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MIN BAJRACHARYA

A November election depends on better law and order

KIRAN NEPAL and JB PUN

There's good news and bad about the 22 November date for elections to the constituent assembly. On the upside, a deal looks imminent with both the janajatis and madhesis. The Nepalese Federation of Indigenous Nationalities is now flexible on its demand for full-proportional representation, the government is listening, and a consensus looks set: a combination of proportional voting and the first-past-the-post ballot system. Some janajati groups with tiny populations could be accommodated in the 17 seats set aside for nominated members to the CA.

MJF central working committee member Upendra Jha is also upbeat about a deal with the government. "Sure, the government can talk to the armed groups first, but the threat of secession is just a bargaining chip," he says. "Eventually we'll get exactly what we want in terms of proportional representation." The resolution of the janajati demands is being seen as another factor in defusing the madhes crisis. "Once they agree on representation, the Tharus and most tarai communities will come over, except the Yadavs and the Muslims" says an analyst. The Election Commission meanwhile is gearing up to work long days to complete its

homework by end-September: laying down rules and regulations, and the code of conduct; staff and monitor selection and training; preparation of voter education and other election-related materials. Then comes the final push: voter registration, getting officials out to the 240 election areas, fulfilling even part of the EC's ambitious plan to visit every household in the country, printing the ballots, and so on. Some conditions are fixed. The voter list of about 13.6 million prepared for the proposed June election stands, as does the number of registered parties (62). There's a general agreement that party registration could be reopened if, say, an armed group in the tarai decided to enter mainstream politics. The EC will need 120,000 staff and 70,000 members of the

security forces to conduct the elections to 480 seats simultaneously across the country in this Rs 6 billion exercise. EC officials will come among civil servants, teachers, and semi-governmental organisations. Law and order remains bad news. The EC is stipulating a 'peaceful' environment for the elections. Election commissioner Nilkantha Uprety says it would be one in which "there are no obstacles to the election process and the workings of the EC, the parties, and voters." Chief Election Commissioner Bhoj Raj Pokhrel is keeping his eyes peeled. "We will install our own monitoring mechanism to ensure that the security provided by the government matches our expectations in run-up to the elections," he said at a press meet shortly after the announcement of the date. ●

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FULL SPEED AHEAD

Prime Minister Girijababu wanted the polls to be held on Monday, 26 November. Chief Election Commissioner Bhoj Rajji thought Friday the 23rd would be more appropriate. Ignoring both suggestions, the cabinet picked Thursday, 22 November.

Superstition may have had something to do with the date. Thursday is dedicated to Brihaspati, a sage worshipped for his sagacity towards rebels. What better day to let Maoists test their strength in free and fair elections?

The hue and cry over YCL excesses has been largely justified. But it requires more than media rebukes to counter the Red Guard menace in the coming months. The district administration needs to be energised and the morale of Nepal Police boosted. This may necessitate a change of leadership in the Home Ministry right away. Creating faith in the machinery of the government is the best antidote to Maoist vigilante prosecution and kangaroo justice.

Engaging rebellious groups in meaningful negotiations, through intermediaries if necessary, needs top priority of the political leadership. It will be difficult to conduct peaceful polls without at least the passive acquiescence of armed groups creating mayhem in the madhes.

It's getting late for the political parties to launch a full-scale political mobilisation. Political training for party officials, voter education and consensus-building are all fine and dandy but there is no substitute to a door-to-door electoral campaign. The monsoon isn't the best time to venture into Nepali countryside, but urban-dwellers have no rice planting to do. We can't put this forcefully enough: parties have to go back to their voters, ask their forgiveness, promise to mend their ways, and show that they are serious about building the future.

The Nepali people have been duped so often in the past that they will need some convincing to accept that the November polls are for real. While the election juggernaut moves full speed ahead, a perceptible improvement in service delivery is necessary. It shouldn't be too difficult to augment water supply, reduce blackout hours, repair roads, or crackdown on crime. Reducing the petroleum shortage is urgent to restore faith in the system.

In the countryside, the people don't expect change overnight.

But they want to see a sign that there is a change in attitude among Kathmandu-based politicians. Mainstreaming the Maoists and addressing the concerns of the marginalised is essential, as is law and order.

But what the people need the most is at least the perception that the elections will mean an improvement in their lives and the lives of their children.



KIRAN PANDAY

All in the mind

Looking beyond just the physical scars of conflict

Badri Chapagain, the district health officer of Jumla, received a phone call as we finished dinner in his quarters last month. The hospital was summoning him to confirm the cause of death of a suspected suicide.



GUEST COLUMN
Brandon Kohrt

Next day, reports on Radio Karnali and bazar talk revealed that an ex-Maoist, Sagar, had hanged himself in the room where his wife was sleeping. Sagar's suicide echoed the distress of the many mental patients we saw at a three-day health camp in Jumla organised by the district health office and World Vision at the request of CPN-M leaders to coincide with their Karnali exhibition. With the flag of the Maoist Republican People's Health Movement fluttering above us, we examined cadres and locals suffering from anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other psychiatric problems.

As in the rest of the country, Jumla lacks a basic mental health infrastructure. The approximately

30 psychiatrists in Nepal are all in major cities. Few health post workers have training in mental illness. Psychiatric medications are rare outside urban centres. Most psychiatric patients in the Jumla health camp will need to get their medications from Nepalganj.

The tremendous burden of mental illness in rural Nepal makes the lack of services more worrying. Even before the conflict, rates of mental illness were high. In 2000, 38 percent of women and 24 percent of men in Jumla suffered from depression. Conflict has only exacerbated the mental health crises. Eighty percent of internally displaced people in the midwest suffer from depression, while 55 percent have PTSD. Recent research by Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation Nepal has found that 60 percent of child soldiers have high levels of PTSD symptoms, while 33 percent of children never associated with armed groups have elevated symptoms.

There is hope for addressing both conflict related and other mental health problems. The first step is raising awareness. Non-governmental psychosocial experts are training local staff in mental health issues but there is a worrying gap in awareness among professionals and Kathmandu-based staff. The stigma travels up to the level of donors; a colleague recently advised me not use the term 'mental health' in a proposal or the project would not be funded. A hospital administrator told a colleague, "It is worse to be a crazy doctor (a psychiatrist) than a crazy patient."

Chapagain in Jumla is an exception. The doctor says his most rewarding clinical experience is to see very

depressed patients return to his clinic smiling, laughing, and interacting with their family after starting treatment.

Health post staff need mental health knowledge as well. The previous Institute of Medicine and United Mission to Nepal Community Mental Health Program served this purpose, but the government now needs to increase funding for the training of community health workers.

Psychosocial counsellors are also needed. Jumla is fortunate to have two of them who, a recent study shows, reduced children's depression by 21 percent and PTSD by 31 percent. Sadly, with money running out, their counselling program is in jeopardy.

Quality control is also crucial. Some NGO staff refer to themselves as psychosocial counsellors after only a weeklong orientation. Government and professional organisations should develop a certification system for the range of personnel acting in the mental health field.

The health camp in Jumla represents a step toward collaborative and beneficial care. Continued local activities are necessary. In addition, the donor and NGO community need to view mental health as a human right for which all persons should have access to services.

We should be able to tell the families of Sagar and other women, men, and children with psychological distress that in the new Nepal suicide prevention, and other mental health services are priorities. ●

Brandon Kohrt is an MD-PhD candidate at Emory University and a research technical advisor to Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation Nepal (www.tponepal.org).

Surviving donor dross

Expect DINGOs to run amok in the run-up to elections

After dismissing the Maoists as 'anti-government guerrillas' for a decade, the Chinese seem to have decided to establish fraternal ties with a party that swears by their Great Helmsman.

With characteristic flair they are hosting uncrowned prince Prakash and Ananta. One is Comrade Awesome's son, the other his aide-de-camp. Ultra-nationalists of both the extreme right and left in Nepal believe that kowtowing to China is an effective way of countering Indian influence.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

The guarded observations of Ambassador Zheng Xianglin ('China won't tolerate foreign intervention in Nepal', From the Nepali Press, #353) are being stretched to mean things that we wish to be true. But, alas, our northern neighbour may have different priorities. Perhaps Beijing is more

alarmed by an invasion of western advisors, busybodies, consultants, and do-gooders than any Indian domination.

