The Maoists are coming under intense criticism for their latest attempt to disrupt the production and distribution of private newspapers through their labour union.

After shutting down Nepal Samacharpatra (See: ‘Stop press’, #354) and disrupting work at Kantipur through their union last month, they now have the APCA group in their crosshairs. APCA publishes Nepal’s widest-selling English daily, The Himalayan Times and Annapurna Post. Distribution of both had been severely curtailed this week.

After publishing a hard-hitting front page editorial on 22 July, APCA officials on Thursday played down the crisis saying a deal was close to being struck. The Maoist union had used alleged exploitation of cycle boys by distributors to close down the paper, but many in the industry say it was just another blatant attempt to warn the media off critical coverage.

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists, the Press Council and publishers took a joint delegation to meet the Maoist Minister for Information, Krishna Bahadur Mahara on 25 July. Mahara washed his hands of the affair, saying the matter was between the publishers and their workers, and denied that his party was trying to undermine press freedom.

But one media publisher who has been threatened by the Maoist YCL told us: “What they are really telling APCA, Kantipur and all of us is, if you dare criticise us we’ll hit you where it hurts.”

Said FNJ’s Bishnu Nishturi: “It is ironical that in a week when parliament passed the bill on the right to information, we see that right being taken away. Workers’ rights have to be addressed through legitimate channels, not by stopping production.”

The attacks on media come as the Maoists prepare for their central committee meeting during which the leadership represented by Mahara, Chairman Dahal, and ideologue Baburam Bhattarai is expected to come under intense pressure from dissidents like Comrades Badal, Kiran, and Biplab who are supported by the YCL, Maoist trade unions, and local commissars.

NOT US: Minister for Information, Krishna Bahadur Mahara tells a delegation of senior publishers and editors that his party has no hand in union activity disrupting media.
Brain deficit

Affirmative action is an excellent way to counter brain drain

T his isn’t surprise most of us, but a recent study by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reveals that brain drain is intimately linked with chronic underdevelopment.

When a society’s best and brightest move away in pursuit of better opportunities, the prospects of progress in their home countries diminish. Nepal’s experience is similar to that of any other nation.

STATE OF THE STATE C K Lal

Least Developed Countries (LDCs) dealing with a crippling outflow of competent individuals. And no amount of remittances compensates for the education and training of skilled professionals as is important as aid and investment for LDCs to get out of poverty.

When a society’s best and brightest move away in pursuit of better opportunities, the prospects of progress in their home countries diminish. Nepal’s experience is similar to that of any other nation.

A conflict environment
Darfur: The problem is not just severe food and water shortages, or a lack of medical care, or the lack of basic living necessities like shelter, clothing or education. It’s a war, and in any war, there are winners and losers.

A program run by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reveals that Sudan: Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment. It’s not just a technical report, but a vivid study of how natural environment, poverty, and population growth interact to provide a fertile breeding ground for disasters like the violence in Darfur.

When a war like Darfur erupts, policymakers look for political explanations and solutions. This misses the basic point that by understanding the role of geography, climate, and population growth dynamics, we can find more realistic solutions than through politics alone. Poor people, the poorest of the poor, need help, not just in the moment they finish school. The best skilled personnel seriously damages the country’s economic viability, makes it hard to attract investments, and results in a brain drain.

The only way to sustainable peace is through sustainable development. To reduce the risk of war, we need to help impoverished people everywhere meet their basic needs, protect them from violence, and get onto the ladder of economic development.

Project Syndicate

Jeffrey Sachs is professor of economics and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

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LET’S JUST GET ALONG
Your poll result last week (#358) said over 60 percent of people thought this government had not done anything in its first 100 days. Look at the flipside: in such a chaotic situation, it has still managed to hold together, put out a budget, and promised to conduct the elections. You can’t expect a coalition government as diverse as this one to achieve more. It would be great if this government could peacefully organise the elections and then promulgate a constitution—which will still be based on compromise.

The media needs to look ahead positively, make people believe in the democratic process, keep political parties on their toes, and help build a positive atmosphere for social movements to be bold but non-political. You need to help build a mass movement in support for national unity. We have to believe each other, and be tolerant, compromising, and forgiving.

Name withheld, email

DISBELIEF
‘Securing a future’ (#358) reminded me of the Pied Piper. The soldiers have unthinkingly followed their leaders who were fighting, in fact, for money and power. Now that they are corralled, I wonder how the government expects people who were out for each other’s lives to join hands and pray? What about the casualties on both sides? Are they all martyrs or just more nameless bodies?

J, email

I agree with the Foreign Hand (Damned if you do, Moving Target, #358). The Maoists think the entire country backs them up, while in fact no one actually trusts them. The YCL continue their rampaging activities, vandalising party offices and beating up their members. They may talk about arresting criminals, planting trees, and building roads, but their humanitarian activities are overshadowed by their aggression. Looking at their behaviour now, it seems very likely that they will reject the poll results if they lose—and the only way they’re going to win is by coercion and spreading terror. Either way, we’re going to hell.

Surya Thapa, email

HOT AIR
CK Lal’s ‘Lost in seminar space’ (State of the state, #358) hit the nail on the head. This hot air convection is being powered by donor money, while the government and political parties condone it and the media is pampered and buttressed by it. In those stale discussions about inclusiveness, democracy, and poverty alleviation, whatever, some of the most vocal people only really want to project an image of commitment and say things the bigwigs want to hear. They won’t do anything about anything. In this country everybody loves to tell others what they should do.

Thanks CK, keep spilling ink, and some day a leader will stop talking and Just Do It.

