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Weekly Internet Poll # 361

Q. Which is the biggest obstacle to holding elections in November?

Total votes: 5,804

20.4%

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Weekly Internet Poll # 362. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

Q. Are the Maoists serious about facing the constituent assembly elections?

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KIRAN PANDAY

# New song

## Now that polls are certain, let's go for it

**GARLAND OF FLOWERS:** A teacher at the Panchakanya Secondary School in Chundebi on Wednesday gets his students to practice singing the new national anthem which extolls Nepal's unity in diversity and doesn't mention the monarchy.

### KUNDA DIXIT

Obstacles overcome, the NC and Maoists have run out of excuses not to go for elections.

Both parties have abandoned their secret plot to evade polls, and a hardline Maoist clique that wanted their party to quit the government has come around.

The only lingering danger is a deliberate attempt by extremists of both the left and right to sabotage elections by adding fuel to the tarai fires, or stepping up violence against candidates in the hills.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala and Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal are Nepal's two most-powerful men. But they were also the most nervous about elections. Both knew they'd fare badly so they maneuvered to add dissidents to the interim parliament and convert it into a constituent assembly without elections.

It was an ill-conceived and ill-concealed plan, one that would have cost the government the little legitimacy it had. Still, they'd probably have pulled it off had they not been warned off by

the internationals.

Now that they can't avoid facing voters, the only way the kangresis can make up for lost ground and lift sagging cadre morale is by reuniting with the NC-D. It will also want to set itself apart from republicans to bag the estimated 40 percent of voters who want to

retain a symbolic kingship. Since the election will effectively be a referendum on the monarchy, this will be a critical campaign issue.

The Maoists have come out of their central committee intact, and their radical rhetoric of rebellion seems to have been for internal consumption only. The plenum resolution on republic and proportional representation

therefore shouldn't be seen as an ultimatum but as the party's campaign platform.

Dahal's biggest challenge now is to make the YCL and other hotheads behave so that their militancy will not wreck his party's chance in elections. The Maoists have come

out of their meetings this week by actually looking like a more democratic party than the NC.

They have also re-committed themselves to the peace process and the 12-point agreement. Now, to fare well in elections all the ex-guerrillas need to do is show they have abandoned violence once and for all and that they stand for pluralism. ●

**Editorial**  
**No turning back now** p2



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# Are we squandering our freedom again? A part for parties

## NO TURNING BACK NOW

Ever since Rana prime minister Padma Shamsheer granted the first written constitution in 1948, Nepalis have longed for laws made for the people, of the people, and most importantly, by the people.

But that expectation for an elected assembly to draft a constitution has remained unfulfilled. In a farcical repetition of history, parties that represent the people are once more having cold feet about elections being held in November. It looks like instead trying to hold polls, politicians again want to hold them off. But there is no turning back now.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala's commitment to elections seems to be intact despite thinking aloud about taking a shortcut and converting the interim parliament into a constitutional assembly. Even so, revitalising and reuniting the NC must be his first priority. The Maoists hounded the NC out of the hills, and the Madhes Uprising weakened its hold in the tarai. The kangresi rank and file feels elections can wait for a more opportune moment when their party has regained lost ground.

That's a prospect Koirala the party president finds hard to ignore, but Koirala the prime minister wants elections to be held on schedule. Which will he be: party boss or elder statesman?

The Maoists are even more nervous about elections. Pushpa Kamal Dahal has come under intense pressure at his extended central committee meeting that ended Wednesday, even though he astutely staved off militant-minded dissidents.

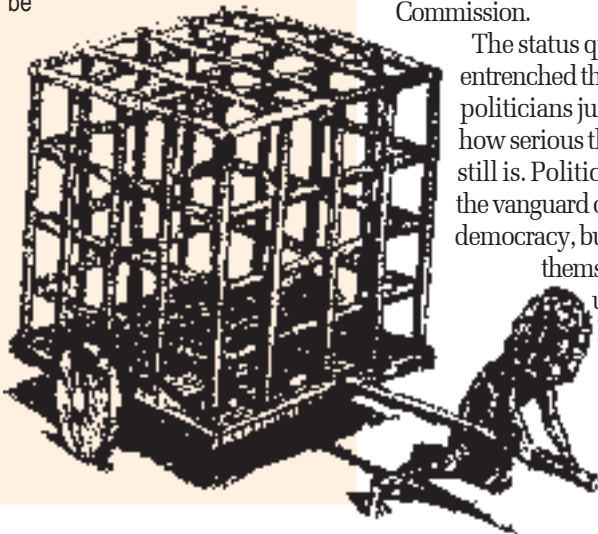
The supremo has realised that he has lost considerable support in his base areas. And the madhes movement decimated Maoist networks in the eastern tarai. A lot of the radical rhetoric that came out of the factory floor in Balaju this week was meant for internal party consumption.

