Rights activists and journalist groups have condemned a series of recent attacks on the private media by the Maoists, and have described the forced closure of Nepal Samacharpatra and Mahanagar dailies this week as a serious threat to press freedom in the country.

The pressure on the media has been carried out through the Maoist-affiliated trade unions, and editors say it is a political pressure tactic to tone down criticism of the Maoists under the guise of a labour movement.

“It is a grave threat against the public’s right to information when a legitimate struggle for labour rights is used as a tool to stop the publication of newspapers,” said the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) in a hard-hitting statement on Wednesday.

Although some staff grievances are genuine, editors and publishers say the Maoists are using their militant unions to interfere with editorial content. It also follows the pattern of how the Maoists have used militant unions to target the manufacturing sector, hotels, restaurants, and private schools in the past year.

“This is a direct challenge to the freedom of press, they have threatened me with physical harm,” says Pushkar Lal Shrestha, editor and publisher of Nepal Samacharpatra daily, which hasn’t come out since Tuesday.

Staff at Kantipur also said they were physically threatened last week because they brought out the paper.

The Maoist leadership seems to have concluded that the private press is hostile to them.

Although their own papers have a sizeable circulation, they aren’t very popular. Media analysts think this could be why they have used the labour leverage to force mainstream papers to suppress negative news and influence public opinion ahead of polls.

But Maoist union leader Sambhu Rimal who lead the movement against Samacharpatra this week says bluntly: “We don’t care what you think, we are fighting for our rights.”

Labour expert Ramesh Badal cautions against over-reaction, since setting up a trade union is a legal right of workers. He suggests forming a tribunal made up of government, management, and workers to address existing labour demands and future ones as they come up.

Publishers and press freedom groups are convinced the current agitation isn’t about labour rights at all but to indirectly influence editorial content. They have called on the government, especially Maoist Information and Communications Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara to be vigilant about protecting press freedom.

Shiva Gaunle is editor of Himal Khabarpatrika and vice-president of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists.
By SARAS RAI

Future schools

Let's put money and energy into education

For nearly 60 years, since the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, world leaders have promised all children that they have the right to go to school and receive education. In 2000, world leaders made new promises—the Millennium Development Goals—specifically addressing education for all children by 2015.

Yet, 77 million children are out of school globally. More than half—39 million—live in conflict-affected countries. Despite the vulnerability of these children, only 23 percent of the global basic education aid goes to these conflict and post-conflict areas. Without urgent action at least 30 million children will still be out of school in 2015, most in conflict-affected countries.

Education is essential to break the cycle of poverty and conflict. It can protect children during a conflict, help communities heal afterwards, and build peace and prosperity. However, it requires rich donors, despite pledging to ensure every child receives an education by 2015, are selecting more stable countries to communicate aid over those affected by conflict, effectively leaving those countries with little hope of breaking the cycle of poverty and conflict.

The current trend of providing education for more stable countries in a single year is not enough to reach the 2015 education target the world set for itself. The total number of out-of-school children is declining, those who are still out-of-school are proving even harder to reach.

The Global Monitoring Report 2007 states that 668,000 children in Nepal are still out of school. Media coverage on the urgement of Nepal achieving the Millennium Development Goals on Education for All has cited the lack of infrastructure, financing, and management affecting the quality of the programmes being implemented. Over and above this is the post conflict scenario through which the country is trying to break away from.

Yet, Nepal stands out from other conflict affected countries, where education has collapsed. Despite the decade-long conflict, the education sector in Nepal continued to remain functional and deliver services as per the government's commitment to the Education for All campaign. Opening avenues for international and national non-governmental organisations to work in the education sector, in areas government could not access, allowed the campaign to gain momentum steadily.

As schools were run by the parents and local authorities, initiatives taken to ensure protection of schools and children as zones of peace were successful to some extent in demanding respect from both warring sides. Barring a few closures due to political interference, most schools in Nepal continued to provide for children the minimum basic services.

In a way, the commotion over his visit was an amusing diversion in these otherwise dull and dreary times. His appearance, the entire 96 hours he was here, was an amusing diversion in these otherwise dull and dreary times.

Subhas Rai

#354EDITORIAL

The republic of disorder

Jimmy Carter's visit only highlighted Kathmandu's hamhanded approach to the tarai

Jimmy Carter's visit only highlighted Kathmandu's hamhanded approach to the tarai state, and head of government, Girija Prasad Koirala who theoretically should be in cantonments. We didn't make it to the front page of Nepal Samacharpatra and that, as soon as time is ripe, they'll go back to their own expense. These two objectives seem to co-exist even within the Maoist fold. Which is probably why we hear Pushpa Kamal Dahal first taking the matter very seriously in looking to ex-presidents and European Union, and then rattling tales for cadre about the revolution.

It’s been a year. Even those who wanted to give the Maistis time to get adjusted to peacetime politics are now losing their patience amidst continued reports of intimidation, extortion and militant unionism. Maoist leaders predictably dismiss these allegations as a smear campaign by “status-quo bourgeois lackeys of a “238-year-old feudalism”.

But no matter how high you are in the seven parties in the reign of the monarch of Nepal. For having faced the notice of NTV news lately, listened to Radio Nepal's current affairs programs or read Gorkhapatra will have noticed that state media is used shamelessly for party propaganda. It is a fact however, Inform minister Mahat is behaving no differently than his predecessors from the NC or UML. Much more sinister, it looks like the threat of violence, if not actual violence, in the run-up to elections is part of the plan. Let's have no illusions: the systematic infiltration of private media by Maoist unions in the past weeks is about putting pressure on editors. It would be naive to believe that this is only about legitimate labour rights. Editors who defied the royal junta's attempt to undermine press freedom. It raises questions about their safety and security in the postconflict scenario through which the country is trying to break away from.

Whether it is the PLA who theoretically should be in cantonments. We pretended we didn't know that the YCL has big guns in containers. We pretended we didn't know that the YCL didn't make it to the front page of Nepal Samacharpatra. It's actually the PLA who theoretically should be in cantonments. We pretended we didn't know that the YCL didn't make it to the front page of Nepal Samacharpatra.

If you think that the former guerrillas have not given up trying to capture state power and turn Nepal into a totalitarian country, then, as soon as time is ripe, they'll go back to their own expense. People who have a soft corner for them that the comrades didn't put all their big guns in containers. We pretended we didn't know that the YCL didn't make it to the front page of Nepal Samacharpatra.