Neeranjan Rajbhandari, email

BACKSIDE
Keep up the good work. You guys have the guts required in journalism. However, as for the online version of your newspaper, the site goes haywire at times which can be a real pain in the posterior. Hope you can fix that soon.

Eric Shrestha, email

I’m confused by the Ass. Sometimes it is plain unvarnished (boring) gossip and editorial-type comments, while other times it is nastiness central. We’re all trying very hard to be goody-goody serious citizens of the New Nepal. Please give us a break, be as mean as you can be. It’s amusing.

Arati, email
Life in the hills and villages of Nepal has always been harsh. For generations, that difficulty has led many Nepalis to leave their families behind and go to the plains in search of opportunities—food, service, security, and a better life. In the face of continuous stagnation at home, that search process opened different life trajectories for migrants, taking them and their children as far away from their ancestral villages as Surinam, Fiji, and Guam.

Closer to home, Ashutosh Tiwari recently caught up with Nepali migrants and their children in Bangladesh. What follow are some of their stories in their own words.

Bhakta Bahadur Thapa Chettri, 80, Dayaguji, Dhaka

“My father was from Ramechhap. Like many young Mir Bahadur Upadhyay (Galu Dai), 51, Nakkhal of Nepalis. Seeing how hard they worked made me realise you work very, very hard to collect fodder for the cattle and hard work one has to do to survive there. Up in the hills, about our festivals such as Kali Puja and Bhai Puja. Bangladeshi Nepalis. We’ve always lived close to Hindu migrants, mostly Chettris and Newars, moved to Mymensing to work at guards at the newly-opened agricultural university. The location of the Nepali Fole in Mymensingh has changed due to the laying of railway tracks, but it has long been popular with students from Nepal who came to study at the university. We used to play Holi with them, and Bangladeshis still talk about us in ways that make all of us proud to be Gorkhalis.”

Babu Bahadur Thapa, 36, Nakkhal Para, Dhaka

“I am a third-generation Bangladeshi Nepali. My grandfather was a soldier in the British Army. In 1950, after the war, some of my grandfather’s friends went to what is now Bangladesh. We were born and raised in Dhaka. I have a job in a leather technology. But most are still cooks, drivers, and security guards. My perception is that we are liked here as labour our concerns to the government here, but we have not...”

Mir Bahadur Upadhyay (Galu Dai), 51, Nakkhal Para, Dhaka

“My father was from Ramechhap. Like many young Gorkhalis men, he came to Assam to work as a security guard. We used to play Holi with them, and it was popular with students from Nepal who came to study at the university. We used to play Holi with them, and in the 1980s, many Nepali families from Nakkhal moved to other parts of Bangladesh—to Pufna, Kushtia, Sylibong, and Chattogram— in search of better jobs.

“In 1966, 16 Nepali families, mostly Chettris and Newars, moved to Mymensing to work at guards at the newly-opened agricultural university. The location of the Nepali Fole in Mymensingh has changed due to the laying of railway tracks, but it has long been popular with students from Nepal who came to study at the university. We used to play Holi with them, and Bangladeshis still talk about us in ways that make all of us proud to be Gorkhalis.”

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Ten glorious years in the air

Reasons why Buddha Air is the safest and most preferred airline in the country.

Technical capabilities of international repute

Since our inception, we have always maintained our technical capabilities at the highest international levels. We have never compromised on these standards because we have been keeping an adequate spares inventory and other required special tools as per international standards to ensure safe and timely flights every single time. Hence Buddha Air is the only airline that enjoys a 99% dispatch reliability record in Nepal. To complement our technical capabilities, we are in the process of building a 25,000 sq ft state-of-the-art hangar and workshop space in Kathmandu that will provide technical support and maintenance to our aircraft. No wonder our engineering & technical capabilities have paved the way for us to transfer our technologies to India, where we are the Technical Service Provider for Satya Airline.

Adhering to safety regulations ADAS/FDR

Among the most common causes of aircraft accidents/incidents are due to mechanical failures and pilots not adhering to prescribed flying procedures as per aircraft flight manuals. The weekly reports generated by ADAS and FDR automatically detects if any pilot is deviating from the manuals or if any part needs replacement. This is then immediately corrected by our concerned division so ensuring that all our pilots operate as per the manuals and engineers are also made aware at an early stage if any aircraft component needs repair or replacement. Buddha Air is the only airline in the country equipped with this modern technology – ADAS. The fact that Buddha Air has never had to claim insurance due to major mishaps is a testament to our safety standards.

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Our high quality service speaks volumes as indicated by our ever-increasing customer base. To reward loyalty, we introduced the Royal Club frequent flyer program. Currently, we have over 35,000 Royal Club members, and we’ve witnessed the membership grow from strength to strength. Members now enjoy free tickets, discounts in various hotels, shopping malls and restaurants.

7th aircraft added to our fleet

Buddha Air started its operation with just two aircraft and within ten years we have now added a 7th aircraft with the investment of Nepali Banks, which has established Buddha Air as an asset to the nation. Buddha Air created private sector aviation history by operating brand new and straight out of the factory aircraft, we are still operating the most expensive aircraft in the domestic sector. Today we cover major domestic routes and also operate mountain flights complimented by high-quality service. We are delighted and proud to claim that Buddha Air has been and is still the safest and most preferred airline in the country.

www.buddhaair.com
The madhes wants options

Interview with Bijay Gachhadar (NC-D) in Ghatana ra Bichar, 25 July

So are the two Congresses close to unification? The party should not have split in the first place. Even the unification is a year overdue. Only Girijababu and Sher Bahadur can tell us what is delaying it. This time around, I am hopeful, but I’ll believe it when I see it. We never intended to split the party. We only wanted to make the party’s leadership more democratic and to fight against bad practices.

