics acceptable to the people. In the past Prachanda has successfully convinced his colleagues about his moderate stance. Now he needs to take the radicals with him. Any politician who likes to talk too much is sooner or later going to get into trouble over some controversial remark. Comrade Prachanda is now earning a reputation for talking too much and regretting it later.

If he wants to continue to be regarded as an alternative political leader, he needs to work on his credibility among the people and the international community. Only then can he stake his claim as a potential leader. Impatience is not in his interest, nor is it in the national interest.



"China won't tolerate foreign intervention"

Interview with Zheng Xialing, the Chinese ambassador to Nepal in *Nepal*, 17 June

**You presented your credentials to the prime minister instead of the king, does that mean that China accepts a republic in Nepal?**  
**Zheng Xialing:** (*Laughs*) We cannot say, it just happened. When I was appointed ambassador to Nepal, we received notice from the Nepal government that the constitution had been changed. According to the interim constitution, the prime minister is the head of state, and ambassadors are supposed to present their credentials to him.

**The US still sees the Maoists as terrorists, do you?**  
The CPN-M are now part of the eight-party alliance. This alliance has been accepted by the people of Nepal. I think the US will also accept this coalition government. As far as the label of 'terrorist' goes, I think that different people assess things differently. American ambassador James Moriarty has told me he, too, would like to shake hands with Prachanda.

**Are Free Tibet campaigners here a security concern for China?**  
The Nepali government has committed to us to not allow separatist forces from Tibet to use Nepali soil against China. We are a little worried about the activities of separatist forces in Nepal. We will work closely with the Nepal government on this issue and hope that Nepal will keep to its commitments. China cannot compromise on the Tibet issue as it is connected to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our nation.

**In 1962, then Deputy Prime Minister Marshall Chen Yi said 'China will not tolerate foreign interference in Nepal.' Has China's policy changed?**  
No, no. There is no change in policy. The longstanding friendship between Nepal and China has lasted for a long, long time, and I am sure it will continue for generations to come.

**Does that mean the Chinese government will treat the problems of Nepali citizens just like it does those of the Chinese?**  
It means exactly that. Whenever the Nepali people face any problem or difficulty, China shall treat them as our own, especially when the problems pertain to sovereignty or territorial integrity. China will not tolerate any foreign intervention in Nepal.



"I just asked them when the constituent assembly election would be held."

Robin Sayami in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-29 June

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



"The Americans have set up an A-Level embassy in a small country like Kathmandu, the way the embassy is built, the status of the ambassador, the military presence in the embassy...it is easy to understand all this was to counter the Maoist People's War and to encircle China."

Barsha Man Pun (Ananta) in *Jana Astha*, 13 June

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We can all help protect and improve the few open public spaces in our congested city

# Breathing room

PRANAYA SJB RANA

At six every morning, Salil Kumar Thakuri jogs slowly to Dhumbarahi's Sankha Park from his home in Mandikhatar. In the park, he runs laps. Each circuit takes him past other runners, people practising karate, people stretching, and the occasional couple holding hands.

Salil is training for the British Army entrance test. Others come to catch some exercise before their stressful day begins, or to get some fresh air before the traffic starts up. Over a hundred people crowd into this small space every morning—it's all they have.

Kathmandu's few parks and commons, hemmed in by high buildings and potholed streets, are the only legroom and free spaces for socialising most city residents have. Part of the problem is that Kathmandu has never been a 'green' society—

our traditional public spaces were typically stone choks and courtyards.

In recent years, some neighbourhoods have begun creating and maintaining small immaculate parks such as that in Gyaneswor (see 'Group effort'), or handkerchief-sized green patches with swings and benches in Maharajgunj and Ekantakuna.

Kathmandu's most famous commons, Tundikhel, has seen a revival in the last year. The middle-aged exercise junkies out are out in the morning, running laps, doing yoga, practising breathing exercises as suggested by Guru Ramdev on the Astha Channel. After school there are cricket and football games and the evenings are for amour—the crowd ensues a kind of privacy for couples to hold hands and swap kisses.