This fear is probably shared by New Delhi which looks at how the goras and their DINGOs (donor-inspired ngos) are running the show in Nepal. Rakesh Sood, the possible successor to Shiv Shanker Mukherjee, is currently Indian envoy in Kabul. He has seen the mess that DINGOs, often working at cross purposes, can create during political transitions.

The expansion of foreign-funded ngos have begun to worry the political class as well. Addressing the convention of the Democratic NGO Federation that has been created by NC sympathisers to counter existing outfits of similar nature this week, Koirala asked our social entrepreneurs to be more transparent in their activities.

But who will bell the big cats: ingos that spend astronomical sums to bring personalities like Jimmy Carter to Nepal and FLAMINGOs (fly-by-night ingos) that sponsor daily consultations at various five-

star venues?

The 12-point deal between the seven-party alliance and Maoists in November 2005 happened without inputs from foreign conflict experts here. That should have stopped do-gooder donors in their tracks. And for a while they kept a low-profile, and hired talented locals. Some of the most promising Nepali journalists writing in English deserted the media en masse and became overnight analysts, program officers, project managers, and inclusion advocates. They are doing fine as liaison officers, but it is the impending invasion of foreign parachutists that we have to beware of.

Unsurprisingly, most foreign advisers are cynical and find fault with law and order. What they don't realise is there never has been rule of law in this country. The law has been the king's command and order administrative fiat to fulfil the wishes of Kathmandu's power elite. Law and order won't prevail just because donors make constituent assembly

elections conditional upon it. Creating faith in the future is much more important.

Advisers prosper when they can predict a catastrophe and convince their clients that they possess the ability to avert it. They have a vested interest in fanning doom. In this they are dutifully aided by DINGOs during trainings for political leaders, civil society, NGO entrepreneurs, and the social innovation vanguard.

Some of the political nonsense these pricey professionals spout has to be heard to be believed. Presumably on their advice, a consortium of donors is planning to fund a massive voter's education campaign. What we need instead is an intensive political mobilisation to reassure voters, raise their hopes, and build confidence. This is something that only political parties can do, despite all their deficiencies.

The class of intellectual comprador created by short-term consultants will perhaps push for more opinion polls, wider consultations, fresh hearings. These activities provide a convenient alibi for laidback politicians to shirk from doing what they are supposed to do at a time like this: go back to the people.

Donors will spend their money in the way they like. But at least till the polls the political parties must ask their cadre to desist from attending donor binges and DINGO jamborees. It's not just a waste of time, it is counterproductive. ●

LETTERS

STOP PRESS

The pen and paper have become inferior to swords and bullets, and the press has fallen prey to politicians who have sold their souls for easy money ('Stop Press', 'Pressure on the press,' #354).

This should concern first and foremost the moderate Maoist leaders who many people, like me, sincerely believe can and want to contribute to the making of a New Nepal through mainstream politics (sans feudalism, monarchy, and so on). If they do not speak up and influence the hardliners now, it will be too late for them later. Their faces have given the Maoists the benefit of the doubt so far and could attract middle and lower middle class city-based voters in the upcoming elections to the constituent assembly.

But if it turns out that most of the leaders do not believe in the people's mandate, that is a different ballgame altogether. In that case, this is a wake-up call for every freedom loving citizen who stood firm against the king's autocratic rule and his efforts to gag the independent media.

Sandesh Hamal, Lalitpur

● I was very surprised to see the numbers you reported as well as the tactics used by Maoists in infiltrating different business houses ('Stop press', 'Messy gamble', #354). But more alarming was that business houses also request the Maoists to help resolve or settle rivalries. If this continues one day all the NCs, UMLs, Rajabadis, and No-badis will be out, and there will be only Maoists everywhere. This trick will clearly work as long as the NC and UML continue their fighting-as-usual for posts and *bhagbanda* for government positions.

The Maoists are entering our kitchens, telling us what we should eat, and when we can do so. I am very frightened. I hope we never have to hear

that *Nepali Times* has had the same experience. King G's goons could not infiltrate media houses, but the Maoists have done so. Makes sense, given that they want ultimate totalitarian control over Nepal and Nepalis.

G Pokharel, West Virginia, USA



● In times like these, when even reputed media houses will not come clean about precisely how their editorial freedom is being gagged, your last issue was the kind of hard-hitting, in-depth, no-holds-barred journalism we've come to expect from *Nepali Times*—sometimes. At other times you seem a little somnambulist. For the sake of the country, if not your readers, please keep this up.

Name withheld, email

OPINIONATED

CK Lal's snobbish dismissal of quantitative social sciences ('Footnotes to history', State of the State, #353) diminishes the weight of his own 'opinion pieces'. An

opinion poll gives insight into mass opinion, which might be different from a personal one. As an effective means of gauging public opinion, polls are carried out in many democratic countries to provide policymakers valuable feedback.

Public opinions polls are even more relevant for Nepal in the current situation because the leaders and parties who are running the state do not have a recent mandate through elections. Their claim that they represent the aspirations of all sections of Nepalis has not been tested at the polls. Those who were elected, were out into power in 1998—their mandate expired in 2003. The Maoists cannot claim to have been elected even once, except perhaps Mr Mahara in 1991.

Under such conditions, opinion polls conducted rigorously using proven scientific methods help register mass opinion on political parties, leaders, and various issues. Argue with the methodology, sample representativeness, and conclusions of the polls—that's more appropriate than blithely dismissing scientific surveys. Mr Lal of all the people should know that without the backing of such quantitative numbers, 'opinion' pieces remain just so much 'hot air'.

Shiva Bisangkhe, email

BREATHING ROOM

Kathmandu can be a 'green' city if the government stops the construction of ugly concrete houses everywhere ('Breathing room', #353). People only build these thinking they will make money by renting out the rooms. Who cares about how you get to your house—or, more importantly, other peoples'? As long as you can get there, don't bother about keeping the back lanes clean for pedestrians who need to pass by. Squeeze every bit of land you can in your neighbourhood instead of

graciously leaving some for the government to build better roads.

If the government wants to make Kathmandu better, I think it needs to raze the city and rebuild it. I'm okay with my house being a casualty. That's extreme, yes, and I realise destroying everything is unfeasible. But the government can take other steps—resettle people elsewhere to make certain improvements in some other places. Ban the construction of concrete houses in the Valley's historic choks and bahas that form the essence of Kathmandu's identity. People like the writer of this article Pranaya Rana can make a difference and help wake up the people, and the government.

S Tuladhar, email

CORRECTIONS

The photograph in 'Long way home' (#353) should have been credited to Kumar Luitel.

Proceeds from Bijaya Baidya's shows often go to charity, but no tickets are on sale for the concert on 29 June ('East-meets-west is back east', #354).

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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JOHN PLAYERS

SURYA NEPAL

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Youthful rivalry

Tension between the YCL and the student wings of other parties are intensifying



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

FACE OFF: Members of the NC-affiliated Nepal Student Union march through Kathmandu to shore up support for their 29 June mass meeting at Basantapur (above), while Young Communist League members go on one of their periodic anti-government chants (below).



JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

With election dates announced and as turf wars begin, clashes between the youth wings of the Maoists and other political parties are intensifying across the country.

The mainstream political parties and their student unions say they fear the YCL's systematic intimidation will increase in the run-up to the elections. Deployment of student unions by their parent parties could spur violence in the run-up to the elections.

Already, run-ins between the league and the NC-affiliated Nepal Student Union (NSU), in particular, are escalating. On 15 June the NSU's former president, Guru Raj Ghimire, was assaulted by the YCL. "I just spoke out against the YCL's anti-political anarchy," says Ghimire.

Popular NSU leader and former

general secretary Gagan Thapa says there have been four attacks on NSU members in Kathmandu in recent days and accuses the Maoists of provoking his group. The Maoist leadership has denied involvement in Ghimire's beating.