Did you find there was more democracy within the NC-D? We tried to make the new Congress more democratic, but the old ways and the old culture continued. That is why we have been speaking out against Sher Bahadur Deuba’s leadership.

Do you think the elections will take place in November? If the current law and order situation continues, a November election is impossible. Law and order must improve and the situation continues, a November election is impossible. Law and order must improve and the situation continues, a November election is impossible. Law and order must improve and the situation continues, a November election is impossible. Law and order must improve and the situation continues, a November election is impossible. Law and order must improve and the situation continues, a November election is impossible.

What’s happening in the madhes—most major parties have lost their base there? The madhes has sent two clear messages: they are in favour of democracy and opposed to the Maoists’ style and perspective. Despite major changes in the country, the mentality of the eight-party leaders has not changed. If they continue like this, the madhes will reject them. The Maoists have traditionally been Congress’s vote bank, but even this party will find it hard to salvage a decent position if it does not internalise the changes and adopt a new approach. The same goes for the UML. The madhes is looking for options.

We hear you are launching a new regional party. The big parties are more focussed on pan-Indian interests, not madhes rights. Instead of supporting the Madhes Movement, they are suppressing it. Madhes is looking for a party that will represent them. We’ve frequently met with MPs from different parties, but I am yet to decide on a new party. My colleagues and public opinion are both in favour of a new party.

What about the separatist calls? Madhes is demanding an autonomous federal state, not an independent one. Even we are against that. The communal tension is unfortunate. Our fight is with state not with the region or pahadi people.

Madhes regiment

Editor’s note in Punarjagaran, 24 July

The Nepali Army is a national army, but its composition does not reflect this national character. Whatever reasons it might have been constrained by in the past, we should not now wait any longer in taking steps to make it more representative. The army has played an important role in the making of modern Nepal. Now, the responsibility of protecting Nepal’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as democracy, rests on the army’s shoulders. For that reason, a madhes regiment is essential. The Nepali Army is a professional and apolitical organisation and it does not need to wait until the reforms are instituted after elections to the constituent assembly. The madhes is demanding—reasonably—proportional representation in all the organs of the state. Political parties can calculate their gains and losses, but the army should remain above this, and create a madhesi regiment right away.

Betrayed

Madhab Basnet in Dristi, 24 July

A recent decision to add state personnel to CPN-M chairman Pumpraj Kamal Dahal’s security detail has been seen as an attempt to bolster the Maoist leader. KC, the army staff chief, was also captured because his friends betrayed him and the party and gave his name up. KC says the extent of collusion will only become clear when those who made the captures at Bhirinibagh are questioned. Some Maoists broke under torture and gave up colleagues’ names. “If you were captured you had to deny being a mole,” they say. The army has to prepare to die or be used by
“The Maoists are creating problems to delay the elections because they know they will not even get the seats they have now in parliament if constituent assembly elections are held.”

CPN-UML’s central committee member Raghu Pant quoted in Naya Patrika, 22 July

Smart voters
Interview with election commissioner Ayodhi Prasad Yadav in Jana Aastha, 25 July

Why did you give the sickle and hammer to the Maoists? While filing for election symbols, the Maoists had put the sickle and hammer as their top choice. We just gave them the symbol of their preference. Even in India it works in a similar way. We changed it when there was opposition from other parties.

So if the other communist parties object to the new symbol, will you change it again? No. They have to agree.

What was the outcome of the mock poll? That’s for our internal use and we don’t intend to make it public. We are testing our managerial ability. There were two different ballots, and we wanted to see if voters would be able to vote and what problems could arise. We have not analysed the outcome yet.

Can we assume that the election will go smoothly in November? The poll showed that people are conscious and alert. We won’t have any problems from a managerial standpoint.

But there is uncertainty about the polls. The political parties so far have reassured us that the election will take place. The dates won’t change.

You yourself are from the tarai, how can you say elections will happen without solving the problem there? Yes, the madhesi issue has become a cause for national concern. The government has assured us that the problem will be addressed, and talks are now taking place. The constituent assembly is of importance to everyone, so we believe all sections will cooperate with us.

Have the constituencies been delineated? That is a constitutional process and won’t affect us. We look at the total number of voters as long as they don’t divide one VDC into two different constituencies, we do not have problem with even a last-minute delineation.

Maoist minister: Help! Help! Are there comrades out there? It looks like someone is trying to give us security again.

Uttam Nepal, Rajdhani, 25 July

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When a Nepal Water Supply Corporation pipe burst in Khokana due to a flooded Bagmati, there was severe shortage of water in the Lalitpur area. While 80 percent of Lalitpur got almost no drinking water, those living in Khokana, Bungmati, and Bhaiyepati were most severely affected.

The NWSC had people working on the burst pipe, but they weren’t successful. Then the Young Communist League came to the rescue and something shocking happened—the Nepal Army joined the YCL and in a matter of few hours they had successfully carried the 18-inch pipe together up to the construction site. Khokana residents were surprised and thrilled to see this.

YCL’s Lalitpur coordinator Narayan said, “We have no qualms joining hands with those who are already helping the people. Such cooperation should also happen in the future.” When asked about the bitterness from the past, Narayan answers, “We will never bow down in front of the enemies of the people, but we will always assist those who are assisting the people.

The army also had positive things to say about the YCL, but Janadesh sensed fear in their voices.