But though Tundikhel is still the largest open public space in Kathmandu, it's a shadow of its former self—it was once almost 5km long and 300m across and the biggest parade ground in all of

South Asia, says architect and urban planner Prabal Thapa. Millions were spent erecting barricades around the grounds to prevent encroachment, but successive governments have themselves been responsible for trimming down Tundikhel. First land was taken for wider roads at Shahid Gate, then the army commandeered half, and finally, half of what remained became Khula Manch.

Sometimes the government gives back too—the Garden of Dreams at Thamel is a good example of a collaborative government-private effort to work together. You have to pay to get in, but the recently-renovated garden offers blissful respite from the heat, dust, and dirt of the inner city. It's also fast becoming the top choice for a cheap and sexy daytime date. There is ample cover behind the trees and bushes and the other visitors are too busy reading, playing with their children, or just staring into space.

Less well-planned is the random clearing of squatters. Six years ago, Maitighar was a treacherous roundabout of shops and businesses complicating a busy intersection. The municipality razed what it said were illegal constructions and after it was given its current form, the mandala has become the site of often-spontaneous gatherings of civil society and protest groups—not quite a park, but it is open. It's too early to say what will happen to the swathe of land in Koteswor cleared of squatters earlier this week. The ruins look surreal now, but perhaps in time it will turn into another civic centre.

The city's open spaces are always multipurpose. The grounds in Pulchok's Engineering Campus often host casual football and cricket matches. Challenges are thrown down—the wager could be money

or just plates of momos and cold coca colas—and accepted with alacrity by teams are from as far afield as Bansbari, Baneshwor, Jawalakhel, and Boudha. Cricket enthusiast Bishal Adhikari says he plays at Pulchok, the grounds in front of the zoo, or even at a club grounds in Chettrapati.

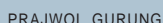
Surprisingly few people know about the lovely Raniban in Lazimpat, where you can watch groups practising tai chi chu'an, as you take your morning constitutional. Because this little park seems so hidden away, chancing upon the occasional mass bratabandas or bel bibahas, or a wedding, feels like a delightful find.

In a cramped city where real estate is scarce and expensive, it's not surprising people want to use—or profit from—every available inch. This is why the so-called green belt around the Ring Road is largely a sad joke, in some places an overgrown tangle of weeds or a public toilet, in others a dumping ground or workshop area. Other public spaces are regularly commandeered for religious and political functions, or held tight by guthis that do not want to cede control. The appalling waste of space at Naxal's Naraynachaur is a prime example of how a large open space can be wrecked. The guthi-sanstha that owns the large triangle won't consider turning it into a park. It would rather lease out the empty space as a dumping ground or for ear-shatteringly loud religious ceremonies, while it waits for a lucrative mall deal.

"If we don't wanted to be overwhelmed by this urban jungle, the municipality must allocate specific public green spaces for each ward," argues Thapa. "Local communities can manage them; that is the only way to go." ●







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# Global Jana Andolan

It's time Americans and the rest of the world came together to stop the madness

**W**e have suffered through nearly seven long years of the most venal and inept American government in history and there's no end to our agony in sight. I say "we" because the Bush administration has inadvertently achieved one thing—it has created a community of distaste and fear that spreads from Wisconsin to Vladivostok, Kansas to Kathmandu.

For make no mistake, more Americans despise their government and their president than ever before. That puts them in a global majority. The current inhabitant of the White House, with his inheritor's lack of intellectual curiosity, desperate grin, and murderous, incompetent ways, evokes righteous anger in a truly ecumenical group of people—the real international community. Nearly 200 million of them are American and it's time to come together and build upon Bush's aversion base.

Let me say from the beginning that I am a huge fan of America. I think it is the only truly modern country, the only nation built on consensus and shared dreams that are constantly kept relevant by



**HERE AND THERE**  
**Daniel Lak**

the white heat of public discourse. I think the American people of whatever political stripe are among the most decent and well meaning

anywhere. Most US citizens believe their country's role is to do good in the world, and they are increasingly appalled at the evil their president and his appointees have wrought in their name.