The NSU's just-elected president Pradip Poudel warns of retaliation, while other senior members we spoke with say they are starting a "peaceful" offensive against YCL excesses. They understand the sensitive nature of transitional phase, they say, but echo Ghimire's caveat that, they "will not be silent spectators for too long". Some of this posturing is the result of tensions between the Tarun Dal and the NSU after former Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka proposed that the two NC-affiliated groups be merged to form a 'Peace Army'. The NSU is scheduled to hold a gathering at Basantapur on Friday and NC president and Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is to address the meeting.

In the early days of the peace process, the YCL and Maoist militia were attacking workers of the UML-affiliated All Nepal National Free Student Union (ANNFSU). But now the UML's union seems to have made peace with the YCL. Former ANNFSU general secretary Thakur Gaire says his group and the YCL have been meeting to sort out problems as they arise. He dismisses chances of unity with the NSU against the Maoist YCL.

But though most party leaders speak out against the YCL in public, we are told that in eight-party meetings this does not translate into pressure on the Maoists to rein in their cadre as no one wants to alienate the Maoists or weaken the alliance.

Before leaving Nepal last week, the UN's Office of the High Commission on Human Rights, Lena Sundh, handed a damning report on the YCL to Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal. "The human rights abuses committed by the YCL are contributing to a climate of fear and intimidation," the report said, expressing worries that the threat of violence would poison the atmosphere for elections.

As a November date starts to look possible and parties plan their return to the districts, everyone agrees the threats have to stop. And the frontline of the campaign might well be skirmishes between the YCL and the party-affiliated students. ●

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Water wheel winner

The Centre for Renewable Energy Nepal has won second prize at the international Ashden Award for sustainable energy for its work improving 2,400 water mills ('Wheels of change', #354). Lumin Shrestha, director of CRTN received the Enterprise Award from former US Vice President Al Gore in the Royal Geographical Society in London last Friday. The four-year-old water mills program has already helped improve the livelihoods of almost 100,000 households.

The centre plans to use the £10,000 prize money to develop a low cost means of generating electricity with a simple magnet alternator using a short shaft water mill to charges batteries that can be used for household lighting purposes. CRTN is supported by the Alternate Energy Promotion Centre and SNV-Nepal.

Bigger Machhapuchchhre

Machhapuchchhre Bank has opened an extension counter at Thapathali. The bank provides include any branch banking, internet and mobile banking, telephone and mobile bill payment, and locker facilities. Machhapuchchhre has 12 branches around the country, and will shortly open one in Itahari.

Shoes made for winning

Shikhar Shoes' new Malamal Offer gives customers scratch cards that entitle them either to discounts ranging from 10-50 percent or cash prizes of Rs 100-200,000. The offer is only valid for purchases of over Rs 425. Shikhar Shoes offers casual, party, executive, and school shoes and sandals, and has showrooms in Butwal, Narayanghat, Dhangadi, Dang, Mahendranagar, Itahari, and Kathmandu.

Sony showroom

Nepa Hima Trade Link, the only authorised dealer of Sony products in Nepal, has added one more showroom at Kumaripati. The showroom carries the full range of Sony products but is especially designed for the Bravia, Cybershot, and Handycam ranges. Other Sony showrooms are located in Kantipath, New Road, and Chabahil in Kathmandu, and Narayanghat and Pokhara.

Romping Rumpum

Rumpum Noodles has been awarded the NS Quality Certificate by the Nepal Bureau of Standards and Metrology. Rumpum is now fortified with vitamins A and D3, calcium, and protein. Rumpum is manufactured by Asian Thai Foods, an ISO 9001:2000 certified company.

NEW PRODUCTS

SAMSUNG AUDIO: Him Electronics, manufacturer and distributor of Samsung electronic products, has launched a new range of audio Samsung products. These include the Max-DT55, Max-DC650, Max-DT95 and Max-DT99 audio systems, and the HT-X100 and HT-TQ35 home theatre systems. The products support Dolby Surround Pro Logic, DivX, and Progressive Scan, and offer USB hosting.

NAZA CARS: Alpine Motors has started importing the Malaysian Naza cars. Three Naza models, the 206 Bestari, the Sutera, and the Sporty. are currently available at the brand's Lazimpat showroom. The cars are under warranty for 50,000km or two years, whichever comes first. Naza is the Malaysian subsidiary of French auto major Peugeot.

PAINI: Home Furnishers have launched an exclusive range of Paini brand sanitary fittings from Italy. The company has been producing sanitary fittings since 1954. Home Furnishers also imports various taps, mixers, and shower products from Morgana, Jolly, Cooper, First, Pilot, and Cox.

DISCOVER 135: The Bajaj Discover now comes with a 135cc engine, with Nitrox suspensions, front disc brakes, and ExhaustEC mileage technology. Customers get a two-year warranty and five years of free servicing. Financing is handled by the Teku branch of Everest Bank.

A dubious high

We really don't want to have the highest per capita planning documents

Another fortnight, another flurry of announcements. In Kathmandu, it's party time for planners. There are workshops and seminars galore, the ultimate high for our cut-and-paste thinkers.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

The National Planning Commission unveiled its three-year planning approach paper, the Minister for Physical Planning and Works announced her 20-year perspective in a vision document. At the National Development Council it was same old same old with the usual suspects mouthing the usual platitudes. The Finance Ministry is making noises about making ends meet in the coming fiscal year.

We have been always good at talking in the present continuous—just look at the proclamations of the monarchs over the last 250 years, Rana-era documents, Panchayat plans, the post-1990 whatevers. It's all more of the same, bagsful of wishes. At least the consultants keep their careers going.

Jagadish Pokhrel, the current vice-chair of the Planning Commission, is going to be a frustrated man. For all his novel planning, he has no control over implementation, and in three years' time, things will look very different.

To allow a market economy to run efficiently, we need to retool the planning process. The annual budgets never dovetail with the five-year plans and, when the commission's targets fall by the wayside, there is no mechanism to analyse what went wrong. It's obvious that if the economy is going to develop in any holistic way, planning and execution need to be the mandate of the same agency. The Beed generally proposes this: a Ministry of Finance and Economic Development that would take



TALK IS CHEAP: Speaker Subash Nembang, Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Vice Chairman of the National Planning Commission Jagadish Pokhrel release the NPC's three year concept paper on peace, poverty alleviation, and rehabilitation on Monday.

over the tasks of a number of ministries as well as the planning commission.

In line ministries we need people who understand how to use the resources available, and harness new ones, to implement plans. The government is all gung ho about increasing pay and not cutting security personnel. The wage bill is going to rise meteorically. These civil servants and security personnel will also have to be paid pensions in the years to come. Militant unions and local politicking are deterring private investors. One wonders where the surplus needed for development work will come from.

We need two things and we need them fast. First, a government that understands finance, business, and industry. Second, a government with the guts to do what is needed, no matter how unpopular.

It's a telling sign of what the Beed must regretfully call stupidity that no minister wants

to raise the price of petroleum products to reduce losses, but that everyone has somehow agreed that it is a good idea to borrow from all sorts of funds, even employee savings. For all the grand plans we have, we need a combination of these two elements. A government that cannot sensibly manage the Valley's water supply, or face head-on the licensing issue for hydropower projects cannot negotiate with India on water rights or projects. It all makes one fearful of the kind of legislation we are to get on complex finance instruments.

One thing is clear—when you make planners also responsible for implementation, or line agencies also responsible for planning, you finally have a level of accountability. Without this, all we can look forward to is becoming the country with the highest per capita planning documents. ●

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GAA Convention

"Towards a Merit Based Society"

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**Interview with Nepali Congress MP Jaya Prakash Gupta in
Ghatana Ra Bichar, 27 June**

The biggest one is that madhesi people do not have the right to the tarai's resources. The government should let go of its colonial policies and let the people in the tarai decide. A federal structure can address these issues and search for solutions. So madhesi must be well represented in the constituent assembly elections.

The MJF was a group of likeminded individuals concerned about the tarai. After the Madhes Uprising, the Forum registered itself as a party. I felt it needed to mature in a different way. I plan to push the madhesi agenda and find solutions to madhesi problems differently, which is why I quit.

We need a powerful group, which will relentlessly raise madhesi issues in the streets and in parliament. The future of Nepal is in federalism and people in the tarai want a regional party focussing on their issues and grievances. We are working towards forming such a party.