Overall, though, this was such a positive story and yet it was not covered in the media. This side of the YCL is an answer to those who think that these helping hands should be living in barracks day after day at the expense of Nepali taxpayers.

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It’s not quite time to get out the party hats yet, but Kathmandu Valley is in damage control mode. After four ignominious years on the World Heritage Sites in Danger list, the Valley, with its distinctive collection of historic spiritual sites, has been taken off. Kathmandu has been on the World Heritage Sites list for 28 years, for being home to the darbar squares of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur, Swayambhunath, Bouddhanath, Pashupatinath, and Changunarayan.

The danger to some of these sites comes from one feature of many of these sites that makes them so attractive: their near-complete integration into the daily lives and physical environments of people who live around them. As the capital becomes more urbanised, and growing immigration puts increased pressure on new and old focal points, the areas around these old sites too are changing. Older houses are being demolished in favour of towering cement structures that obliterate the well-planned vistas most old areas had. Fast food and cheap clothing vendors have sprung up where buildings could not, and places like Patan Darbar Square are subject to greater physical strains than before. Along with UNESCO’s warning came 55 recommendations, some of which were taken on board swiftly by the Kathmandu Metropolitan City and the Department of Archaeology. Vehicles were no longer allowed into the monument areas, stone markers were placed around the sites, hoarding boards and curio shops were removed from the premises, and maps of the sites marking them as World Heritage Sites were put up.

This was enough for UNESCO and the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) to take the Valley off the list earlier this month, citing commendable efforts to preserve its heritage in the face of urbanisation and growing immigration.
Ours for the saving

To bridge the Valley’s past and future, individuals need to care

outstanding urban
development.

This doesn’t mean we can
celebrate, though, says Rohit Ranjitkar of the Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust. “We
mustn’t let being off the
endangered list make us
complacent,” he argues.

Many problems remain to
be tackled. “Kathmandu and
Patan darbar squares are
allowing vehicles in again, not
to mention the night markets.
Boudha is blocked from all
sides by buildings,” explains
Riddhi Pradhan of the Nepal Heritage Society, which does
everything from restoration
and environmental
improvement to awareness-
raising walks.

In Kathmandu and Patan,
old houses that are part of the
heritage and atmosphere of the
area around the squares have
been knocked down. “Zoning
laws do not allow houses in
the core area of the heritage
sites to be demolished, yet this
continues,” Ranjitkar points
out. Another construction
bylaw does not allow buildings
less than 35 feet
from the monument site, and
even these have to be of a
certain height and should have
no cantilevers. One look
around some of the sites tells
you how effectively that is
being enforced.

The night markets,
paradoxically promoted by the
very municipalities
responsible for the
preservation of heritage sites,
are a real problem in
Kathmandu and Patan
darbar squares. “Anything can
happen with these markets
around,” says Samajwati Singh
of the Patan Darbar Heritage Committee. “Smoke from the
food stalls stains the walls,
garbage is everywhere, and
there is always the fear of a
fire breaking out. These are
holy sites, not public hawking
spaces, bulletin boards, or
 eateries.”

Singh also points to the
disturbing trend of using
these darbar squares for public
gatherings and mass meetings
that can and often do turn
violent, endangering the sites.
“There was a notice recently
forbidding demonstrations in
darbar squares,” says Ranjitkar,
adding bitterly. “But who pays
attention? The prime minister
himself recently attended a
large Nepali Congress rally at
Basantapur.”

To be sure, in many parts
of the city things are slowly
changing, and new buildings
are making at least an attempt
to fit the ethos of old

Kathmandu, with
traditionally-tiled facades.
Prime Minister Koirala aside,
support is also coming from
the interim government,
which has put heritage site
conservation on its Priority 1
list and is giving it a large
enough budget, says Rajesh
Mathema at the World Heritage
Section of the Department of
Archaeology. The DoA will
monitor an Integrative
Management Plan drawn up
with UNESCO and to be
implemented by KMC. The
plan deals largely with the
private buildings around the
sites, but also includes public
awareness programs.

Getting the general public to
appreciate the inherent
value of heritage sites is
essential, especially with
regard to the private buildings
around the heritage sites, says
heritage consultants and urban
planners. “Public awareness is
paramount,” says Riddhi
Pradhan. “Whatever we’ve
accomplished so far is all due
to public awareness.” Pradhan
points to the conservation
success in Bhaktapur, which
she attributes to the love local
residents have for their
surroundings.

“We take our heritage for
granted,” says Ranjitkar.
“People need to learn the
value of our culture and
heritage. Only that will make
them stop these destructive
activities.”

KUNDA DIXIT

RUBBING SHOULDERS: Some exquisitely restored traditional residences, like the Shrestha House guest house, are cheek-by-jowl with modern monstrosities.
The tariar issues must be resolved by Nepalis, not internationals

Leave it to us

Nepal has a new conflict and the ‘internationals’ can’t wait to get involved. With no humility about their dismal failure in past conflict resolution efforts, and blinded by their distaste for Nepali political players, many donors are angling for a greater political role in the tariar. But Kathmandu’s diplomatic corps, including UNMIN, would best keep their hands off the madhesi cauldron as their increased role could well be counter-productive.

Some well-intentioned diplomats, worried about the turbulence in the tariar, are keen to help. Others, especially within the UN, see an opportunity to step in as facilitators, a role they are used to and missing here. Madhesi groups egged them on, believing this will internationalise the issue and give them equal standing with the state.