I am confident that if you survey opinion around the world you will find much the same thing. People in Iran, India, South Africa, and Polynesia like and admire the USA and want to emulate its constitutionally binding commitment to freedom and democracy. They would like to have open economies and the rule of unbiased law, like America; they want to embark on joint projects with the US people for the greater good of the planet.

But in Washington for seven years now, we have endured an anti-American government which spurns the founding values of the people that elected it, that recklessly embarks on military adventures and exploits tragedy to enhance its power, which sells off valuable public assets to its cronies, and enriches the richest while spurning the poor. Narrow religious values are shamelessly promoted for electoral gain, in defiance of the secular principles of the land. Science—America's greatest gift to the planet—is demeaned and diminished while deserts spread and ice melts. As Al Gore, a real and quintessential American, describes it, there is an "assault on reason".



So it's time to come together, perhaps under of the leadership of one such as Gore, or Jimmy Carter. Bill Clinton would be welcome to join, and decent Republicans like Thomas Keane, Senator Arlen Specter and Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York. There are millions of others and a great many will come from the serving ranks of the US Armed Forces, which has never before been so dissatisfied with a commander-in-chief.

Such fine, upstanding, real Americans from outside the world of big oil and Washington lobbying need to get together with people from Europe, Africa, and Oceania and send a solid, unmistakable message to Bush and Cheney. That message is "stop now". Stop the military adventures and plundering of the public purse in the name of national security. Stop ignoring climate change, stop making the rich richer at the expense of the poor, stop pushing a narrow fundamentalist Christian social policy. Stop damaging the planet with your incompetence and cynicism.

Think of it as a global Jana Andolan that uses the internet, international television, and the pure, driving decency of most people in America and around the world to enact lasting change. Earth deserves no less. ●

In Achham, migration and HIV are destroying the lives of women and children

**"They don't get rich, they get HIV"**



NARESH NEWAR

**NARESH NEWAR** in ACCHAM

"These were my parents," says eight-year-old Rajan BK holding out a much-handled photograph. His mother and father, both of whom had full blown AIDS, died last year. Rajan doesn't speak for the rest of the day. He carries the photograph everywhere.

"It's incredibly hard for us all. I can't bear the pain of losing my only son," says Rajan's grandfather, 67-year old Prasa, who now has to do hard physical labour to feed and school his three grandchildren. "My son made a mistake and now his old parents and children suffer. This is a terrible fate," he adds.

In 2005/06 alone, nearly a fifth of 500 people who came in for a blood test at the local Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centre (VCT) in Sanphebagar were found to have the virus. Local ngos estimate that close to 500 people have died here of HIV/AIDS related illnesses in the last three years.

AIDS-related death is nothing new in Ridikot VDC, an impoverished dalit area 2km from Sanphebagar in Achham. But as the number of orphans and widows here grows, so does the dire economic hardship and social ostracism they have to endure.

There are close to 20 AIDS orphans in this single ward of Kakadset village. In nearby Payal VDC, there are over 115, mostly dalit. The lucky children whose relatives have enough farmland or income can stay on in the family home. Most must find work wherever they can, in the district or outside, as domestic workers, porters, and farm labourers.

Most of the surviving widows

were infected with HIV by their husbands. The majority of men in Achham go to work in Mumbai as porters and guards—every adult male from Kakadset ward's 30 households has done so—and all are at high risk for HIV from unprotected sex in Mumbai's Nepali brothels.

"They go with dreams of becoming rich, but come back with HIV. Their poor families become even poorer," says an angry 17-year-old Netra BK, who is worried about his brother and father who both work in Mumbai.

"As much as the extreme poverty, the psychological and social hardships can also be unbearable for the children and widows," explains Haribol Bajgain from Save the Children (Norway), which works with local ngos to help the local community reduce the impact of AIDS on vulnerable groups.

Suicide attempts are becoming increasingly common here among those infected with HIV and who deal with its fallout. "Death seems better than living with such misery," says 33-year-old widow Mansara Bhul, who has HIV. Bhul tried to immolate herself and her three children earlier this year. The family was saved by a neighbour who heard the children screaming.