It's not enough to talk to just the armed groups or just the MJF. The eight parties must understand that all the agitating groups, armed and unarmed, need to be brought to the table if the government really wants to solve the tarai's problems and avoid trouble there during the elections.

Legally, I'm a Congress MP, but it's up to the party to decide how close it thinks I am to it. Neither the NC nor the MJF have ever asked me to clarify my relationship with the other. I am an MP only because I feel close to the madhesi issue.



KIRAN PANDAY

2000

The short-lived Air Nepal is also likely to resume service under Japanese investment and management.

આરંભ

For the first time in the history of Nepal the palace has invited Maoist leaders for a reception to celebrate King Gyanendra's 60th birthday at Narayanhiti palace on 6 July. This black tie affair will begin in the palace's Kaski room at 7PM. Maoist leaders received their invitations ten days ahead of the party, but UML general secretary Madhab Nepal and Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan have not yet got theirs. CPN-M and UML leaders say they will

not be available to attend the reception. This year, the form of address on the card is no longer 'Honourable Minister', but 'Sri Minister'. Among the 900 VIPs invited for the celebrations are senior political party leaders, ministers, King Gyanendra's former teachers, Nepal Army generals, diplomats, and royal relatives. The following day, King Gyanendra will receive members of the public who want to wish him. Last year the government announced that the king's birthday will not be a public holiday. This year 7 July falls on a Saturday, which is perhaps why the government hasn't said anything yet.

内平四

The UML's central committee meeting is likely to be extended for a few more days, as the row over the party's leadership and its working unity with the Maoists intensifies.

The meeting is deliberating on general secretary Madhab Nepal's 22-page report which concludes that the UML's role in the government has become ineffective. The UML recalled its previous team in the government, led by KP Oli, following a similar report by Nepal. That time around the party said it was satisfied with the overall performance of the government, but now the UML feels the government has failed.

Some members want to change the party's leadership by holding its general convention before the constituent assembly election. Former general secretary Jhalanath Khanal is to table a proposal to create a left-party alliance with the Maoists, which Oli and Nepal are expected to oppose.

•

As the second round of combatant verification takes place in Ilam's Chulachuli camp, those new recruits who are below 18 are returning to their schools to get certificates saying they are over 18. In the latest incident, four fighters returned to Akkhebhui VDC to get altered documents. One rebel fighter who has 'revised' his date of birth from 1991 to 1987 says that some 150 fighters in Chulachuli have similarly changed their year of birth. The headmaster of the school refuses to speak for fear of Maoist intimidation.



KIRAN PANDAY





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Kalikot connects

Nepal, 24 June

नेपाल

Until just a year ago the only working phones in Kalikot were the VSAT phones in the barracks in Manma. The two public phones with long distance were out. Manma never got the 150 phone lines it was meant to in 2002, before the first emergency, because the administration felt the phones would be misused. Then the Maoists blew up the repeater tower at Bharta and Kalikot was disconnected from the rest of Nepal.

Things have changed. The tower was repaired this past winter. Over 500 mobile CDOT lines have been distributed in the district and also in Dailekh's Khadki Bajar. A mobile CDMA tower has been put up to support

another 300 lines, for which subscribers pay an initial fee of Rs 8,000. The phones, which were distributed in 20 VDCs, are all mobile and Nepal Telecom officers tell us that each VDC has been issued 10 lines. Solar panels have been set up to charge them.

Locals say they save a lot of time now that they don't have to queue up for the phone in Manma. The CDO works more efficiently now that people can fax their letters through, instead of having to send out letter after letter by post. Although still expensive, the district has email and internet access. Nepal Telecom earned barely Rs 50,000 a month during the conflict. Now it earns a whopping one million rupees.



TULARAM PANDEY



नेपाल Nepal, 24 June

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ In the past political parties have duped us, but this time around we are hopeful that they will learn from their mistakes and hold elections on time. ”

Film star Rajesh Hamal, in an interview with *Naya Patrika*, 25 June

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Spirit mountain

TEXT and **PICTURES** by **KIRAN PANDAY**

Ever since a Japanese expedition first made a reconnaissance of the eastern slopes of Mt Manaslu, the eight-thousand metre peak in central Nepal has been as good as adopted by the Japanese. With the pre-monsoon clouds snapping at our heels, we raced up the Budi Gandaki valley trying to outrace the rains. In village after impoverished village in this remote region, children would run up to their parents as we approached to announce: “Japanese are coming, Japanese are coming”. All outsiders here are known as “Japanese”. In 1956 when the Japanese expedition arrived to make a serious push on the mountain from the northeast ridge, the rimpoche in the town of Loh actually tried to stop them saying it was a holy mountain and shouldn’t be climbed—the mountain is in fact named after the spirit, or *manasa*. The Japanese went ahead anyway, and climbed the mountain with Tashio Imanishi and Gyalzen Norbu

Sherpa setting foot on the summit. The Japanese kept coming back, with an all-woman team climbing the mountain in 1974. Besides being a strikingly beautiful mountain, Manaslu is also the only peak in the world from the summit of which one can see seven other 8,000ers in Nepal, all except Kangchenjunga. Manaslu can be circumambulated on the Budi Gandaki trek that begins in Aru Ghat, past Larke Pass (above) into Manang and down the Marsyangdi to Besisahar. This is probably the wildest and most natural treks in Nepal. Along the way you see slices of a very different kind of life, from communal carving up of yaks, to Tibetan-medium schools, and influences from the outside world that would not be amusing elsewhere, but here just underscore the remoteness of this valley. The porter sporting the bin Laden t-shirt knew only that it was “someone very famous”. The landscape is spectacular, and the walk challenging. The only hikers you see might be your own group. ●





ROGER DE GROEN/GREEN LOTUS TREKKING





In the future

Our children might be able to fix the ethical mess we've made

It's often hard to believe that this is the 21st century, yet so little have many of our human traits and attitudes evolved. We have technology, communications, and transport that make our world tiny and connected. We have medicines to slay or tame ferocious pandemics. Many of us pay lip service to variations of communitarian values and compassion.

Yet war, violence, pestilence, and poverty persist and become ever more pernicious. Western societies that could be using their vast wealth and influence for good instead use coercion and military might to get their way. They sell arms and wasteful consumer goods to foreign elites and guerrilla groups with access to natural resources. Corruption is deplored abroad and

encouraged at home. Human rights, equality, and social justice are empty mantras to be disregarded at the first opportunity for power or profit.

Fundamentalism is on the march across religions and economics. Obscurantists hold undue sway in Washington and Riyadh, Islamabad and Jerusalem. They push false civilisational values that obscure our commonalities and emphasise our differences. They flourish when we're fearful, afraid of them, afraid of death, frightened even of our sexuality.

Free market fire-breathers dominate international institutions, despite decades of proof that unleashing capitalism without checks and balances does more harm than good. Corporate interests have captured so much public space that governing is often little more than making as much room as possible for them. What the World Bank and its ilk refer to as 'good governance' means stepping aside and letting established private interests have unaccountable access to local resources.

What is most saddening about this is not that some promised utopia hasn't materialised—we're all aware of the ravages wrought by communism and its variants that are themselves little more than religions requiring faith and unbending adherence to overlords. No, it's the missed opportunities, the unrealised potential for good. All it would take is a little imagination and a modicum of defiance.

Imagine a world where the main thrust of pharmaceutical research was to save and enhance lives regardless of ability to pay. What if our drug companies poured their resources into finding cures for cancer, AIDS, malaria, and diseases of poverty, rather than magic pills that make fat people thin and enable erections in middle class beds? What if communications were all about connecting problems with solutions, irrespective of profit potential, so computer giants in Bangalore could enable the spread of literacy in Africa rather than accounting systems for tobacco firms?

What if media told us how we were similar, how many of our problems could be addressed through common approaches, rather than providing a platform for divisiveness, greed and hatred. What if we used television and the internet to truly hold our elites to account, rather than making pornography and soap operas? Why not tackle global hunger, thirst and injustice with same zeal and financial commitment as the 'war on terror'. That's admittedly a bad example, though, as the whole endeavour has been a profit-driven, power-enhancing farce.