If you think that the former guerrillas have not given up trying to capture state power and turn Nepal into a totalitarian country, then, as soon as time is ripe, they'll go back to their own expense. People who have a soft corner for them that the comrades didn't put all their big guns in containers. We pretended we didn't know that the YCL didn't make it to the front page of Nepal Samacharpatra.

However, the week's change of mind, the pace of work to fulfill the requirements and achieve the targeted goals is picking up, with the ministry urging to formulate strategies to reflect the changes in political situation. However, there is an urgent need to meet the gaps in funding for Nepal, to allow qualitative as well as quantitative implementation of education programmes to reach those children still out of school from marginalised communities.

To do this, we need to increase financing and better coordinate between the government, donors and INGOs to mobilise funds for effective and holistic delivery of education services to children in Nepal. Save the Children is implementing its Revitile Future programmes in 27 districts to increase government education for children out of school, improve the quality of education to help keep children in school, ensure protection of schools, and advocate for financing of education in conflict-affected areas. Nepal has a unique possibility to reach the MDGs on education.

Let's do it.●

Gunnar Andersen is Country Representative in Nepal of Save the Children Norway.

STATE OF THE STATE

C K Lal

But no matter how high you are in Nepal, western donors and their government-inspired NGOs are higher than you. It's hard to decide how many 'sris' suffice for a person at the pinnacle of the donor community. Exasperated by the attention showered on the founder of the Carter Centre, the ever-popular blog Meri Sansar prettied Jimmy Carter's name with Sr Kail Ho Kati. Carter granted an audience to Dahal and his alter ego. He called upon Koirala twice, presumably first to ascertain the status of the aging ruler and then to confer legitimacy. Mukherjee was also graciously received. In the interest of full disclosure, I have to admit that I too present to this Chief, Carter dominated the news for the entire 96 hours he was here. It's understandable that the various excellences strutting around the country are concerned about their personal security and have moderate concerns over their full government protection from such exigencies. But when someone like Carter expresses his concern about the security situation in the country, we're missing some details. Whose safety are we talking about? Security to do what and for what purpose? Where exactly does the security situation merit immediate attention, and are we to do that?

The lawlessness in the tarai is the main concern for obvious reasons. But a law and order approach to establishing peace in the tarai is unworkable for one simple reason: the government looks nothing like the demographics on the ground in the region. Rather crudely put, the role carri

The republic of disorder

Sri Pancha Gayendras is continuing to be the signature name in this issue. For having outmanoeuvred the seven parties in the peace process, Prachanda is in Sri Sat. As leader, he has recently confirmed that the state, and head of government, Girja Prasad Koirala is in Sri Ath. In recognition of his influence in the government-South India-Pakistan standoff, Shankar Mukherjee could be Sri Nau Sarkar.

By STATE OF THE STATE

C K Lal

No matter how high you are in Nepal, western donors and their government-inspired NGOs are higher than you. It's hard to decide how many 'sris' suffice for a person at the pinnacle of the donor community. Exasperated by the attention showered on the founder of the Carter Centre, the ever-popular blog Meri Sansar prettied Jimmy Carter’s name with Sr Kail Ho Kati. Carter granted an audience to Dahal and his alter ego. He called upon Koirala twice, presumably first to ascertain the status of the aging ruler and then to confer legitimacy. Mukherjee was also graciously received. In the interest of full disclosure, I have to admit that I too present to this Chief, Carter dominated the news for the entire 96 hours he was here. It's understandable that the various excellences strutting around the country are concerned about their personal security and have moderate concerns over their full government protection from such exigencies. But when someone like Carter expresses his concern about the security situation in the country, we're missing some details. Whose safety are we talking about? Security to do what and for what purpose? Where exactly does the security situation merit immediate attention, and are we to do that?

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HALF EMPTY

Democracy gives false hope to Nepalis. Your editorial ‘Hall full’ (#353) suggests that a multiparty system would be the best bet for the country. And yet it is the source of many disorders, the madhes and other ethnic uprisings. I agree that despotism is not the best solution, but Nepal does not have the conditions that allow democracy to succeed, there are too many ethnicities and politics is unstable. An enlightened despot, and not a disorganised parliament, could through an evolutionary process create democratic institutions that will eventually succeed.

Sujapya Acharya, Tokyo

POL

I agree with CK Lal that donor-driven research is diverting money to the elite rather than to the genuinely needy. (‘Footnotes to history’, State of the State, #353). But I strongly disagree that surveys are inconsequential. The advantage of surveys is that they take us closer to social reality than mere speculation or rumours. They are limited, of course, because people change their minds. Using this to conclude that Nepal has a mature political consciousness is unscientific.

Perhaps Lal’s discomfort stems from the fact that support for Hinduism and the monarchy is still strong in the tarai, 49.9 percent of the people in the tarai want to keep the monarchy, according to the latest survey report by Interdisciplinary Analysts. Instead of ignoring that, people like Lal should go there and try to break the hegemony of the Hindu monarchy that prevails rather than refute scientific findings.

Muhammad Rafiq Ahmad, email

I was flabbergasted by CK Lal’s assertion that opinion polling is a frivolous donor pastime. Implicit in his contention is that Nepal’s leaders, or for that matter newspaper columnists, know the views of their country’s citizens without having to bother to ask. His suggestion that polls are unnecessary during turbulent times is even more confounding: Does a dynamic political environment preclude the need to consult the broader populace? The current political transition in Nepal provides an unprecedented opportunity to reinvent the state, but only if the policymakers and pundits cloistered in Kathmandu listen to voices outside the valley.

Implicit in his contention is that Nepal’s leaders, or for that matter newspaper columnists, know the views of their country’s citizens without having to bother to ask. His suggestion that polls are unnecessary during turbulent times is even more confounding: Does a dynamic political environment preclude the need to consult the broader populace? The current political transition in Nepal provides an unprecedented opportunity to reinvent the state, but only if the policymakers and pundits cloistered in Kathmandu listen to voices outside the valley.

Consult the broader populace? The current political transition in Nepal provides an unprecedented opportunity to reinvent the state, but only if the policymakers and pundits cloistered in Kathmandu listen to voices outside the valley.

Methodologically sound, rigorously conducted surveys are an invaluable tool for this purpose.