They don’t realise an outside role would be neutral and may even go against their interests—look at the Maoist-UNMIN tussle on verification. And anyway this is not a view of most madhesi, who may be pleased with the attention but know they have to live and deal with Kathmandu politicians, not diplomats, UN peacekeepers, or conflict advisors. The problems in the tariar can still be resolved within the framework of the national polity by local actors. Only when the present establishment sits of its own accord and its interests, and implements promises can Nepal develop a stable political structure. The country is going through a necessary, albeit painful, phase of inclusive nation-building as a result of the opening up of democratic space.

An interventionist international role could distort this fragile process by snatching political gains away from the ground, thus weakening local political institutions that need to be reformed and strengthened. In the case of UNMIN, closer engagement with the madhesi will further upset relations with the Maoists and take focus away from its core mandate.

Many experts come to Nepal from the Balkans or Sri Lanka and view the madhesi issue solely through an ethnic prism. Their limited understanding stems from various factors: there is little literature (in English) to explain the tariar; most diplomats and donors have never interacted with madhesi political and civil society figures, who are comfortable in Mahali or Nepal; their sources are first-hand reports of violence and select interlocutors who represent only one view and have their own interests; and finally, they do not know the caste structure and district-level political dynamics. Until six months ago, most internationals had no clue about madhesi. A multimillion rupee World Bank project on inclusion barely mentioned the madhesi sense of exclusion, and a hastily postscript is now being funded and prepared.

The context is different but it is instructive to look to 1950s Nehruvian India. A democratic framework was being built in a diverse country; contentious issues were the shape of federal structure and linguistic policy. The Delhi elite faced problems ranging from street agitation in the south and west to armed struggle in the northeast. While problems remain, one of the reasons Indian democracy survives is because it was adapted to local conditions by local actors without outside mediation or solutions.

Internationals believe only they can effectively mediate in the tariar because there is a trust deficit. But the trust issue is not irresolvable. After all, the Nepali Congress and the Maoists, who have a history of amnesty, together carved out the 12-point agreement. Such dialogue on madhesi concerns will happen with local actors without outside mediation or solutions.

Like it or not, India is a critical player in the peace process and its distaste for international involvement in Nepal has to be considered. New Delhi grudgingly agreed to UNMIN. But the tariar is much closer to the Indian heartland across the open border. The internationals must out of pragmatism give up hopes of a greater role.

But India’s displeasure is a sideshow. For a sustainable solution, this problem must be resolved by the Nepali political class. The cocktail circuit is abuzz with ideas—some donor officials recently considered. New Delhi grudgingly agreed to UNMIN. But the tarai is more activity, staff, or report-writing at UNMIN.

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Kids in limbo

The review of the adoption process is messy and unfair

MALIKA ARYAL

shortly after he took over in early April, Minister of Women, Children, and Social Welfare Jhada Bahadur Biswakarma suspended inter-country adoption. As a result, over 400 families with completed paperwork cannot take their children back with them.

The decision to suspend international adoptions followed the exposure of a ‘market’ in ‘orphans’ and the taking of children away without their birth parents’ consent in a poorly regulated birth process (‘On sale’, #339).

Officials at the ministry confirm that no files have been processed since the suspension, and that those pending a final signature were sent back to the District Administration Office. Most adoptive countries are also not longer issuing visas to any of those adopted children whose files are complete. A positive consequence of the indefinite suspension is that many commercial ‘orphans’ are returning to their children’s parents, now that there is no ‘market’ for them.

The ministry and the embassies seem to be saying nothing will move until the inter-country adoption process is altered. But it is not clear how to make it similar to adoption procedures in the other countries (see also interview with departing French Ambassador Michel Jolivet, p12). The biggest changes will be the setting up of a centralised agency that will verify orphans and vet prospective parents from all other national agencies, and the acceptance that adoption is the last resort for a child. This could put a stop to the ‘widow freelance’ adoptions Nepal is known for.

Few dispute that adoption from Nepal needs to be better regulated. But many of the 400-plus children in limbo belong to parents and children who have spent the last few months bonding with each other. This indefinite suspension is painful for all of them and is made worse by the difficulty in getting accurate information. The ministry has not been answering adoptive parents’ questions directly, and the boards of internet groups like Nchild and Adoption Nepal are filled with pleas for information, open letters to the ministries, and some wrenching tales of children left behind. Some adoptive parents are camping out indefinitely in Kathmandu.

Ministry joint secretary Vinod Adhikary will tell you that the ‘adoption conditions’ formed by a ministry review committee involve the best interests of the children, but ‘if they are so concerned about the best interests of the children, they should act fast,’ argues one. Some parents who have been waiting for the last three months say whatever the changes, the old rules should continue to apply to existing situations where the adoption was more or less completed.

Too little, too slow

Is the peace process failing ordinary people?

One part of the peace dividend is psychological—people feel safer and less afraid of today. Some say they have been displaced or who left have come back. They feel more comfortable. People are overcoming the past.

If development work is an indication of a peace dividend, that process has just started. Infrastructure is being rebuilt, but whether this rebuilding is helping people depends on the context.

If we compare our situation with other post-conflict countries, perhaps we have not delivered the kind of peace dividend we should have. This is because the peace process is ongoing, and many things have been settled yet and will be settled until after the elections. The international community has not come through in a big way to help as we had hoped either.

There is also a gap between the state apparatus and the people. When the local bodies can bridge that gap, the situation will move closer to normal.

How will the momentum for elections affect development work?

It will build confidence and make it easier for other actors, such as development agencies, and NGOs to go out and work. Even where there are disturbances, like in some parts of the tarai, development agencies can continue doing political tutoring. The constituent assembly process will speed things up too. Eventually, politicians will be using development work to reach out to the people.
“Where are the young leaders?”