As a father of teenage offspring, I despair that the world my children will inherit is not significantly better than the one I took over a few decades back. It is worse. There is much more money around. Mobile phones are everywhere. The web reaches into places we didn't know existed. Many of our cities are awash with new construction and air travel has eliminated remoteness. But for much of the planet, relentless toil, illness, and conflict remain daily realities and there's damn all that many of us rich westerners, or developing world elites, have done about it.

I hope my kids do a better job of imaging their futures. ●

HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

Obscenity

Weak laws create two kinds of victims

MALLIKA ARYAL

One night some months ago, 20-year-old Bhumika Shrestha was walking home from work when she was arrested and imprisoned in a dark cell for almost a fortnight.

Police told Shrestha, who works with the Blue Diamond Society, that they had orders to arrest *metis* or transgendered people for involvement in "obscene activities" and spreading "immoral behaviour".

Nepal's legal system does not define obscenity and there is no specific law that addresses it. As a result, says advocate Sabin Shrestha of the Forum for Women, Law and Development, vulnerable sections of the society are persecuted and the perpetrators get away.

'Obscenity' is often used as a legal catch-all in the moral policing of vulnerable groups like sex workers, *metis*, and women in general. There is no protection of the rights of victims of obscenity-related offences, usually sexual harassment. "Legally this is an issue of exploitation and violence," says Sapana Pradhan Malla of FWLD.

Obscenity is vaguely and partially parsed as having to do

with exposing the body, and pornography, in various places in the 1959 Defamation Act, the 1970 Public Offence and Punishment Act, the 1992 Children Act, in the civil code under Intention to Sexual Intercourse, in last year's Electronic Transactions Act 2006, and in Nepal Press Council's code of conduct.

But if you've been at the receiving end of obscene behaviour, legal experts say there is scant precedent of people using any of these provisions to seek justice. "First of all it is hard to get evidence, and privacy of the victims is hard to maintain," says Kishor Silwal, associate professor of criminology at Nepal Law Campus. And even if a perpetrator is found guilty, explains Shrestha, "the laws are punishment-centred, none of them talk about victim's compensation, physical or mental state."

The flawed laws related to obscenity are perhaps not closely scrutinised because they constitute a fluid idea of what is deemed socially acceptable. The issue comes down to striking a balance between legal norms and social mores, says Malla. "Legally, sexual expression is a right."



KIRAN PANDAY

EASY TARGET: Members of Kathmandu's transgendered community, such as the *metis* in Thamel are regularly arrested and charged with obscenity.

Socially, individuals need to see that their right to expression does not offend," she explains.

Nepal should perhaps look to legal definitions of obscenity in other countries, says Malla, since most of them accept that obscenity is perceived differently across cultures, countries, religions, generations, and ethnicities. Side by side, there need to be stronger mechanisms to protect victims of sexual harassment, or 'obscene behaviour'. ●

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Patching up Melamchi

The ADB and the Maoists bury the hatchet on Kathmandu's water supply

NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

After last month's bruising confrontation with a new Maoist minister over a mammoth project to augment Kathmandu's water supply ('Troubled water,' #350), the Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) is sending a team to Kathmandu in July to study how to revive the scheme.

The ADB had threatened to walk out of the Melamchi Water Supply Project (MWSP) that it is funding by an end-June deadline, but Maoist Minister of Physical Planning and Infrastructure Hisila Yami has bought time by writing to the bank and backing down from her opposition to privatising water supply.

"The silver lining is that she is not annoyed about private sector participation," said a senior ADB official, speaking about Yami. "It was positive to hear from her that she would comply with the reforms we have introduced."

But the bank official who spoke on condition of anonymity said Yami's recent letter was not clear enough on how Kathmandu's water supply would be managed before



SAGAR SHRESTHA

Melamchi came in. The bank had warned that it would pull out if the management contract for Kathmandu's water supply was not awarded to Severn Trent Water International (STWI), a British company selected for the job by the previous government ('Private water, public debate,' #335).

Yami had accused the previous administration of doing the selection in a hush-hush manner. The ADB had argued that the

process was transparent and according to procedures, and threatened to pull out of the project if the \$165 million contract was cancelled.

Nepal's biggest infrastructure undertaking aims to pipe in 170 million litres of water a day from Melamchi in Sindhupalchok district through a 27km tunnel. Yami finally wrote to Manila indicating she wanted to move ahead. But the bank set the condition that the tunnelling

work could begin only after private sector management takes over Kathmandu water supply.

Yami's plan was to temporarily hand over the management of Kathmandu's water supply to an individual from the private sector before bringing in an international company through global bidding. "In line with ADB's reform policy, the Kathmandu Upatyaka Khanepani Limited (KUKL) has already been established,

replacing the Kathmandu Drinking Water Supply Corporation,” minister Yami told us. “Since global bidding might take almost a year, we can for now hire a financial or management expert from among overseas Nepalis or foreign experts.”

But the ADB official who spoke to us said Yami had not elaborated on those plans in her recent letter to the bank. "The devil is always in the details and that is what the upcoming mission will look into." That mission should go smoothly because the bank also seems keen on not making the Severn Trent contract an issue.

Bank officials were heartened by Yami's conciliatory tone and her commitment to institutional reforms in distribution that it has backed. Said the ADB official: "This provides an opening, and we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Now what remains to be seen is if Minister Yami tangoes or not."

With STW no more an obstacle the two sides might agree on one or the other modality of water supply management. But the bank is less worried about who gets the management contract than about which government it will have to deal with in the future after patching up with the Maoists.

Said the ADB official: "We may finally reach an agreement with the Maoist minister, but what if a minister from a different party does not like the idea tomorrow?" ●



USHA TITIKCHU

Making waves

In recognition for its outstanding contribution in defence of free speech and democracy, Radio Sagarmatha has been awarded the AMARC International Solidarity Prize 2006, the One World Broadcasting Trust's special award for an outstanding community media project.

The ten-year-old station ('10 years on air,' #339), Nepal's first community radio, defied the ban on free news and political shows after the 1 February 2005 royal takeover in innovative ways. First, it decided to defy the ban and began broadcasting news as 'haalchal', rather than 'samachar'. Threatened with closure if it did not stop ('Nepali radio, Nepali awaj,' Editorial, #275), Sagarmatha changed tactics and broadcast news items through songs and comedy. Radio stations around the country followed suit.

"The award was helpful in getting us recognised internationally," says station manager Mohan Bista. "This increases our responsibility to work for the freedom of press while continuing our community-oriented coverage." ●



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A state of failure

States that are weak for any reason affect those around them

The Fund for Peace, an independent research organisation, and *Foreign Policy* recently released the third annual Failed States Index. Using 12 social, economic, political, and military indicators, 177 states were ranked in order of their vulnerability to violent internal conflict and societal deterioration.

For the second year in a row, Sudan tops the rankings as the state most at risk of failure. This year, eight of the world's 10 most vulnerable states are in sub-Saharan Africa, up from six last year and seven in 2005. Iraq, Afghanistan, East Timor, and Somalia all had a lousy year. An ever-worsening spiral of violence and bloody conflicts in the regions have left little to look forward in the coming years.