Nick Langton, Country Representative, The Asia Foundation

APPEARANCES

The Beed uses largely colonial or feudal clichés about ‘nice Nepalis’ who are mute in the face of exploitation and the mafias who make millions sending them overseas without any guarantees (‘Appearances count’, Economic Sense, #353). Politicians and businessmen are equally responsible for the and the Beed should re-read the ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’ and the Beed should re-read the ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’ also the result of a job done poorly over the long term by businesspeople. The ‘business community’...
Bombs in the countryside

Even in peacetime, thousands of explosive devices are threatening the lives of Nepalis.

caused by a bucket bomb that was to be used to demolish a road. Local resident Dhara Kunwar Thada says the bomb was made available by CPN-M Gothadi in-charge Chet Bahadur Gande and brought in from his house. The locals believe there are more explosives in Gothadi.

The explosion killed two children—seven-year-old Dhan Kumar Thada and 45-day-old Budhlal Bahadur Thada. Four-year-old Human Bahadur Thada and his 15-month-old sister Bhumi have no idea what happened to their family. "They are being looked after by their aunt Debi Thada. The orphaned children keep asking surviving relatives where their mothers and fathers are. The widows do not know how they will take care of their children."

The incident underscores the lack of attention being given to collecting and defusing the hundreds, possibly thousands, of improvised explosive devices, war leftovers, that are scattered around the country.

Gothadi police-in-charge Pashupram Joshi says the bombs belonged to the Maoists and that how the explosives reached Gothadi and the circumstances of the explosion are under investigation, but local residents do not want to talk.

Meanwhile CPN-M district committee member and Gothadi local Tika Kafle says that the person responsible for the explosives might have died or been "transferred and not told locals that the bombs were there." He says such incidents occur because the public "somehow get hold of the explosives".

Kafle says that the CPN-M is not involved and is being scapegoated.

"Even during the conflict we rarely had so many children orphaned all at once. Such incidents bring back the war, they make healing more difficult."

Maoists have infiltrated the casinos too

I f it seems as if casinos and Maoists don’t mix, but the Valley’s gaming houses now employ hundreds of party workers or their relatives.

Kathmandu’s casinos get frequent ‘requests’ from Maoist union bosses to employ party workers, wives, relatives, and friends from the districts. These friends and family work as croupiers, cashiers, security personnel, and in the accounts section at the casinos in Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Annapurna, Yak ‘n’ Yeti, Everest, the Hyatt Regency, Radisson, Shangri-La, and the Fulbari in Pokhara.

Maoists are cashing in on the ongoing battle between casino partners RG Tuttle and Rakesh Wadhwa over majority ownership of the casinos at Shangri-La, Yak ‘n’ Yeti, and Everest. Both sides have at different points sought Maoist help to resolve the issue.

Bishnu Lamsal, president of the Nepal Independent Hotel Workers’ Union says the Maoists have sent 600 of their people to infiltrate these hotels. Ramesh Babu Panta, president of Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Hotel and Restaurant Workers’ Organisation says these are just rumours being spread to discredit his organisation. "We only suggest that the casinos employ people from discriminated against and poor groups," says Panta.

Panta’s wife Durga and Lakmi Shrestha, wife of Shalikram Jamarkattel, president of the All Nepal Trade Union Federation are both high-level employees at the Everest Casino.

According to our sources, the Maoists have 181 people at Casino Tara, 78 at Casino Nepal, 71 at Arma, 68 at Royal, 65 at Everest, 40 at Casino Tara, 11 at Casino Rad, and 40 at Nepal Recreation Centre. Casino security is being provided by former Maoist fighters.

Casino Everest’s general manager TR Bhatta was vague while explaining the connection between his casino and Maoists. "They requested us to give jobs to those who lost family members during the war and to the displaced, so we employed 30-35 people," says Bhatta. "People come and go. It is common for casinos to employ a bunch of new people every now and then."

Other casino employees tell us that most of the people who were given employment due to Maoist pressure have got, quite literally, nothing to do at work. There’s no money either, so other employees haven’t been paid for months.

Last month, under pressure from Maoists, Casino Royal sacked 14 employees from its NC- and UML-affiliated groups. Their unions agitated in turn, and the employees were reinstated.

Rajesh Karki, central vice president of Nepal Tourism and Hotel Workers Association (NTHWA) tells us he has been threatened a number of times by union leaders. "If we do not support their union, they threaten and beat us up, especially," says Neta Bikram Thapa, president of NTHWA.
Step up to the job

Charm’s gentle downplaying of a CEO’s personal attributes such as intelligence, self-confidence, and communication skills makes him a rare guru who does not mistake a CEO’s articulateness for accomplishment. Charm surely knows too many executives with all the right personal attributes who ultimately failed because their business priorities were a mess. In a previous book, Charm celebrated the art of execution and the practice of getting things done. In this new one, he has given every CEO a tool-kit for stepping outside of their day-to-day frame of reference to really examine the ingredients of high performance.

Laxmi Visa

Laxmi Bank can now issue Visa credit cards, making it only the fifth Nepali bank to be authorised to do so. The bank was established in April 2002 and has nine branches around the country.

Office supplies

A range of Gestetner and Ricoh office automation products is now available through Shrestha Amrit Traders. Gestetner offers advanced multifunctional printers that combine the functions of a copier with those of network printers, scanners, and fax machines. Ricoh offers Japanese office equipment including copiers, fax machines, data processing systems, and photographic equipment. SAT has been importing office products for eight years.

Swift insurance

Arun Intercontinental, authorised dealers of Maruti, is offering two years of free insurance on every Maruti Swift. The car already comes with a four-speaker stereo system, seat covers, floor mats, and a car perfume. Customers can also exchange motorcycles for a new Maruti and a car perfume. Customers can also exchange motorcycles for a new Maruti and a car perfume. The car already comes with a four-speaker stereo system, seat covers, floor mats, and a car perfume. Customers can also exchange motorcycles for a new Maruti and a car perfume.

Position and re-position your business: Take Nepal’s leading newspapers as an example. Their core product is news, which now has competitors in the form of blogs, FM radio stations, Google News and so on. Given this, what can media executives do to re-position newspapers? Should their web presence be completely revamped? Should newspapers do more tie-ups with TV, radio, mobile phones, and other websites? In addition to serving up news, should they also position themselves as providers of knowledge, interactions, and research?

Pinpoint external change: Most Nepali banks are sitting on piles of money, and stock doing, what an ex-banker matter-of-factly calls ‘plain vanilla’ commercial banking work. But the demands of the country for long-range growth are urgently clear. Nepal desperately needs more highways, better airports, power plants, tourism destinations, and other infrastructure projects. How can business leaders be credible spokespeople to convince the government to open regulatory doors so Nepal’s own money also gets reliably invested in development infrastructure projects? A CEO’s personal attributes such as intelligence, self-confidence, and communication skills makes him a rare guru who does not mistake a CEO’s articulateness for accomplishment. Charm surely knows too many executives with all the right personal attributes who ultimately failed because their business priorities were a mess. In a previous book, Charm celebrated the art of execution and the practice of getting things done. In this new one, he has given every CEO a tool-kit for stepping outside of their day-to-day frame of reference to really examine the ingredients of high performance.