Bhul and her children had to live under a tree for some months after her relatives kicked her out of her house when her husband died of AIDS. Things are a little better now, but only because she receives financial support towards monthly expenses and her children's education from Gangotri Rural Development Forum, a local ngo, and SCF (Norway).

Healthcare in Achham is

appalling. There are a handful of nurses for the district's 250,000 residents. The health posts are poorly stocked—they often run out of diarrhoea medication during the monsoon. Anti-retroviral treatment is a distant dream. "About a hundred people with HIV come to us every week asking for ARV treatment but all we can do is refer them to hospitals in the cities," said Krishna Rawal from Himalayan Association Against AIDS, which runs the blood testing clinic.

Most people with HIV here will die from secondary infections, such as acute respiratory problems, cholera, asthma, typhoid, and urinary tract infections. For women the situation is complicated by the high prevalence of uterine prolapse. "I am just waiting to die," says 32-year-old Kokila Bista, who has had a prolapsed uterus for over a year. Because she has HIV, doctors in Kathmandu and Mumbai do not want to operate for fear of virus-related complications.

Despite the hardship, the stigma and the neglect, some of Achham's HIV widows have started to band together to form support groups called Ekal Mahila (Single Women) with the help of Gangotri, SCF (Norway), and Social Volunteers Against AIDS. The 20 groups in 20 VDCs now have close to 200 members who work together to earn money through vegetable farming and calf and poultry farming. The income goes to help feed their children and, if there is anything left over, travel to city hospitals for treatment.

For the time being, it looks like all they are likely to have. ●





PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS: Rrural areas need community workers and resources to run regular information programs and q-and-a's such as this one in Dang last year, but there just isn't enough funding.

There's lots of talk about dealing with HIV in Nepal. But that's the problem. It's a lot of talk.

Awareness remains rudimentary and stigma, strong. For example, few people know about the factors involved in early onset and worsening of HIV symptoms. These are conditions common to the lives of most Nepalis—lifestyle factors like a



COMMENT  
Aruna Upreti

heavy workload, poor living conditions and frequent infections, poor nutrition, and lack of access to good healthcare. Instead, reaction in remote communities remain at the level of blame and social ostracism.  
Poor Nepalis need better treatment

options and a whole lot more information if attitudes are to change. Money is a major problem. Not the lack of it, but how it is dispensed. Work in rural areas and you see how little money actually goes to local community organisations that have concrete knowledge of the social and working conditions that affect project work.

Small rural organisations working successfully to spread awareness and information don't always know how to write slick pitches and don't have Kathmandu connections. This means they lose out in the funding race. "People with good English come, take all the information we have, write proposals, and get money. They never show up after that. We've heard there's a lot of money in HIV/AIDS. Funny we've never seen it," a local coordinator told me on a recent trip to far-

# There's funding to fight HIV in Nepal, just not where it should be AIDS money

west Nepal.  
Some local organisations such as Gangotri (see 'They don't get rich, they get HIV') are trying to help AIDS orphans and widows in a number of ways including financially. "But," says Rupa Auji of Gangotri, "as an organisation we are also poor and we have no idea how much longer we can help them."

To add insult to injury, community health workers in Achham say they are strongly encouraged to work on a volunteer basis—by experts from Kathmandu who themselves earn over \$100 a day. "In what world is this fair?" asked a woman who has worked with AIDS widows for the last five years.

The double standards are pervasive. The Health Ministry wants female community health workers (FCHV) to be volunteers and boosts that its "48,000 FCHVs are the pillars of our health system". Yet it withdrew even the token Rs 100 per month they were paid at the start of the program because "money kills the spirit of volunteerism. Meanwhile well-off people with enough time to actually volunteer their services get paid handsomely to go work in rural areas for short spells.

In Kathmandu there are donor-funded receptions, workshops, and seminars and feel-good banners and rallies on AIDS Day

which the media duly covers. Out in the field health and community workers struggle to keep their initiatives afloat and little changes. "We sit helplessly watching people suffer and die," says a doctor from the far-west. "Seminars and rallies do play an important role in lobbying the government. But there has to be money going to the real programs that make a difference in rural areas."