Some failing states, such as Indonesia's Aceh Province, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, made impressive gains. The states' legitimacy also improved in the eyes of the impoverished populace, in large part due to multiparty elections. Liberia was the year's most improved, gaining six points over last year's index score. There, too, a November 2005 election, held after more than a decade of civil war, can be credited with bringing much-needed stability to the country and laying the ground for last year's notable progress.

| | | | Indicators of Instability | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|-------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Rank | Total | Country | Demographic Pressures | Religious and Ethnic Tensions | Crimes and Violence | Human Rights | Political Freedom | Economic Development | Corruption | Democratization of State | Public Services | Human Rights | Security Apparatus | Facilities and Infrastructure |
| 1 | 113.7 | Sudan | 9.2 | 9.0 | 10.0 | 9.0 | 9.1 | 7.7 | 10.0 | 9.5 | 10.0 | 9.9 | 9.7 | 9.8 |
| 2 | 113.4 | Iraq | 9.0 | 9.0 | 10.0 | 9.5 | 8.5 | 8.0 | 9.4 | 9.5 | 9.7 | 10.0 | 9.8 | 10.0 |
| 3 | 113.3 | Somalia | 9.2 | 9.0 | 8.5 | 8.0 | 7.5 | 9.2 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 9.7 | 10.0 | 10.0 | 10.0 |
| 4 | 113.3 | Zimbabwe | 9.7 | 8.7 | 8.0 | 9.1 | 9.5 | 10.0 | 9.5 | 9.1 | 9.2 | 9.6 | 9.7 | 9.8 |
| 5 | 108.8 | Chad | 9.1 | 8.9 | 9.5 | 7.9 | 9.0 | 8.3 | 9.5 | 9.1 | 9.2 | 9.6 | 9.3 | 9.8 |
| 6 | 107.7 | Ivory Coast | 8.6 | 8.3 | 9.8 | 8.4 | 8.0 | 8.9 | 9.5 | 7.9 | 9.2 | 9.6 | 9.3 | 9.8 |
| 7 | 105.5 | Dem. Rep. of the Congo | 9.4 | 8.9 | 8.8 | 7.6 | 9.1 | 8.0 | 8.3 | 8.8 | 8.0 | 8.2 | 9.0 | 8.6 |
| 8 | 104.3 | Afghanistan | 8.5 | 8.9 | 9.1 | 7.0 | 8.0 | 8.5 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 8.9 | 8.6 | 8.1 | 9.0 |
| 9 | 101.3 | Guinea | 7.0 | 7.4 | 8.1 | 8.3 | 8.5 | 8.5 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 8.9 | 8.6 | 8.1 | 9.0 |
| 10 | 101.0 | Central African Republic | 8.9 | 8.4 | 8.8 | 9.5 | 8.6 | 8.4 | 9.0 | 9.0 | 8.2 | 8.9 | 9.3 | 9.8 |
| 11 | 100.9 | Niger | 8.8 | 4.2 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 8.2 | 8.4 | 9.2 | 9.0 | 9.1 | 9.3 | 9.3 | 9.8 |
| 12 | 100.9 | Pakistan | 8.2 | 8.5 | 9.0 | 8.1 | 8.5 | 9.8 | 8.7 | 7.1 | 8.7 | 9.5 | 9.5 | 9.5 |
| 13 | 97.7 | North Korea | 8.0 | 8.0 | 7.2 | 9.0 | 8.8 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 9.5 | 9.7 | 8.3 | 7.9 | 7.9 |
| 14 | 97.6 | Burma | 8.5 | 8.5 | 9.1 | 8.0 | 8.9 | 7.6 | 9.1 | 8.3 | 9.8 | 9.0 | 8.2 | 4.0 |
| 15 | 96.4 | Uganda | 8.1 | 8.4 | 8.5 | 8.0 | 8.5 | 7.5 | 8.5 | 8.2 | 8.2 | 8.3 | 7.8 | 7.4 |
| 16 | 95.9 | Bangladesh | 8.6 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 8.4 | 9.0 | 8.9 | 9.0 | 7.4 | 7.8 | 8.0 | 9.5 | 9.9 |
| 17 | 95.6 | Nigeria | 8.2 | 5.6 | 9.5 | 8.5 | 9.1 | 9.4 | 9.1 | 8.7 | 7.1 | 9.2 | 9.5 | 9.7 |
| 18 | 95.3 | Ethiopia | 9.0 | 7.9 | 7.8 | 7.5 | 8.6 | 8.8 | 7.9 | 7.0 | 8.5 | 7.5 | 6.8 | 7.5 |
| 19 | 95.3 | Burundi | 9.1 | 8.9 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 8.8 | 8.2 | 7.1 | 8.9 | 7.5 | 6.8 | 7.5 | 9.0 |
| 20 | 94.9 | Togo | 8.1 | 8.5 | 7.1 | 9.3 | 8.5 | 8.5 | 9.5 | 7.9 | 8.9 | 9.0 | 8.8 | 8.8 |
| 21 | 94.8 | Madagascar | 8.1 | 8.5 | 7.1 | 9.3 | 8.5 | 8.5 | 9.5 | 7.9 | 8.9 | 9.0 | 8.8 | 8.8 |
| 22 | 93.8 | Nepal | 8.1 | 8.5 | 7.1 | 9.3 | 8.5 | 8.5 | 9.5 | 7.9 | 8.9 | 9.0 | 8.8 | 8.8 |
| 23 | 93.5 | Wolstenholme | 7.7 | 9.4 | 7.1 | 9.7 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 7.8 | 8.5 | 7.7 | 7.0 |
| 24 | 93.4 | Sierra Leone | 8.8 | 7.4 | 7.1 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 8.7 | 8.0 | 8.0 | 7.8 | 8.5 | 7.7 | 7.0 |
| 25 | 93.2 | Thailand | 8.0 | 8.7 | 7.3 | 7.2 | 8.7 | 8.0 | 7.8 | 8.1 | 7.2 | 8.0 | 9.0 | 7.2 |
| 26 | 93.2 | Timor-Leste | 7.0 | 8.8 | 9.5 | 8.9 | 8.2 | 8.0 | 8.9 | 8.5 | 7.5 | 8.7 | 9.2 | 8.1 |
| 27 | 93.2 | Democratic Congo | 8.7 | 7.3 | 8.7 | 8.1 | 8.1 | 9.1 | 9.1 | 8.8 | 7.9 | 8.8 | 7.2 | 7.4 |

brutal crackdown on dissent since the massacre of hundreds of unarmed protesters in May 2005, has been in power since 1991. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, has been at the helm for a quarter century, and is now orchestrating his own succession, with his son as the heir apparent.

Likewise, effective leadership can pull a state back from the brink. Indonesia's first directly elected president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, has helped steer the country toward greater stability. His efforts haven't necessarily made him popular, but such leadership is exactly what more failing states need: a head of state who chooses continued reforms over his own power and recognition.

The environment and global warming too are factors. As the world warms, states at risk face severe threats to their groundwater, agriculture, and ecosystems, factors that can rapidly undo political and economic gains. This year's index found a strong correlation between stability and environmental sustainability, a country's ability to avoid environmental disaster and deterioration. That means that in poorly performing states on the edge, including Bangladesh, Egypt, and Indonesia, the risks of flooding, drought, and deforestation have little chance of being properly managed. That suggests that storms are brewing on the horizon for the world's most vulnerable. ●

(Foreign Policy)

Full results are available at www.ForeignPolicy.com and www.fundforpeace.org.

The green paradox

Positive policies on reducing emissions have unfortunate negative effects

Kyoto-Protocol participation map



German Chancellor Angela Merkel achieved a substantial diplomatic success. With charm and unassuming clear-headedness, she wrought a compromise from the G8 countries that may help save the world from the most



COMMENT
Hans-Werner Sinn

severe devastations caused by global warming. The world's eight richest countries promised to "seriously consider" halving their CO₂ emissions by 2050. Given the positions the countries held at the outset, the outcome was an important

achievement. The United States, in particular, shifted its stance significantly since its rejection of the Kyoto Protocol, even accepting that the United Nations will have to organise the future negotiations.

But several important countries did not sign on. China, India, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico did, but the oil sheiks and other producers of fossil fuels—those who ultimately control the amount of carbon released in the atmosphere—were not part of the deal.

Sure, it would be better if all countries curtailed their emissions, but it is already a great help if at least some countries do so. If a group of countries decides to lower emissions, worldwide emissions

will decline by the sum of these countries' reductions.

Unfortunately, this view is too good to be true, because one country's emissions are not independent from those of another. If countries decide to cut their emissions, they will have to reduce their consumption of fossil fuels, in particular oil. If oil producers continue to extract as per allotted without the G8's restraint, the price of fuels will fall sufficiently to induce extra consumption among the non-participating countries that the net effect on aggregate CO₂ emissions will be nil. The countries that cut their emissions would, in effect, be subsidising their competitors' growth.

Will the oil producers reduce output? Most suppliers do reduce production when the price falls, but the producers are sitting on fixed stocks of oil. If they do not extract it today, they will have to do it in the future if they want to make a profit. At best, it seems that the time path of extractions can be tilted toward the future. This would not solve the CO₂ problem in the long run, but it would postpone the catastrophe.