Lead your business’s social system: Many non-family business partnerships founder sooner or later in Nepal because the level of trust is often low.

True, arbitrary application of laws by government officers does little to reward basic transparency. But on the personnel side, doing well in tiny Nepal goes to most people’s heads quickly, making them act like prima donnas who then start creating headaches for business partners and associates. These long-simmering internal quarrels make even businesses that start off doing well much too low points within a few years. Charm says that one business know-how skill to look for in a CEO is to see how she moulds teams “by getting the right people together with the right behaviours to achieve better business results.”

Address societal pressures: The median age of 27 million Nepalis is 18. Youths make this country tick. From sending money home from abroad to calling for shutdowns and disrupting factories, what young people do significantly affects all businesses. Yet most business leaders carry on as if they are only interested in a few young graduates for entry-level jobs. Charm says non-market forces are increasingly influencing business results everywhere, and that an effective CEO is the one who finds creative ways to respond to societal pressures that cannot be controlled but do have an impact on the bottom line.

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Free the press
Amapurna Post, 21 June
Nepal Samacharpatra has had to stop publication after 12 years. This is a gross violation of the press freedom stipulated in the constitution. Freedom of expression is a part of democracy and so are the differences of opinion among newspapers. It would be very wrong if the reason for closing down Nepal Samacharpatra was for vengeance, or for a role that a newspaper might have played in the past. Newspapers are carriers of news and views, and just stopping their publication cannot hide the truth. Obstructing independent journalism is a betrayal of democratic norms and values and cannot be justified in any way. To complicate matters, this has happened while the Maoists hold the information and communications portfolio. That a Maoist-affiliated labour group is involved in the current crisis sends out negative signals of a party that harbours dictatorial intentions. Minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara needs to urgently make a positive intervention. Such incidents negate the Maoists’ commitment to peace, democracy, and development. The Nepali media is concerned that such incidents will become a pattern.

United we stand
Kantipur, 21 June
For past one-and-a-half months, the activities of the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Communication, Press and Publication Labour Union have been creating problems for newspapers. In a democratic set-up, preventing the publication of newspapers for even a day is unbecoming and objectionable. It might be normal for the sister organisations of political parties to make inroads into commercial ventures, but it is not normal to do so in media houses. The Maoists are involved in the Samacharpatra fiasco—banners extolling Prachandapath have been put up at Kamana Publications, which owns Samacharpatra. The unwillingness or the inability of the Maoists to sincerely address the disturbances casts a shadow on their behaviour.

We believe it is the duty of the Maoist minister who holds the information and communication portfolio to resolve the issue and help create a media-friendly environment. All concerned should help in the exercise of the constitutional right to publish and distribute newspapers freely. The media community and civil society must offer vital support to Kamana Publications’ efforts to resume printing its two dailies. Only such a display of solidarity can ensure a free, unrestricted environment for publishing and broadcasting.

Jungle justice
Interview with Chandra Bahadur Thapa (‘Sagar’), YCL in-charge of Kathmandu Valley, in Tarun, 18 June
The Young Communist League arrested so-called criminal Sitaram Prasai and handed him over to the police. Shortly after, Girija Prasad Koirala publicly called you a “criminal” league. What’s your reaction? Girija Prasad Koirala showed everyone that he is the king of the criminals, of the corrupt, and his “why did you arrest a bank defaulter without my permission” tirade only proves it. We thank him for that.

Will you follow up on your public proclamation that you will take action against criminals, traitors, and those who shield them? If we come into power, we will hang them. But hanging has been banned by law. America sent Saddam Hussain to the gallows. Our country has traitors a lot worse than Saddam Hussain, can we not hang them?

Do you have proof against them? Yes. We have dossiers on hundreds of such people. If possible we will take action against them now. If not, then when we come into power. We will hang all those who are sinking the country.

Too much?
Abhiyan, 18-24 June
Although the government claims that over Rs 1.1 billion has already been released for the running of the cantonments, the media is concerned that such incidents will become a pattern.

NARESH NEWARI

Times 22 - 28 JUNE 2007 #354
Maoris say they have only received Rs 400.1 million. Maori Minister of Information and Communications Krishna Prasad Mahara has over the months taken advances totalling Rs 63.1 million.

The relevant ministries have released monies for cantonment infrastructure development too—Rs 6.0 million for electrification, Rs 63.4 million for buildings, Rs 11.1 million for drinking water, Rs 5.8 million for communications, and Rs 100 million for roads.

In addition, the government of India provided 2,000 tents.

Maoists say they have only received Rs 92.5 million has been paid out for general upkeep over the last two months.

In 100,000 temporary infrastructure development released monies for cantonment organisation offices and internal meetings.

Prasad Mahara has over the months.

Maoist Minister of Information and Communications has been paid out for general upkeep over the last two months.

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Mango fever

The celestial fruit is a perennial hit in the Valley of the Gods

PRANAYA SJB RANA

The star monsoon life form is the mango-crazed Kathmandu resident. This drooling, slavering, often spotty creature in soiled shirts eats, quite literally, tons of mangoes — estimates vary from 9 to 90.

A day.

Mango fever is a trait we share with our South Asian brethren, politics be damned. Mangoes actually originated here some 25 to 30 million years ago according to genetic family tree tracing and carbon-dating of fossils (hey, we said this was serious business).

In myth and in literature we and our neighbours have always celebrated the mango. There is a mango story attached to every major (and even minor) character in folktales and myths. There is not one set of lovers that does not rendezvous in a mango grove.

Consider this gem of more recent vintage: “Ma mahuri hu radha, timi aam ke manjari hau (“I am a bee, Radha, you are a flowering mango tree” — perhaps this loses something in translation.)

The ‘fruit of the gods’ timeline is murky, but makes for a great story—Parvati loved mangoes and missed them so terribly when she came with Shiva down to the Himalayas that her attentive and caring consort brought the celestial fruit to our lowly world to please her. Please do not bother us with the logic of ‘how can mangoes grow in icy Himalayan caves’.