The offence is partly financial and partly in the mistaken assumption that volunteers will take care of the community work so large organisations can devote their time to strategising and fundraising, instead of supporting and strengthening awareness and prevention programs on the ground.

HIV/AIDS largely affects young people, the economic backbone of the country. The epidemic and the response to it are worst in the far-west, but will destroy the rural communities around the country, particularly women and the disadvantaged.

There are people who need better care and counselling than they are getting now even in Kathmandu. And it helps no one, not individual patients and their families, and not development efforts, if doctors, and health and community service volunteers are underfunded and demoralised. ●

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# “Asian” values

## It's simplistic to suggest that some religion- or culture-specific values best support capitalism

A provocative book written by a Japanese mathematician has reignited the debate about whether there are specifically “Asian” values. As-yet-untranslated, *The Dignity of a State* by Masahiko Fujiwara is an emotional plea for a Japanese “special path.” It argues that liberal democracy is a western invention that does not fit well with the Japanese or Asian character.



**OPINION**  
Harold James

The reasoning is peculiar, and seems to revive a 19<sup>th</sup> century critique, usually associated with Nietzsche, that Christianity (and Islam) produces an acquiescent, even subservient, mentality, in contrast to the heroic virtues of classical antiquity or of warrior societies, such as the world of the Japanese samurai. Likewise, according to Fujiwara, democracy overemphasises reason, another western construct. “We Japanese,” he writes, “don’t have a religion such as Christianity or Islam, so we need something else: deep emotion.”

Many non-Japanese Asians will dislike most or all of Fujiwara’s message, for they will hear unpleasant historical echoes. After all, there is no reason to



believe that Asians share a particular yearning for authoritarianism, say, or that Chinese pro-democracy movements are insincere stooges for western interests.

But Fujiwara’s book has also revived an old debate about capitalism and the values needed to sustain it. That debate stems from the fact that capitalism, or the market economy, cannot go on forever driven by an internal momentum and that the basic proclivities that drive it are destructive of long-term success.

While capitalism depends on investment and consumption, too much of the former leads to production gluts, and too much of the latter causes economies to overheat. Competition, another necessity, can also be brutal and destructive and elaborate legal systems are needed to ensure that it is open and fair and that monopolies and trusts do not destroy competition itself. But each legal reform is answered by entrepreneurial ingenuity from those who want to circumvent the new restraints.

Some thinkers, most notably Max Weber, have suggested that capitalism must be sustained by an outside value system. Weber’s argument was that religious values which emphasise restraint and a sense of duty may support dependability and reliability in business relations, especially vital in societies just opening up market relations. A legacy of violence and suspicion makes it hard for people to feel secure enough to enter into long-term contracts. They tend to look for short-term gains at the expense of others, reinforcing a general scepticism about the market.

Second, religious values that emphasise social solidarity help correct the market tendency to polarise society by rewarding success. Periods of globalisation have been eras of considerable economic advance, but they have also increased inequality within particular countries, as markets rewarded scarce factors of production and fuelled powerful political backlashes that endangered the continuation of trade and financial integration.

The debate about religious values in capitalism parallels that on the relationship between freedom and economic development. Critics of authoritarian regimes are tempted to argue that freedom is good

because it promotes economic growth. But a deeper view of freedom regards it as having intrinsic value, as the work of Nobel laureate economists Friedrich Hayek and Amartya Sen shows.

So, too, with religious values. Backed by evidence from large empirical studies, some claim that belief in religion is good because it boosts economic performance. That may be the case, and it may be a tempting argument to make in authoritarian societies that are unsympathetic to beliefs that challenge their own legitimacy. But can you imagine the pope whispering such a message to the Chinese leadership?