The oil producers would be inclined to postpone extraction if they could reasonably assume that the demand reductions of the signing countries and the comparative price reduction this implies are both stronger today than they will be in the future. This is not plausible. Producers know that concerns about

global warming will increase over time. They will therefore speed up rather than reduce production, to avoid selling their oil when prices are at their lowest. Green policies will, paradoxically, accelerate rather than mitigate global warming.

Two lessons arise from these considerations. First, all polluters must negotiate and be forced or induced to participate in reducing pollution. The commitments of single countries like Germany to over-fulfil their duties are useless. Germany has already contributed three-quarters of the total EU-wide reductions of CO₂ emission from 1990 to 2008-2012 to which the EU committed in the Kyoto protocol.

Second, and more difficult, the oil barons and other producers of fossil fuels must be talked into postponing their extraction plans or, better yet, not to extract some of their resources at all.

The good news from Heiligendamm is that the UN will now have to organise a common solution. The bad news is that this is unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future, and that the owners of natural resources will therefore make every attempt to extract their resources and thus pump the fossil carbon into the atmosphere before the UN finds a way out of this impasse. ● (Project Syndicate)

Hans-Werner Sinn is professor of economics and finance, University of Munich and president of the Ifo Institute.



Do you dare to care?

Individual histories and empathy are complicated affairs

When *Paradise Now* hit the theatres in 2005 to a lot of hype, and was nominated for an Oscar, controversy was inevitable. Israeli novelist Irit Linor called it a ‘quality Nazi film,’ and complained that terrorists just had to be played by bewitching hotties. Major Israeli distributors eschewed the film.

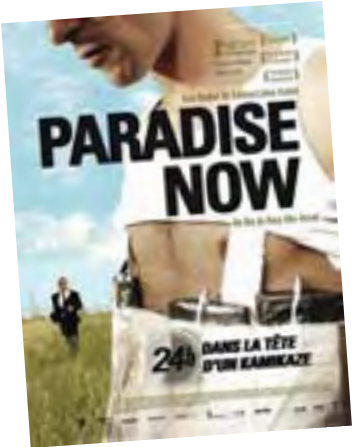


REEL REVIEW
Diwas Kc

Meanwhile in the US, the glowing reviews it received may have admitted the film’s humanising aspect, but focussed mainly on its success as a psychological thriller, as art. The ‘Palestinian question’ was left as an unhappy aside.

Directed by Hany Abu-Assad, *Paradise Now* is, more than anything else, a genuine testimony to the power of empathy. What happens when even the most horrifying and uncanny acts of suicide bombers are understood in terms of ordinary human fallibility? And what is possible, politically and otherwise, when the lives of others are no more just abstractions for a terrorist?

Said (Nashef) and Khaled (Suliman) are two young Palestinian auto mechanics who



Paradise Now
Director: Hany Abu-Assad.
Cast: Kais Nashef, Ali Suliman.
2005. PG-13. 90 min. In Arabic, with English Subtitles.

have grown up angry, witnessing the havoc wreaked upon their families by Israeli occupation. They volunteer for a terrorist mission. They aren’t fanatics as we would imagine suicide bombers to be, but simple, thinking individuals craving for some meaning, control, and dignity in their lives. Once called upon, the two have different responses to their prospective martyrdom. Khaled is totally enamoured of the heroism of his death. Said is more perturbed. On the one hand, he is afraid of being branded as a traitor, like his father was, but on the other hand, he is not certain quite how sound his

beliefs are. The two stories represent a harrowing struggle for reason amidst the pervasive paranoia of Palestine.

Paradise Now is not a defence of terrorism. The strong-willed, truth-seeking disposition of its uncommon heroes stands firmly against the skittish ways of the terrorist cell, whose plotters may preach about martyrdom but are conveniently far from death themselves. In fact, director Abu-Assad and co-writer Bero Beyer seem hopeful that a more forbearing kind of resistance is possible in Palestine, even if the character that embodies this hope—Said’s love interest Suha (Lubna Azabal)—appears unsatisfactorily utopian and out-of-touch.

The film places its viewers in an uncomfortable zone where they are in danger of relating to and even loving the ‘unlovable’. It is a brilliant irony, then, that a film about suicide bombers teaches us so much about love and respect. Kudos to Abu-Assad for capturing larger historical contexts in small, concrete images of reality. He can portray through the briefest gazes of his characters the inner turmoil of shame and humiliation in Palestine.

Paradise Now is a rare exploration of life and death, and of human body and soul. ●

Hazy gazing

Weather permitting, July offers up interesting summer stars

The monsoon is not a particularly good time for stargazing. But, when there is a cloudless night sky, you see sharper images of stars and planets due to increased humidity in the atmosphere.

In July, you have a chance to observe Saturn and Venus in the western sky, while the giant planet Jupiter will be high above in the east. It’s a good time for stars too, with the Great Summer Triangle (Vega-Deneb and Altair) in the east dominating the night skies for several more months. This will become a familiar sight to the stargazer. The bright star Archuturus will be just overhead in the constellation of Bootes the Herdsman.

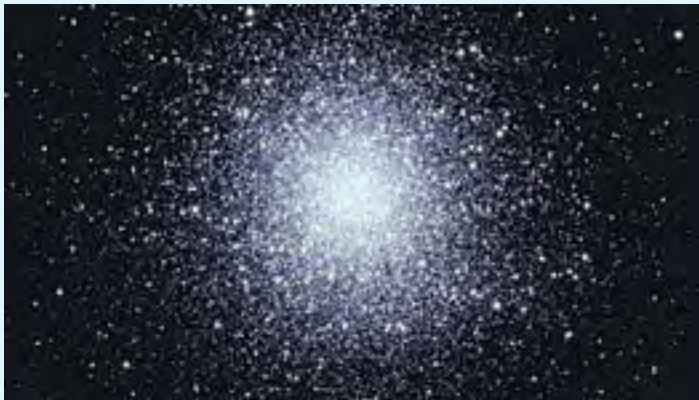


STARGAZING
Kedar S Badu

A highlight for July is the Great Hercules Star Cluster (also called M-13) in the constellation of Hercules. Located at a distance of 25,000 light years, this object

is, without a doubt, one of the finest deep sky objects you’ll ever come across. It is extremely accessible using amateur telescopes as it has close to naked eye visibility. (See picture).

Most people are surprised to learn this, but our world is farthest from the Sun in mid-summer. The earth reaches that position in its orbit, the aphelion, on 7 July.



Highlights:
The Sun is in the constellation of Gemini at the start of July, moving into Cancer on Saturday, 21 July.
Mercury reaches its greatest distance west of the Sun on 20 July. It may just be visible in the north-eastern sky at dawn during the last week of July.
Venus is still a brilliant Evening Star, visible in the west as soon as the Sun has set. By the end of the month, it starts disappearing in the glare of the Sun before the Sun itself has set.
Mars is rising in the east around midnight this month, and is well up in the eastern sky at dawn.
The giant planet **Jupiter** is low in the southern sky at dusk, and sets after midnight.
Saturn is low in the west at sunset at the start of July. On 1 July Saturn and Venus appear close to each other.

Meteors
There are various minor meteor-showers which are active in July, mainly with radiants in the Capricornus-Aquarius area. Towards the end of the month, weather permitting, we may also start to see the first of the **Perseids**, which peak in mid-August.