The result of this obsession is that in Kuleswor’s wholesale fruit market today you see everything from perfect Nepali-grown maldahas and dasheris to elusive Indian hapoos and bangaganallis. The kalami, or ‘developed’ commercial varieties are the commonest, including the maldaha, bambaiya, calcuttia, and dasheri, but keep an eye out for the few genuine super-local indigenous varieties that survive, such as the supariya, sinduriya, and keraba. Increasingly, Kathmandu’s mangoes are not Indian, but from the eastern tarai districts, Kapilbastu, and Banke.

Mangoes are cheapest at this time of the year, with maldahas at Rs 40-50 a kilo, which suits most of us fine. There is this hankering after the super-expensive alphonso, or hapoos (a crate of twelve will set you back Rs 700), but those in the know are dismissive of it. “Hapoos are popular among the moneyed, but they’re not terribly tasty,” says Kuleswor wholesaler Sanj Shrestha.

Ah yes, the maldaha, so perfect for relaxed eating. With an average-sized pit and lots of juicy flesh, it can be cut hedgehog style or sliced into long thin pieces. Just remember those wine snobs who fail in blind tastings, though, and don’t kid yourself that you always know what you’re eating. “People will buy any kind of mango if you tell them it is a maldaha,” smirks Jungi Lal, a bicycle vendor. “Few can tell a real one from a fake.”

One way not to look a fool is to explore other varieties. The skinny dasheri is perfect if you lop off one end suck out the flesh from there. The bangaganalli is a seductive plump orange-red. Bombaiyas and calcuttias are good for drinks and shakes. Smaller

Kuladhwani.
varieties like chausa and jarda are better off in pickles.

There are hill mangoes, but opinion split straight down the middle on the relative merits of those from Salyantar in Dhading and those from Kabhre-Sindhupalchok. It’s a moot discussion, though, because you can’t buy hill mangoes in the markets. They come with an added dose of protein—worms.

Everything else about mangoes justifies the habit on health grounds. With up to 15 percent sugar, it’s not a diet fruit, but the mango does have large amounts of vitamins A, B and C, and minerals including zinc, magnesium and potassium. It’s a sort of superfruit, in fact. The mango, its tree bark, its leaves, and even its flowers, all have many therapeutic properties: a whole lot of anti-viral, septic, helminthic, asthmatic and biotic, expectorant, laxative and, with cruel irony both contraceptive and aphrodisiac.

This king among fruits deserves as much attention as it gets. It’s amazing how different varieties of a single fruit can taste, and how much subtle, yet identifiable variation there can be between different batches of the same variety. We should have mango-tasting sessions, like wine and whiskey tastings, and neighbourhood mango-themed potlucks. We should ban bandas during mango season so the precious fruit doesn’t rot away waiting to go places. We should declare one month of every summer Mango Month and be happy, simply because we have mangoes.

That texture, that sweet, sweet taste—what better way to spend the monsoon than at home, with a big pile of the golden fruit, munching, slurping, drooling, and gulping away. Invest in a bib.
The next big bad thing

Agendas and spin determine page one news, but offer no early warning system

Why do I have this funny feeling that we’re all missing the point, that we’re heading for big trouble irrespective, or perhaps because of, our 24/7 media culture, internet-driven ideas and panic tendencies fully stoked by cynical and dishonest world leaders?

Why do I think that the battle with radical Islam is a farce, that the west’s real enemies are poverty, disease, alienation, illiteracy, inequality and the tendency of global elites to plunder and pandering?

Perhaps it’s because I am in the media, and I do surf the internet and occasionally feel that fear that my leaders like to induce in me. I know my limitations as a journalist and information gatherer: I know the power of the panic and the easy loathing of the ‘other’ that comes from paranoia.

In the battle for viewers, rating and advertising dollars, global television and even the best newspapers are at best instruments of the moment. They have little choice but to follow existing or stage-managed agendas. Even when those are clearly false or misleading, if they come from powerful stages or top leaders then they are repeated as if true.

The time fantastic reporters examine the pronouncements of presidents and prime ministers thoroughly, exposing flaws and fallacies, the damage has been done—a country invaded, a village obliterated, economies left in ruins, a death toll accelerated, a process out of control.

From time to time, the media looks for the next ‘big bad thing’ and gives it headline coverage. But it’s almost always too little, too late or just plain wrong. Climate change only battled its way into popular consciousness because of Al Gore’s film, An Inconvenient Truth and the efforts of committed scientists, writers and activists to force the issue past corporate and US presidential malignant denial.

Public health threats like SARS and bird flu pandemics become matters of concern when people die but not before, when it might have been possible to save lives and establish a truly effective and humane health care system for the planet.

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Concerns about genetic engineering arise in mainstream media consciousness years after products made in laboratories reach the market and make activists angry. A leading US scientist himself is applying for a patent on the first wholly created form of life. Bad news is, it’s a bacterium. Made from chemicals in the lab.

What isn’t, is front page news. Instead, we have the latest line on Iraq, Afghanistan, terror, and Paris Hilton. Endless momentum, diversion, spin. There’s no sense of the real flow of history, or the truth of a situation. It’s all reduced to what one side says, and the other side’s response, to numbers of dead and injured, to scripted rhetoric that adds nothing to comprehension or leadership.

You can find attempts to broaden this paltry agenda throughout the media, but in obscure places, back pages, late broadcasts, obscure corners of the internet. But without the walkup of the big headline or the expensive news anchor’s sonorous tones, consciousness is not raised to anything like a critical mass.

Individual journalists, editors, and producers struggle every day to get insightful and helpful material into their medium, but often fall afoul of the daily demands for sensation, sentiment, and voyeurism. Yet the troubled times we live in require so much more. The next big bad thing might just be lurking, and all we know for sure is that it will take us by surprise. ●

Improving water mills has a domino effect

Milli Durga Simha Mabah of Chalal, Parasaun knew there was more grain in the village than he could really grind. So, the 74-year-old (above) decided to get help improving the water mill he inherited from his father.

Today, Mabah gets to work as early as 5AM, and everyday he grinds about 450kg of grain for an average of eight families. “Sometimes,” he smiles, “there’s no time even to blink.” Now, his son does not have to till other people’s fields to ensure the family has enough grain. Instead, he can drive a taxi in Kathmandu, which helps bring in more cash.

The women of Chalal are ecstatic, because the new mill has given them back their time. They’re happy to pay Mabah one-fifteenth of the grain he grinds for them. “You have no idea how much time we used to spend at the traditional ghattas,” says 49-year-old Subhadra Karki putting her doko full of grain next to the mill. “Sometimes, there’s no time even to blink.”