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Voltaire claimed that religion’s major virtue was its social usefulness—basically, he sought to subvert religion by making it purely instrumental. But to do that is to destroy the true character of religious belief. By reviving the debate over “Asian” values, Fujiwara’s book may contribute to a similar mistake. ● (Project Syndicate)

*Harold James is professor of international affairs at Princeton University and author of The Roman Predicament: How the Rules of International Order Create the Politics of Empire.*

# Job interview

## There needs to be an open hearing to appoint Robert Zoellick as head of the World Bank



The arguments against the ‘old boy’ system, by which the United States appoints the head of the World Bank and Europe the head of the IMF, are especially compelling today. How effective can the bank be in promoting good governance and fighting corruption if its

The bank’s board should conduct open hearings on George W Bush’s nominee to succeed Wolfowitz. Here are some questions—and hints at right and wrong answers—it should ask any proposed candidate for the bank’s presidency, including Bush’s nominee, Robert Zoellick:

Should the president of the World Bank put the interests of developing countries first? Will you press for Europe and America to eliminate agricultural subsidies? Will you advocate a development round that emphasises liberalisation of labour markets more than capital markets, elimination of non-tariff barriers that keep developing countries’ goods out of advanced industrial countries, and abolition of so-called “escalating

tariffs,” which impede development? Will you be open to research even when that research shows that policies of the advanced industrial countries may, at least in some circumstances, not be in the interests of developing countries?

During James Wolfensohn’s presidency of the Bank, there was a change in philosophy. We encouraged research-based policies, even when that research was critical of policies being pushed by certain advanced industrial countries and by some in the Bank. When our research showed that certain policies (like agricultural subsidies) were hurting developing countries, we publicised the findings, helping to redefine the debate.

**Will you support the initiatives of developing countries to have a development-oriented intellectual property regime?**

What separates developing countries from developed countries is not only the gap in resources, but also a gap in knowledge. The bank should also be viewed as a Knowledge Bank. It should advocate reforms that enhance developing countries’ access to knowledge. Access to generic medicines is essential for developing countries, with their limited budgets, to improve the health of the poor. TRIPs, the intellectual property provisions of the Uruguay round designed to reduce access to generic medicines, succeeded. But the bilateral trade agreements Bush has been pushing are even worse. Candidate claiming to represent the interests of developing countries must distance themselves from these policies.

**Will you redefine the criteria by which countries get access to funds?**

Today, complying with current orthodoxies, such as on privatisation and liberalisation, can earn you points on “good governance,” and increase aid

allocations, regardless of whether money goes to countries most in need or that can most effectively use aid.

**Should corrupt countries be cut off from funding? If so, will do you so consistently? Will you support a comprehensive anti-corruption agenda, including closing down secret bank accounts?**

One flaw of Wolfowitz’s anti-corruption agenda was that expansion or continuation of aid for countries favoured by the Bush administration, like Iraq or Pakistan, was pushed, regardless of how corrupt they were, while there was little tolerance elsewhere. Problems with Uzbekistan were overlooked until it fell out of favour with the US. The Bush administration also opposed the OECD initiative to restrict bank secrecy, until it realised that secret bank accounts help finance terrorists. Since then, it has closed secret bank accounts, but only for terrorists.

**Should the World Bank encourage countries to adopt core labour standards?**

Not only has the bank not been active in promoting these globally agreed standards, there is a concern that the bank discourages collective bargaining and protections for workers when it talks about “flexible labour markets” and conditions that are conducive to private investment.

If the advanced industrial countries that control the Bank refuse to stand by their principles, at least they should give a nod to greater transparency. The world should know what it is getting. Open hearings would be a step in the right direction. ● (Project Syndicate)

*Joseph Stiglitz is a Nobel laureate in economics. His latest book is Making Globalisation Work.*



**COMMENT**  
Joseph Stiglitz

president is chosen in a process that demonstrates flaws in its own governance? An anti-corruption message can’t be credible when delivered by an appointee of one of the most corrupt and incompetent administrations in US history?





# New ways of seeing

Kailash Shrestha's paintings are dark splashes of black and red, one bleeding into the another and producing constantly shifting shapes. Almost all of the 24 canvases Shrestha exhibited this week use what he calls the tantric colours—red, white, black, the colours that are supposed to be present in the eye. But the paintings are not dark or depressing, as the black and crimson usually give way to white, as if finding the light in darkness.

Shrestha's solo show, A Shift of Vision, was the first in a series by final-year BFA students from KU's Centre for Art and Design in Bhaktapur. The nine solo student shows run for four days each through June.