In a freewheeling interview outgoing French Ambassador, Michel Jolivet speaks about the changes he has seen in Nepal, the Nagarjuna murders, and mountaineering accidents.

Nepali Times: What has been the highlight of your tenure here?
Michel Jolivet: I have witnessed many historical events, but I will always remember 21 November at the convention centre. Everyone was happy, sitting together, talking, hugging, there was very little security. There was a strong sense of nationalhood. On this night I thought Nepal could be definitely on a new path.

So does Nepal look very different than when you first arrived here in 2004?
The problems are largely the same as they were in 1990, and even in the pre-1990 period, Jana Andolan for the 21st century—what does that government are not. Perhaps not ripe enough to easily build a modern nation. Ethnicities and caste and interests, and national feeling is perhaps not ripe enough to easily build a modern nation. The people can be modern, but the state and the government are not.

The parties too are not modern—they do not have programs or agenda. How can you tell the difference between them? Even the Maoists—they say we are a Marxist-Leninist party for the 21st century—what does that mean concretely? You can change a few words here and there in speeches and all the parties sound the same. As for the Maoist revolution, it was anarchistic as early as 1996 because the international revolutionary movement was already dead. Nepal has always been a rather weak state. This means poor governance, even non-governance. Regarding poor governance some examples stand out. One is the inability to appoint ambassadors. Nepal, which has only friends, has been so kind to us! Everyone has been so kind to me!

Then there are the willful defaulters. In my three years here there have been four or five finance ministers. All told they’ve dealt with this, but I doubt a single rupee has been given back by willful defaulters. Another consequence of a weak state is widespread corruption. Just one example—a few years ago I had to call on a finance minister to tell him that a head of a government body was asking for a kickback in order to implement a cabinet decision. The minister said to me: “that is normal.”

You seem to be saying nothing has been gained in the past year.
You seem to be saying nothing has been gained in the past year. Just over 50 French adoptive parents are in this position. Before adoptions were suspended, children were being taken away without the consent of their parents, and too much money was changing hands. It was good to stop that, and that an overhaul of the system is being planned. I think the adoption agencies can organise international adoption the way many other countries do, through a centralised national adoption agency that other national agencies can organise adoption through.

Your tenure has also been a bit ‘disastrous’ in terms of French mountaineering accidents—the bodies of four French climbers were found on Ganesh Himal just ten days ago. This was a very bad series. We had no major mountaineering accident for years and years. Then we had Kangnur in 2005 when 18 climbers including seven French died. Shortly after, two French people died on Chulu. Jean-Christophe Lafaille, the top French climber, died on Makalu in January 2006, then a French gentleman on Everest in May 2006, and then the four young men on Ganesh last October. I appreciated the help and comradeship of Nepali mountaineers in the search operations. I also pay respect to the families of all the deceased. They showed great dignity.

And you yourself have a passion for mountains. Yes, I’ve trekked and hiked in many places and went to Island and Mera peaks. I’ve travelled to many parts of Nepal. People are so helpful, welcoming and kind everywhere. On the way from Bardiya recently some women had closed the highway. They refused to reopen it for us, but the gentlemen did show us away around the blockade! I think this story; it proves again how everybody is kind in Nepal. Prime Minister Koirala, Prachanda, the king, everyone has been so kind to me!

So you have positive impressions of each of these people?
They all do what they think is the best solution. The only time I was really worried was between the king’s two announcements last April. Today, my main concern is for the elections and the many very important issues that need to be sorted out before them. It is not a political or the order, the marginalized groups. But Nepal has a true magic to move forward in complex situations that a foreign observer can hardly understand. Everybody seems to be trying hard.
Cost of conflict

Time is running out to help businesses revive the economy

The books that have come out since the ceasefire last year have all concentrated on the politically interesting period in Nepal’s history. But few authors have assessed the socio-economic impact of the armed conflict and recommended strategies for reconstruction.

BOOK REVIEW
Bhagirath Yogi

In Nepal’s Conflict: A Micro-Impact Analysis on Economy, Bidhawambh Pyakuryal, the economist and professor, and Rabi Shanker Sainju, program director at the National Planning Commission, fill this gap. Aside from the loss of life, the country was beset by population displacement and political instability. The authors conclude that the impact of the conflict on the country’s economic growth has been much more serious than we previously imagined.

Nepal’s economy grew at 4.8 percent in 1995–96, but growth had plummeted to minus 0.3 percent in 2001–02. Even after the ceasefire last year, the economy has only bounced back by 2.5 percent.

The authors zoom in on the impact of the conflict on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Banke, Rupandehi, Kaski, and Sunusari districts as case studies and extrapolate their observations there to the entire economy. SMEs are the largest group of manufacturers and have brought in 40 percent of all industrial investment in the country. Industries with fixed assets of not more than Rs 30 million are medium industries.

The share of SMEs, including micro, cottage and small industries, in the total industrial output is 70 percent. Similarly, the share of SMEs in total industrial establishment and total industrial employment are 96 percent and 83 percent respectively.

The study (conducted between July–September 2006) found that the flow of Chinese products in local markets has had a strong impact on these manufacturers. For example, one plastic sandal factory in Rupandehi that could not compete with Chinese sandals had to close down.

The study points out that the overall problem being faced by the SMEs is related to production and market failures. The conflict destroyed not only physical infrastructure, but also human capital and broke apart the social fabric. This is likely to create instability in the short-run and lower growth in the medium-term, the authors say.

More ominously, the conflict destroyed business linkages and distribution channels of SMEs in previous market areas. Although after the ceasefire new material availability was not a problem, the cost of raw materials and logistics increased significantly.