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“The improved water mills grind grain at 20-35kg per hour—up from 10-20kg per hour, hull paddy, extract oil, function as sawmills, and generate up to 3kW electricity. Of CRTN’s improved water mills, 237 can do all of this (harnessing electricity generation), and 31 successfully generate electricity.

In some places, polluting diesel engines are being replaced with clean electricity. It takes two improved water mills to replace a single-diesel mill. CRTN estimates that one such switch reduces CO2 emissions by 4.8 tons per year.

A project like this could run into a number of problems in part because while ghattas perform a valuable community function, and often generate resources such as electricity that will be used communally, they are privately-owned. Improvements are made by individuals but are in the interest of the entire village.

In response, an integrated private-public partnership is emerging to help improve and manage the output of water mills. While CRTN designs and implements the changes, the millers must provide the raw materials themselves. They use local service centres.

Wheelsof change

M ALLIKA ARYAL IN KABHRE

Since 2003, the Centre for Renewable Technology Nepal has helped improve over 2,400 water mills all over Nepal, close to 10 percent of all the ghattas in the country. As a direct result, about 100,000 rural Nepali households save time and earn more money. For its efforts, the organisation has been named one of the ten nominees this year for the prestigious Ashden Awards for sustainable energy.

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Centre (AEPC) will subsidise this 250,000. The government’s but serve the tea costs about Rs kitting a water mill out to do all receives a Rs 9,000 subsidy while faster—costs Rs 15-20,000, and getting a mill to grind more and available.

The simplest improvement— program activities. Rai believes agency SNV, which advises, Subarna Rai of the Dutch aid sustainable because everyone has manufacturers, and financing institutions, and take advantage of the government subsidy institutions, and take advantage of water mill owners and manufacturers are directly involved, CRTN supports and advises. The project remains sustainable because everyone has certain responsibilities.” says Subarna Rai of the Dutch aid agency SNV, which advises, monitors, and evaluates the program activities. Rai believes these projects are perfect examples of public-private partnerships. Ensuring millers’ rights is a key factor in making sure the system will work well in future years. Shiva Saran Shrestha, secretary of the Kubilu Ghatta Owners’ Association, explains: “Mills are owned by poor families, they have no papers or certification, so technically it’s not their property. And that means no insurance, no right over the water they use.”

But supporting individual millers is cumbersome and costly and, CRTN believes, only half the battle. “What we have to do is build up local confidence, the owners’ associations have been doing just that,” says Ganesh Ram Shrestha, executive director of CRTN. The organisation supports eight Ghatta Owners’ Associations (GOA).

The other factor is keeping the money coming in—not all mill owners can even afford the subsidised cost of improvement. Govind Raj Pokharel, executive director of the AEPC, which provides financial, technical, and policy support to the program, says micro finance institutions, DDCs, and village cooperatives need to work together to find solutions.

CRTN plans to improve 5,000 ghataas by 2008. If they win the Ashden Award, they say the money will go to a pilot project to test a lower-cost improvement that allows a water mill to generate electricity, which can be stored in batteries for household lighting purposes.

Kuldevi in Sindhu, a 68-year-old Narendra Bhatti, can’t contain his glee as he tells us about the “singing and dancing and laughing” that has followed the electrification of 40 households through water mill improvement. On the other edge of the ridge, there are houses still lit by spattering lanterns. “We refused to live in darkness anymore, so we took the initiative and installed the system. If we can do it,” says Bhatti, “so can they. Anyone can.”

The wide range of locales and participants, from artisans in the village to business and government types in swanky hotels, belies the highly unscientific nature of the poll, which applied only one rule rigorously throughout: wait patiently until the second tumbler of whiskey is well underway before posing the first question. “So, where do you think all the guns are?” is a great way to break the ice at parties. No, the Hand has yet to meet anyone who believes the Maoists surrendered more than a fraction of their arms. Most say the UN containers are full of rejects while the quality weaponry is stashed in several locales across the country. “If they joined the government in good faith, why didn’t they turn in the guns?” World-weary fatalism, second nature to Valley residents after so many years of bad politics, is evinced in the shrugs and admission it’s likely these weapons will soon be used against the police, army, and people.

And where is the cabbage? Once upon a time this was a real mystery, as the UN camps filled with Maobabies clutching pressure cookers and bits of pipe they called bombs instead of trained fighters with real guns. The sudden appearance of the YCL answers this question handsomely. “So, who is in the camps, anyway?” Simple, comes the chorus, village kids who should be in school, some 34,000 of them, hoping to get the promised dollar a day for their part in the ruse. Time to slake the thirst and affect a look of heartfelt frustration, “but why hasn’t the government enforced law and order all along?” This question could only be asked by a naïve outsider and the answer is both unanimous and patronising; because it is weak, wracked with rivalries, and terrified of being consumed by the highly motivated Maoists. If my drinking buddies aren’t sympathetic to the curious quire by now they’ll never be, so the Hand launches his final attempt at understanding the mysterious East.

“Just imagine the enormous amount of cash extorted from businesses, schools, factories, hotels, departmental stores, radio stations, newspapers, coldstores, taxi drivers, and us; where does all the money go?” The ensuing silence is eloquent, as even the most boisterous fall quiet. Some furiously slide off to the bar for another double while others appear to contemplate the vast sums involved and mayhem this money could finance.

A few solemn sips later, the Hands wonders aloud, “Maybe they should change their name to CPN (Moneypad).” Pandemonium ensues to the tune of clinking glasses and raucous laughter, endorsing the suggestion that it all comes down to the cash. No-one is surprised another political party has sold its soul for easy money.

Some say the Maoists are stockpiling arms for the next war, others say they buy gold, adding to the tons already collected from businesses, schools, factories, hotels, departmental stores, radio stations, newspapers, coldstores, taxi drivers, and us; where does all the money go?”

South Asia Times
Caste is again casting its shadow over India’s politics. Caste-based ‘reservations’ in education and government employment are supposed to benefit India’s most deprived, but have hardened, rather than eroded, India’s ancient system of discrimination.

Every now and then, particularly before elections, caste groups demand to be placed on the list of ‘other backwards classes’ (OBC’s) to benefit from these reservations. Political parties promise reservations for ever more castes and say they will to extend the policy to admissions into elite educational institutions and the private sector.

Many intellectuals and politicians consider India’s increasing mobilisation along caste lines a welcome assertion of identity and a move towards true equality. Some argue that the recent rise of the lower castes in northern Indian politics and the implementation of reservations by the central government are a silent revolution, and that caste politics is secular and a bulwark against religious sectarianism.