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Heart Beat 07 – Series 5** an art exhibition by a group of young artists, 2 July-2 August, 10.30 AM-6PM, at Baryo Fiesta, Naxal. 9851050299
- ❖ **Solo art exhibits** by Sushma Rajbhandari Joshi, 1 July onwards at NAFA, Naxal.
- ❖ **Art-as-Object** a functional art exhibition by Nutan Singh, until 7 July, 11AM-6PM, at GTZ/DED Neer Bhawan, Sanepa. 4700835

EVENTS

- ❖ **Scoop** the latest film by Woody Allen, 6.45 PM, 29 June at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Paleti** with lyricist Ratna Shumsher Thapa (right), 6PM, 29 June at R shala, nepa~laya, Kalikasthan. 4437893
- ❖ **Yuva Chalfal Shrinkhala** on the international criminal court and campaigning in Nepal, 29 June, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 4107599
- ❖ **Shastrartha** on sexual identities, starting with the showing of Your Mom's a Lesbian, 30 July, 4-6PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Workshop on non-violent communications** a practical method of peace building, 30 June at Tewa building, 9AM-5PM. 4434220
- ❖ **School Bullying** a talk program by Niti Rana, 30 June and 1 July at The New Era, Battisputali. 9851023958
- ❖ **Film South Asia 2007** Festival of South Asian documentaries, 11-14 October, call for entries deadline 30 June. www.filmsouthasia.org
- ❖ **Media Discussion Series** a linguistic analysis of headlines in Nepali newspapers, 5 July, 3PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Screening of Water** a fund raising program at the Radisson Hotel, followed by dinner and live music, 12 July. 4411818
- ❖ **Pottery classes** one month course in coil and slab methods and two month course in wheel work, starting 1 August. 9851101837



MUSIC

- ❖ **Jazz at Jatra** every Saturday 7PM onwards, at Jatra Café and Bar, Thamel.
- ❖ **Soul of Raga** live classical and fusion music, every Friday night at Nhuchhe's Kitchen, The Organic Bistro. 4429903.
- ❖ **Open mic night** at Via Via Café, every Friday, 8PM onwards.
- ❖ **Live music** at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 8PM with Yanki and Zigme Lepcha. 4416071
- ❖ **Ciney Gurung** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 7PM. 5521408
- ❖ **DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers** live at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234

DINING

- ❖ **5th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival** 16 wines at Rs 150 a glass and Rs 600 a bottle, at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Friday evening BBQ** with live music, at the Hotel Himalaya, 7PM, Rs 499 net. 5523900
- ❖ **Walk and lunch** every Saturday at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel, six to 22 course ceremonial lunch and dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **Weekend special** with sekuwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 4411706
- ❖ **Mongolian BBQ** Wednesdays and Fridays, 6.30 PM on at the Splash Bar and Grill, Radisson Hotel. Rs 1,000 for unlimited barbeque and beer. 4422828
- ❖ **Flavours of the Middle East** every Friday and the taste of Thailand every Wednesday at The Café, Hyatt Regency, Boudha. 4491234
- ❖ **Light nouvelle snacks** and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La'Soon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- ❖ **Continental cuisine** and wine by the fire place at Kilroy's, Thamel. 4250440.
- ❖ **Smorgasbord** lunch at Park Village Resort, every Saturday. 4375280
- ❖ **Gyakok** at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, minimum four diners at Rs 450 per person, two hours' notice.
- ❖ **Retro brunch barbecue** with Crossfire Band at Le Meridien, Gokarna from 12-4PM, Rs 1,000 including swimming. 4451212
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Woodfired pizzas** at the Roadhouse Café, Thamel 4262768, Bhatbhateni 4426587 and Pulchok 5521755
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519
- ❖ **Jazzabell café** enjoy great food, exotic cocktails and music, Chakupat, Patan. 2114075

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **Weekend package** at Le Meridien Kathmandu Gokarna Forest Golf Resort and Spa, two nights three days at Rs 8,888 and one night two days at Rs 4,444. 4451212
- ❖ **Wet and wild package** at Godavari Village Resort, every Saturday and Sunday, unlimited swimming, buffet lunch with a bottle of beer or a softdrink, Rs 690 net. 5560675

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Working class cop John McClane (Bruce Willis) is back in fine form for the fourth instalment of the Die Hard series in *Live Free or Die Hard*. When the FBI realizes its computers have been hacked into, McClane is assigned to haul in Matt Farrell (Justin Long), a techie. The ultra-efficient culprits, led by ice-cold, black-clad tech genius Thomas Gabriel (Timothy Olyphant) have a three-step plan to shut down everything in the country that's run by computer, and it's up to McClane to stop them!

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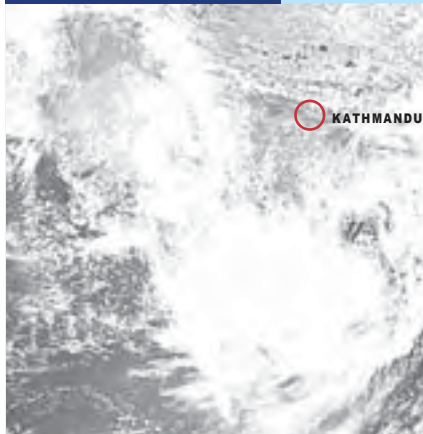
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



KATHMANDU VALLEY



Usually, huge flood-causing rains in one area pretty much means a severe drought in a neighbouring area. But this is not what happened earlier this week. Although there were devastating floods in Pakistan, Thursday afternoon's satellite picture shows that the rest of South Asia will get plenty of moisture too. Only Nepal is a little under its monthly quota so far. The fresh cyclones over the Bay of Bengal next week will mean more rain in the Indo-Gangetic plains and the lower Himalaya. The midhills will receive frequent showers due to convective clouds that split off from the southern front. We'll have some mild monsoon madness this weekend, as showers alternate with occasional scorching intervals.

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Ich bin ein UNMINer

Earlier this year the Ass had guesstimated that the UN's deployment in Nepal would increase Nepal's GDP growth rate by one percentage point. It turns out that was a gross understatement. Given the number of UN SUVs, pickups, planes, and helicopters (and you wonder why we have a fuel shortage?) that have been brought in together with the personnel to ride them, Nepal's GDP is easily going to grow by four percent more than it would normally. If one adds to that the salaries of new Nepali staff, house rentals in the Sanepa/Jhamsikhel/ Pulchok area, the extra food consumed, the beer quaffed, and other **downstream benefits**, it could even cross five.

The ass doesn't know about peace, but our macroeconomic prospects sure look good. But there is one thing UN people sitting in their retrofitted cubicles at the BICC should now turn their attention to: a logo. How come UNMIN **doesn't yet sport one**? An operation of this magnitude needs an easily-recognisable emblem.

✽

So is **His Awesomeness** going to attend Kingji's 60th birthday bash on 7 July at the Kaski Baithak in Narayanhiti or not is the question on everyone's mind. Invitations have gone out to just about everyone, the Ass has been told, including dyed-

in-wool republicans. This shouldn't be a surprise since the person who has made the biggest contribution to the republican cause in this country is none other than **Kingji himself**.

✽

Unlike Comrade Fearsome, it seems that the YCL is not waiting for parliament or the first session of the constituent assembly to be declared a republic. The young commies are on a billboard painting spree at most tarai border points with prominent red signs that proclaim: 'Welcome to the People's Republic of Nepal'. But they have forgotten Kathmandu airport and the fact that it is named after the **grandfather of the nation**.

✽

Looks like every other party is taking its cue from the Maoists and setting up their own adolescent units patterned after the YCL. The Madhesi Janadhikar Forum has just set up the Madhes Youth Forum. The UML has activated its Akhilays, the NC-D has its Taruns and now the NC is also making a major deployment of its NSU youth wing (age bracket 40-50, since that is **considered 'young' by kangresis**). With 40 percent of the population below 18, it is heartening to note that our political parties have made moves to keep our youngsters gainfully employed. But the Ass wonders where all the combined

exuberance of Nepali youth is going to take this country. The trend was started during the Panchayat absolute monarchy days when the rulers tried to channel adolescent energy through the Mandalay network as a vanguard force. If history has taught us anything, it is that Mandalays finally brought about the downfall of the absolute monarchy and when they grew older this residual group of hardcore royalists helped demolish what was left of the monarchy.

✽

Chairman Prach has been trying to defend his boys by telling CNN-IBN in an **excruciating interview** that the YCL isn't all bad, that they even "clean the streets and plant trees". But we sympathise with Comrade Dahal. He must know that if anyone will hurt his party's chances at the polls it will be the YCL. In fact, the Maoists don't need any enemies as long as they have these youngsters running loose. Just as Daddy packed off his son Prakash on a junket to the People's Republic of China, he should also send YCL honchos to visit the Red Guard Café in Beijing. On second thought, maybe not. They may decide to **escape to Hong Kong**.



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