A Shift of Vision is a strong start to the festival. From Shrestha's perspective, even mundane objects such as pots, windows, and poles become a whole lot more interesting. There are contrasts in his pictures that Shrestha says represent life and death—a closed window next to an open one, a dark splash merging with white.

The show is largely inspired by the artist's native Bhaktapur, and here contrast is also a way to understand and culture. Red chillies hung out to dry, a sari draped in front of a house, and twin pots hanging on outside walls are recurring motifs. They are common enough images in Nepali art, but Shrestha makes them his own—the chillies explode upwards, the pots hang in thin air, the sari is a dark cloud with a red lining. This granular imagining of what may or may not be present is a major hook of Shrestha's paintings. "Even a small object should tell a bigger story, a story of something more," he says. ●

Pranaya SJB Rana

For more information on the student shows ring Baryo Fiesta at 4414395 or Juju at 98510 50299.

# Astronomers without borders

Mike Simmons, founding president of Astronomers Without Borders (AWB), travels extensively to observe and study celestial events. He promotes astronomy by networking amateur astronomy groups throughout the world and is associated with the Mount Wilson Observatory in California. *Nepali Times* spoke with Simmons about his experience in astronomy and how Nepal could benefit from astronomy education.



**What strategy would work for practical astronomy in Nepal?**  
Sending a spacecraft to the Moon is really an engineering project, more than astronomy or another science. It's very difficult and requires experienced and educated engineers and scientists. Nepali engineers and scientists will have to get the best education possible in order to prepare for such a huge endeavour.

**How could Nepali and American astronomers collaborate?**  
Nepali astronomers can certainly come to the US to study and to participate in research programs here. There are ways for people to apply but for such top-flight programs the applicants have to be among the best to qualify.

**How far is astrology true from the scientific perspective?**  
The positions of the stars and planets have nothing to do with what happens to us on Earth. We need to move forward using our new knowledge to make decisions about what we should do and what we can and cannot do and forget the old false beliefs that we have learned. Only then can we move forward and control our own destinies rather than taking the path of the past.



**Nepali Times: What inspired you to start stargazing?**  
**Mike Simmons:** I was interested in astronomy at such an early age that I can't remember when I first became interested or how. When I was old enough I bought books, used binoculars, and joined an astronomy club to learn more. I've stayed involved in astronomy through my entire life while working and raising a family.

**What has been your most exciting moment in stargazing?**  
It's such an exciting field and pursuit, how can someone choose one exciting moment? Whether using a small telescope or a huge one, it's the idea that you're seeing something so far away and so different than our own familiar world that makes it interesting and exciting.

**What inspired you to establish AWB?**  
AWB has been established to connect people with an interest in astronomy and other fields all over the world. Many organisations have joined us in this effort and I expect to have over a thousand organisations affiliated with us eventually.

**How could Nepali stargazers participate in AWB?**  
As we build the AWB network of affiliate organisations there are more and more groups in other countries to interact with. It will be some time before we grow to the point where we can accomplish all our goals, but eventually there will be forums and interactive events where Nepali stargazers can talk with and maybe observe with their colleagues anywhere in the world.

**June Highlights:**  
● Make plans to celebrate for the longest day of the year. The **Sun** is at solstice on 21 June, indicating the start of summer.  
● After 2 June, when **Mercury** reached it greatest eastern elongation and its best position to be viewed, it started moving closer to the setting Sun and will go through inferior conjunction on the 28 June to become a morning object.  
● **Venus** moved from Gemini to Cancer at the start of June and this fantastic "evening star" and will be close to Saturn by the end of the month.  
● **Mars** moves from Pisces to Aries during June, rising three or four hours before the Sun.  
● **Saturn** will be seen parked in western Leo throughout the month. On 30 June, Saturn and Venus will be very close to each other, so make a point to try to see them in the western horizon an hour after sunset.

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**SMILEY JIMMY:** Visiting former US president Jimmy Carter speaks to media after meeting Election Commissioner Bhoj Raj Pokhrel and his team in Kathmandu on Thursday morning. Carter will meet senior politicians, including Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and go bird-watching on Shivapuri in his three-day stay here.