But whether caste is a good indicator of socioeconomic deprivation remains unexamined. The protagonists of caste politics and caste-based public policy offer only small-sample surveys that can be grossly misleading in the context of a huge country characterised by monumental diversity. Moreover, these studies typically pool castes into three large groups, which distorts the real picture.

Since India gained its independence, the government has systematically refused to collect sufficient data on the socioeconomic aspects of caste. The huge mass of evidence in the censuses and land revenue settlement reports of the period from 1901 to 1931 lies ignored.

If caste is a good indicator of depravation now, it should have been even clearer in the past. But statistical analysis of this evidence—the only accessible macro-level quantitative data for the whole country—does not confirm caste as a clear indicator of deprivation.

For example, less than one-third of workers in this period followed their traditional caste occupations. Workers belonging to each caste pursued a wide variety of occupations, although agriculture provided the bulk of employment.

Access to land was uneven. Farmers, the single largest occupational group in most castes, were highly differentiated in terms of size and economic status. Holdings sizes were similar for most upper castes and some lower castes. Thus, the economic status of households varied a great deal within each caste. The majority of peasants belonging to any caste, upper or lower, were poor.

The most obvious fact in the data is the great disparity in the economic positions of castes sharing the same ritual rank. Such differences are particularly acute for middle-ranking castes, which are now called OBCs. Some dalit castes have higher economic status than others. The data shows an amazing degree of heterogeneity among backward castes. In some regions the lowest economic positions were occupied by some “backward” castes, not by untouchables.

Caste has not been an indicator of material deprivation, even during the early decades of the twentieth century. Boosters of caste politics claim that it is not economic deprivation but the social backwardness from which these castes have historically suffered that makes caste reservations necessary.

But not all lower castes suffered from an equal degree of ritual handicap. There was an elaborate gradation and hierarchy among the middle-ranking and even untouchable castes, which governed interaction between them and kept inter-caste socialisation to a minimum. Historically, the rich in each low caste emulated the customs and rituals of the upper castes, such as child marriage, dowry, and prevention of widows remarrying. Usually, well-off sections of low castes broke away to form new castes and achieved higher ritual status.

By using caste as a criterion in public policy, India’s government is effectively treating the rich and the poor equally, thereby conveying benefits to the former. This helps co-opt the elite among the lower castes to the ruling coalition, and keeps the poor divided along caste lines. But it is hypocritical to argue that this does anything to eliminate poverty.

Pradipta Chaudhury, currently a visiting fellow in the department of economic history at the London School of Economics, is professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University.
A month after Sarkozy won the French elections, it's hard to imagine Paris still being the most romantic place on earth. Yet, myth-building projects like Paris, Je T'Aime would have you believe otherwise. Never mind the serious immigrant issues, rising VAT, or the glaring social and economic polarization between different arrondissements. What is important is that in Paris, the city of pyrotechnic charms, you can find love anywhere.

Cheap sho(r)ts

In film, we'll always have Paris—unfortunately

How wrong can you go with this line-up and a decent concept, you ask? Awfully wrong. Sure, the shorts offer a brilliant array of characters, ranging from mimes to vampires. But your acquaintance with them is a little like speed-dating—the multiplicity is intriguing, but not really satisfying at the end.

The problem with Paris Je T'Aime isn’t just the patchiness of the shorts. It is that most of the vignettes are, simply put, unsuccessful as shorts. But while some are insubstantial and completely forgettable, there are a few that may well redeem the film. Joel and Ethan Coen’s ‘Tuileries’ shows remarkable handling of humour, with Steve Buscemi consummately portraying a humiliated American tourist. Walther Salles and Daniela Thomas’s ‘Lein du 16ème’ starring Catalina Sandino Moreno (Maria Full of Grace) poignantly contemplates the irony of motherly love for a runaway.

Olivier Assayas brings his short-film mastery to ‘Quartier des Enfants Rouges’. And Gérard Depardieu’s ‘Quartier Latin’ is an excellent depiction of the caustic decorum of a divorcing couple. These delights are, however, lost in the hotchpotch of other duds.

Ultimately, the idea of a mythical city through the lenses of some of the most talented filmmakers of our time does not do enough. Sense, if not sensibility, is in short supply here. It’s hard to tell if Paris, Je T’Aime is an elegy to love, an offbeat effort, or just an unofficial plug for L’Office de Tourisme.
**EXHIBITIONS**
- Saransha: an exhibition of paintings by BFA final year students at Kathmandu University, until 29 June at Barye Fiesta, Naan. 4413959
- Art-as-Object: a functional art exhibition by Nutan Singh. 28 June-7 July, 11AM-6PM, at GIZ/CED Veer Bhawan, Sanepa. 4700835

**EVENTS**
- *Nowhere in Africa* a film by Caroline Link. 22 June, 6.45PM at the Lazimpat Gallery Cafe.
- *Greater Nepal* a documentary by Manoj Pandit followed by discussion. 22 June, 3.5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107699
- *CSGN monthly lecture* on environementalism with Vibek Raj Maurya and Anil Rau. 23 June, 4-6PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- *School Bullying* a talk program by Nili Rana. 26 June at The New Era, Bastrapul. 9851023958
- *Art of Living* basic course by Rishi Nitya Pragya from Bangalore. 26 June-1 July, 6-9AM and 6-11AM on Saturdays at Agrawal Bhawan, Kamalpokhari. Rs 3000, 5520668
- *Film South Asia 2007* Festival of South Asian documentaries, 11-14 October, call for entries deadline 30 June. www.filmsouthasia.org

**DINING**
- *Jazz at Jatra* every Saturday 7PM onwards.
- *Rashmi and Khitch* live at Latin Quarter Corner, Darbar Marg, every Saturday. 7.30PM. 4243225
- *Soul of Raga* live classical and fusion music, every Friday night at Nathu’s Kitchen, The Organic Bistro. 4423903
- *Open mic night* at Via Via Cafe, every Friday, 8PM onwards.
- *Live music* at the Red Onion Bar. Wednesdays from 8PM with Yani and Zigme Lepcha. 4419071
- *Ciney Gurung* every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex. 7PM. 5531409
- *DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers* live at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234

**WEEKEND WEATHER**
- *KATHMANDU VALLEY*
- Friday afternoon’s satellite picture shows the sky over the Valley, for example, is 100mm short of its 261mm June quota. The rainfall this week in west Nepal was welcomed with open arms—it made the scorching days 5 degrees cooler. The rest of the country received isolated thundershowers and some rainfall at night, but not as much as usual. The Valley, for example, saw 100mm short of its 261mm June quota. Thursday afternoon’s satellite picture shows the sky over the Bay gathering strength to send another lot of moisture-laden clouds to the north. This may reach us early next week if the clouds to the north. This may reach us early next week if the...
HAPPENINGS

UNHAPPY FAMILIES: Among the 200-strong crowd of protestors outside Baluwatar on Wednesday demanding to know the whereabouts of their missing relatives were Ruby Shrestha, whose husband Rajendra Mali is missing, and her mother Indira who is petitioning to find out what happened to her son, Nanga Ram and friend Rajan Dongol.