The authors warn that a post-conflict period is very sensitive to economic policies and will respond to them. So an over-emphasis on political reforms, elections and party politics eclipsing necessary socioeconomic policies may backfire on overall reform initiatives.

The book lays out projections for various development scenarios under the state of continued conflict and under peaceful conditions from 2005–06 to 2017–21. It makes recommendations to revive economy and generate employment in general and support the SMEs to grow, in particular.

A recent annual report published by the International Development Department of the University of Birmingham says that conflict and security are critical issues for the development community. “By destroying economies, infrastructure, and societies, conflicts’ impacts resonate long after the combatants have laid down their weapons,” the report says.

Pyakuryal and Sainju’s book is a must-read for students of Nepal politics as well as policymakers, and a timely warning not to sideline economics. Whoever is in power after the elections will have to address economic issues, otherwise stagnant production, and lack of job creation will continue to haunt politics for decades to come.

Bhagirath Yogi is a journalist with the BBC Nepal Service in London.
**ABOUT TOWN**

**EXHIBITIONS**
- **Amalgam** a group exhibition of paintings by national and international artists at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal. Revisited. until 20 August, 11AM-6PM. 4218048
- **Heartbeat Series 5** a group art exhibition by 12 young artists. 4:30 PM till 2 Aug at Baryo Fiesta, Nepal. 9851050289

**EVENTS**
- **Shashtrartha** on postcolonialism by Pramod Mishra. 4-6PM, 28 July at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- **5th Bagmati River Festival** clean-up campaign at Chobar. 28 July, 1-10AM. 9851031431
- **School Bullying** a workshop by Nile Rana. 28 and 29 July at The New Era. Batbipat. 9851032369
- **Pottery classes** one month course in coil and slab methods and two month course in wheel work, starting 1 August. 9851101837
- **Thai Film Festival** 3.6 August with a film each day at 5.30 PM - The Overture, Ong Rak, Nang Nak, and Monrak Transister, at the Russian Culture Centre, Kathmandu.
- **Rato Bangala School presents West Side Story** 8 August: 6.30 PM, 10 August 3PM and 6.30 PM, 11 August 1PM and 4PM, 12 August 1PM and 4.30 PM. Tickets at Rs 250, 500, and 1000, proceeds go to Gangalal Memorial Hospital for heart surgery on economically disadvantaged youth.
- **Film South Asia 2007** Festival of South Asian documentaries. 11-14 October. www.filmsouthasia.org
- **Toastmasters** a communication and leadership program, organised by Kathmandu Toastmasters Club every Wednesday 6PM at Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI) building, Tripureswor.

**MUSIC**
- **Pokhri series** with musican Dipak Jangam. 27 July. 6PM at nepa-laya’s ‘P’ sala, Kalikasthan. 4437893
- **Jazz at Jatra** every Saturday 7PM onwards at Jatra Café and Bar, Thamel. 4250440
- **Soul of Raga** live classical and fusion music, every Friday night at Khushi’s Kitchen, The Organic Bistro. 4429903.
- **Open mic night** at Via Via Café, every Friday, 4PM onwards.
- **Live music** at the Red Onion Bar, Wednesdays from 6PM with Vani and Zyme Lepcha. 4416071
- **Ciney Gurung** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayan Complex. 7PM. 5521408
- **DJ Raju and the Cloudwalkers** live at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, every Friday and Saturday. 4491234

**DINING**
- **Arabian BBQ Night** with live music by Side B. 27 July at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarika’s. Rs 1199. 4479849.
- **Starry night BBQ** with live music by Ciney Gurung at The Shambala Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri-La, every Friday 7PM, Rs 650 inclusive of a beer. 4412999.
- **5th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival** 16 wines at Rs 150 a glass and Rs 600 a bottle, at Khilo’s of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440
- **Monsoon Magic** live jazz by Inner Grove and a variety of cocktails from the summer special menu, every Wednesday, Rs 599 at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarikas’s. 4479848
- **Friday evening BBQ** with live music, at the Hotel Himalaya, 7PM, Rs 699 net. 5523900.
- **Walk and lunch** every Saturday at the Shuvapri Heights Cottage. 9841371927.
- **Fresh summer bites** salads, soups, sandwiches, and sorbets at Hotel Shangri-la daily 12-3PM at Rs 499. 4412999.
- **Kebabs and curries** also trigger cloud burst on the western slope and this is not unlikely over the weekend over the eastern and central midhills. This satellite picture taken on Thursday afternoon shows a synchronisation of the southwestern’s system from the Bay with a low pressure trough which is bringing copious rain right across Nepal. Such monsoon pulses also trigger cloud burst events and this is not unlikely over the weekend over the eastern and central midhills. The Valley will see vigorous rains mostly during the night and light rain with low-hanging clouds through the day.