**PROMISE TO COMPROMISE:** MPs Purna Bahadur Khadka and Minendra Rijal (*at head of table*) at a meeting of the parliament's State Affairs Committee on Monday concentrated on making the election process more inclusive.



**GETTING FUNDAS RIGHT:** Hindu holy men and women march down to Maitighar on Wednesday chanting slogans demanding that Nepal revert back to a Hindu kingdom.



**HAPPY AND THEY KNOW IT:** Shortlisted contestants for the WAVE Mr and Miss University contest pose for a group picture after their Talent Round on Monday. The finalists will be chosen on Friday and will represent Nepal in Korea next month.

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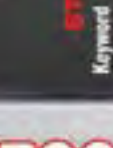
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# Half-assed bund

The Ass has no idea how they did it, but reporters at the new newspaper *Naya Patrika* scored quite a scoop by translating a detailed itinerary of Jimmy Carter's 96 hours in Kathmandu in the tabloid's Thursday edition. Its a directory of the mobile numbers of Nepal's movers and shakers. We now know the cell numbers of everyone from Carter Centre Field Director Darren Nance to COAS Gen Katuwal, from Ian Martin to Election Commissioner Bhoj Raj Pokhrel. From Chief of Protocol Gopal Thapa to Peter Burleigh. This is an amazing treasure trove and the Ass is certain they and Suresh Chalise, Bhekh Thapa, Sapana Malla, Prachanda and our very own CK Lal will soon be changing their **SIM cards**. All thanks to Jimbo.



If any of you Nepali college students home on summer holidays is looking for a subject for a master's project, the Ass has one for you: banda psychology. Tuesday's **non-bund** was a case study on how rumours about an impending shutdown go viral and turn into mass hysteria. The Ass researched it and found rumours of a bund are first disseminated through an early warning network on the expat-NGO listservs and then move beyond that thorough SMS and word-of-mouth. That is why even if media doesn't cover a bund call, everyone stays home.

Tuesday's half-assed bund was called by squatters who had their houses bulldozed last week. They had a genuine cause, but the strike failed miserably because they didn't follow the SOP for making a bund successful: rent the **Thamel Gang** to burn tyres at six strategic interlocations on the Ring Road at about 7:00 AM. You see the same gang lead by a fat fellow who is always on a mobile phone at all bunds, no matter who calls them.

To deter future forced bunds, never repeat a rumour either verbally, electronically or telepathically.



It's boomtime for doomsdayers as Nepal's astrologers fall over each other to predict various **calamities** in the coming weeks. The first date to watch out for is 22 June when the sky will reportedly fall. This forecast by Trisuli Baba has been hotly contested by the Astrologer General's office, but that hasn't deterred tens of thousands of Nepalis from deciding to stay indoors that day. Then there is 4 July when soothsayers say Great Floods will strike the region because it is Girijababu's birthday (many happy re-runs!) as well as America's Independence Day. After that we have 7 July, which is Kingji's 61<sup>st</sup> birthday, and many are congregating at 7AM on the seventh day of the week on 07-07-07 at the palace despite

predictions of an **apocalypse**. Seven being a lucky number is probably why KingG has been looking bright and chirpy despite parliament passing a bill that makes it possible to impeach him through a two-thirds majority. Is there something the Majestic One knows that we don't? Those who have met him recently say the sedentary lifestyle has made G slightly overweight. But reports of his poor health could be a palace **leak** to prod Baluwatar to give him the green light to go abroad to get a checkup. The Ass's advice: Kingji and PMji go for a checkup together to Bumrungrad.



The two items of news may not be related, but the government is about to lift a ban on textiles with camouflage prints on the same week that the UN is to begin its second phase of the process to verify if there are any Maoists in the contentments who are above 18 years of age. Now, if only CAAN can first finish its mysteriously extended safety inspection of the UN's de Havilland Dash-7 turboprop that is still sitting on the tarmac.

There is one other complication: the **ceasefire** between the UN and the Nepali media has broken down because the peacekeepers have resumed poaching journalists. Gloves have come off as us hacks are no more bound by an earlier commitment not to verify verification in return for a moratorium on UNMIN stealing staff.

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