AMBASSADORIAL ASSURANCE: China’s ambassador to Nepal Zheng Xianglin speaks to the press at Reporter’s Club on Wednesday. Zheng said China would respect whatever decisions Nepal made about its internal affairs.

A LONG TRADITION: The Rato Machhendranath chariot being taken for a spin around Lagankhel on Wednesday evening in preparation for the jatra's grand finale on Thursday. Machhendranath, who is also called Karunamaya and, in the Buddhist tradition, Lokeswara, must be kept happy if the Valley is to have a good monsoon.

TOP OF THE CLASS: WAVE Mister University Nepal 2007 Hembung Rai gets keys to his new Yamaha Gladiator JA from Vishnu Agarwal, CEO of Morang Autoworks at the finals on Saturday. Swekshya Adhikari, the new WAVE Miss University Nepal 2007 won a scooter. The winners fly to South Korea this weekend to represent Nepal’s universities in the international contest.
Burgher King

The weekly Donkey just can’t figure out why we are working ourselves into a frothing frenzy about Girija and his Baby King proposal. After all he sent up that trial balloon in February which your loyal Ass had duly pricked. Putting Princess Sruti’s daughter on the throne may do the trick, but even that is iffy. This may be an opportune moment for kingji to start making alternative plans. There are plenty of examples of monarchs who have gone back to being commoners. With his significant assets, our businessman king may actually have a headstart in investing and creating jobs for Nepalis. Even as a tyrant, KingG wasn’t very successful, he may actually make not a bad tycoon.

So why does our kingmaker prime minister keep prying open his monarchist can of worms, especially in front of Pakistani journalists of all people? Our prime minister may be President Carter’s hero, but he is flogging a dead horse. And what are the Paki journalists doing here, anyways, shouldn’t they be back home struggling for their own freedom? Apparently they were here to lobby FNJ to make a strong statement about freedom of press (or lack thereof) in Pakistan. FNJ obliged and dashed off a self-righteous statement which brought a swift rebuke from Islamabad suggesting FNJ mind its own business.

Here, for once, the Ass’s sympathies are with the Pakistanis. At a time when Nepali journalists are being internally displaced, getting death threats from criminal gangs, and newspapers have been forced by Baddies to suspend publication, FNJ’s should be protecting our own freedom first.

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The Ass does give credit where it is due once in a while, and this week it must go to Comrade Hasiya who is probably the only member of the cabinet showing some strategic thinking through her Ministry of Psychological Planning and Deconstruction. She has just released a ‘Vision Document’ for the next two years to finish the Midhill East-West Highway, construct North-South road corridors, and push a Strategic Road Network. Ms Yummy has gone to the heart of the issue and drawn up a realistic do-able plan.

So what’s with us ethnocentric Nepalis when we go abroad? Hanging out at the waterfront in Doha or Kowloon, exactly as we do on the Bagmati bridge. Gulf employers aren’t great about labour rights, so our diaspora comrades went on strike with a 15-point demand and promptly got deported.

Anyone planning to fly out on Formerly-royal Nepal Airlines in the coming weeks, don’t say the Ass didn’t warn you about humungous delays. Between the ministry, the eight-party cabinet and KNACK management no one can agree on who going to get the cut on a new plane lease and the contract to overhaul the airline’s spare Rolls Royce RB211 jet engine lying in a Hong Kong hangar. If all this sounds like the mid-1990s, you’re right, our democracy is back to Square One. Time to put the flag-carrier out of its misery and start afresh.

Next time, they’ll probably burn tyres, mistaking Daharan for Dharan and call for a Saudi-wide band. Even on the US west coast a certain janajati group decided to set up its own association to differentiate it from other bahun-dominated groupings. However, the registration process had to be abandoned when the convenors found out that only three of the 400 prospective members were legally in America.

The weekly Donkey just can’t figure out why we are working ourselves into a frothing frenzy about Girija and his Baby King proposal. After all he sent up that trial balloon in February which your loyal Ass had duly pricked. Putting Princess Sruti’s daughter on the throne may do the trick, but even that is iffy. This may be an opportune moment for kingji to start making alternative plans. There are plenty of examples of monarchs who have gone back to being commoners. With his significant assets, our businessman king may actually have a headstart in investing and creating jobs for Nepalis. Even as a tyrant, KingG wasn’t very successful, he may actually make not a bad tycoon.

So why does our kingmaker prime minister keep prying open his monarchist can of worms, especially in front of Pakistani journalists of all people? Our prime minister may be President Carter’s hero, but he is flogging a dead horse. And what are the Paki journalists doing here, anyways, shouldn’t they be back home struggling for their own freedom? Apparently they were here to lobby FNJ to make a strong statement about freedom of press (or lack thereof) in Pakistan. FNJ obliged and dashed off a self-righteous statement which brought a swift rebuke from Islamabad suggesting FNJ mind its own business.

Here, for once, the Ass’s sympathies are with the Pakistanis. At a time when Nepali journalists are being internally displaced, getting death threats from criminal gangs, and newspapers have been forced by Baddies to suspend publication, FNJ’s should be protecting our own freedom first.

The Ass does give credit where it is due once in a while, and this week it must go to Comrade Hasiya who is probably the only member of the cabinet showing some strategic thinking through her Ministry of Psychological Planning and Deconstruction. She has just released a ‘Vision Document’ for the next two years to finish the Midhill East-West Highway, construct North-South road corridors, and push a Strategic Road Network. Ms Yummy has gone to the heart of the issue and drawn up a realistic do-able plan.

So what’s with us ethnocentric Nepalis when we go abroad? Hanging out at the waterfront in Doha or Kowloon, exactly as we do on the Bagmati bridge. Gulf employers aren’t great about labour rights, so our diaspora comrades went on strike with a 15-point demand and promptly got deported.

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