**WEATHER**

**KATHMANDU VALLEY**

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**WORST FLOODS IN RECORDED HISTORY**

In Cash, Doc (Ajay Devgan), an ace con artist hires the services of top notch robbers Puja (Esha Deol), Aditi (Dia Mirza), Danny (Zayed Khan) & Lucky (Ritesh Deshmukh) to rob a set of three priceless diamonds in South Africa. Angad (Sunil Shetty), a vicious underworld henchman, gets two of the diamonds and now wants the third one. The robbers also need to outrun Shania (Shamita Shetty), the head of security at the Indian embassy of South Africa. Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com

**STREET LENGTHS**

Worst floods in recorded history in Britain, hottest ever in southern Europe. And our monsoons are being pushed further back every year. This week’s monsoon showers were the kind we should have in end-June. But, better late than never. This satellite picture taken on Thursday afternoon shows a synchronisation of the southwestern’s system from the Bay with a low pressure trough which is bringing copious rain right across Nepal. Such monsoon pulses also trigger cloud burst events and this is not unlikely over the weekend. In Cash, Doc (Ajay Devgan), an ace con artist hires the services of top notch robbers Puja (Esha Deol), Aditi (Dia Mirza), Danny (Zayed Khan) & Lucky (Ritesh Deshmukh) to rob a set of three priceless diamonds in South Africa. Angad (Sunil Shetty), a vicious underworld henchman, gets two of the diamonds and now wants the third one. The robbers also need to outrun Shania (Shamita Shetty), the head of security at the Indian embassy of South Africa. Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com

**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 Godawari Village Resort, every Saturday and Sunday, unlimited swimming, buffet lunch with a beer. Rs 690. 5526675
- **Monsoon madness** two nights three days package at Rs.4999 for a couple at Shangri-La Village, Pokhara. 4412999
- **Experience Hyati** one night stay on double occupancy, full buffet breakfast at The Cafe and access to Club Oasis, Rs 5000 plus taxes, valid only for Nepali and local residents. 4491234

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

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HAPPENINGS

27 JULY - 2 AUGUST 2007

#359

ALL TOGETHER NOW: Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokhrel and the parties talk about the code of conduct for the elections to the constituent assembly at the Election Commission on Wednesday.

THE TROUBLE WITH VDCs: VDC secretaries and other civil servants protest the killing last week of their colleague Ram Pokhrel, in Siraha, on Monday. Local bodies are functioning only sporadically in many districts, hampering development efforts.

AND ANOTHER THING: Indian communist leader Sitaram Yechuri tells correspondents at the Reporter’s Club on Tuesday that Nepal should ask India for help on the tarai and that India needs to reconsider the importance of the monarchy and the army in Nepal. Yechuri arrived on Monday to pay his respects to the recently deceased Sushila Koirala.

MOVING ON RAPIDLY: A post office employee in Rasuwa decides who should stay and who should go on the walls of the office, last week.

THIS IS HOW WE DO IT: Pedestrians cross the street at Singha Darbar less suicidally than usual, as the Korea and Nepal Youth Red Cross Circles manage traffic at the intersection on Tuesday.

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our weekly Ass rarely gets its facts right, preferring to bend them every week on this space. So it wasn’t surprising that it got its backside rattled by irate readers about the report that Matrika Babu had set an example for the class struggle by travelling economy roundtrip to Bangkok for a health checkup. It turns out the Minister of Jungles was actually on business class with his better half (Seats 1J and K) and his retinue was at the back on steerage with the citizen journalist, who reported this to us. What perplexes the Ass is: aren’t the Gangalals and the Norvics of this country good enough for Comrade Rumble in the Jungle? Wonder if sick recruits in the cantonments will also get the same commune equality treatment in Bumrumgrad?

Comrade Ian must be doing something right, given how he is being clobbered by both royalists and Maoists. Last week’s issue of the CPN-M mouth organ (Janadesh, not Gorkhapatra) sent vicious barbs directed at the UNMIN Chief, his interviewers in the cantonments accusing them of asking hostile questions. Janadesh even insinuated that there had been some international canvassing inside containers. The same week, rightwing blogs erupted in a blistering attack on UNMIN and Ian’s perceived mollycoddling of Maoists. The Ass’s take on this is that UNMIN is falling into the same trap as the Norwegians in Sri Lanka where the rebel movement arm-twisted supposed peace monitors to get its way by threatening to abandon the peace process. It’s pretty clear who is holding up the third round of verification and why, and it’s time UNMEAN stop beating around the bush.

The reason Comrade Fearsome is obsessed with DDR and SSR could be because both acronyms have a Stalinist ring to them: Deutsche Demokratische Republik and the Soviet Socialist Republic. One sure sign of desperation on the part of the comrades is the open attack on our colleagues at the Himalayan Times and Annapurna Post. Could this be a case of shooting the messenger before elections? The Ass’s prognosis is the comrades will follow through with their threats to quit the government ahead of elections since an anti-incumbent advantage is the only thing that will save them. The Fierce One will dump Laldhoj if it gets too hot at the plenum.

Word reaches us that whatever might have been happening at Lord’s cricket ground with the Indian tourists, the spirit of the game was not observed during our head jarsap’s visit to the UK. Politeness and due protocol were much in evidence at the FCA and MoD but fair play and the ability to duck at the crease was not. The nasty opening ball was an Isabel Hilton op-ed in the Guardian that served as a curtain raiser for the visit. Hilton attacked our COAS as being a man who talked and promised a lot about reform and change but delivered little. It got a lot worse in the meetings were beamers and bouncers were the order of the day. Katuwal Jarsap was caught off silly point and even before the first over. Ouch. I say old chap, it’s hardly cricket…

What the Assinine One finds ironical is that while the British press was accusing Katuwal Jarsap of mass disappearances, three weeks earlier sections of the Swiss media were also calling Chairman Lotus Flower a “butcher” in Berne. With human rights violators like these in power, no wonder truth and reconciliation is in no one’s agenda. Meanwhile, disinformation via cyberspace is reaching a frenzy: the Maoists’ Zurich connection got a flurry of email cross-postings by a Buddhist Swiss, the improbably named Halshi Bash, about a vast red stash of ill-gotten wealth in Credit Suisse. As we go to press, bloggers from left field have launched a counter disinformation campaign.