Only the UML has been consistently serious about elections, and that could be because its internal party investigation has shown its candidates will do well. That is why Madhab Kumar Nepal has been urging Koirala and Dahal not to get cold feet.

Now with two Alfa Males of Nepali politics having overcome their doubts about elections, it seems to be all systems go. the only spanner in the works can now be reactionaries, fundamentalists or royalists disturbing the polls by provoking unrest in the next three months.

It must be civil society and the people who must put pressure on the parties to stay the course. They must ensure that the parties don't look at the elections as a zero-sum game. No matter who wins in November, everyone wins.

It is not a general election, after all, just a mechanism to select people who will decide how this country will be governed in the future.



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Sapana P Malla**

achieve. But are we once more squandering this hardwon freedom?

Recognising the contribution made by civil society, the eight parties agreed to set aside 48 seats for them but in the end distributed it among cronies. A committee was formed for the drafting of the interim constitution and with six members representing four major parties, but it had no women, dalit or janajati members until protests by activists. The same story for the Peace Negotiation Committee and the Rayamajhi Commission.

The status quo is so entrenched that some politicians just don't see how serious the exclusion still is. Political parties are the vanguard of peace and democracy, but if the parties themselves are undemocratic how can they ever take us there? Our parties have always been better at

struggling for democracy than making it deliver development. The parties are supposed to believe in the rule of law, but they are now competing with the YCL to establish youth leagues.

The peace process is also threatened by excluded groups with demands that escalate from equality, to autonomy to secession. The present band-aid approach of negotiations just won't do, there has to be a genuine effort to address root causes and grievances.

We have a chance to restructure the state through the enactment of a new constitution via an elected assembly. Constitutionalism implies a balance between the power of the government and the rights of individual. But what power has been given to the people so far? Ownership of the peace process is important, but who owns the process: the parties or the people? Do the parties genuinely reflect the peoples' desires especially given their expired mandates since the last elections in 1999?

Can democracy be established with the restructuring of the state alone, or do we need to restructure our values and delivery? How can we expect figures who have held on to power for decades within their parties to devolve power to a federated state structure?

Rayamajhi Commission's findings have been published but the home minister says action has already been taken against the guilty and there is no need to make them public. The insincerity in setting up a truth commission, the inability to appoint a head to the Human Rights Commission, even the Commission on Women is

languishing.

To be sure, we have seen the passage of progressive legislations like the Gender Equality Amendment Act, the law on citizenship rights and the trafficking law. But it comes back to the same issue: lack of due diligence in enforcing those laws.

For the first time in the history of Nepal, the people will have a chance to craft their own constitution. It is not a flawless process. It will be the people's representatives from the political parties who will be making the decisions after being elected through a mixed proportional system. A certain number of excluded groups will be included in the closed lists of the parties, but it will still be the parties who will choose those members, not the people directly.

The election law also gives discretionary power to the party for the use of ten percent of their candidacy. And history has witnessed parties never go beyond minimum when it comes to marginalised groups. Having a constitutional provision for minimum 33 percent candidacy for women means that will be the cap. Still, we need to explore participation within that limited scope.

Political parties play a key role in transforming democratic values into living reality and establish peace, but due to lack of clarity, commitment, and short term vested interest there is a crisis of uncertainty and suspicion about the election itself. ●

*Sapana Pradhan Malla is advocate and president of the Forum for Women, Law, and Development.*

# From Mallik to Rayamajhi

## History has repeated itself as a farce

When Home Minister Krishna Sitaula read out the findings of the Rayamajhi Commission on Monday, Justice Janardan Lal Mallik was in a coma in the hospital.

He survived for a few days and then passed away. Had he seen the cynicism that greeted the restrained recommendations of Justice Rayamajhi, perhaps he too would have repeated Hegel's exasperated observation: 'the only thing we learn from history is that no one ever learns anything from history'.



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

Or that it repeats itself as a farce. Sitaula virtually trashed the Rayamajhi Commission report by stating that the government had already taken appropriate action against everyone found guilty of atrocities to suppress the people's uprising of April 2006.

Of 202 persons identified by the commission, however, most were let off the hook or left untouched. Apparently, the culture of impunity in the country has deeper roots than respect for retributive justice.

The commission of inquiry headed by former Supreme Court judge Krishna Jung Rayamajhi was constituted on 5 May 2006. Rayamajhi had championed the values of human rights, democracy, and rule of law at the height of Gyanendra's absolute rule. When he promised to bring perpetrators to book, it was clear his commission enjoyed the mandate of the people rather than just the government of the day.

At one point, commission members Ram Kumar Shrestha and Kiran Shrestha even hinted that the commission was losing its commitment. But Rayamajhi's credibility was so high he salvaged support. Nearly a year later, sceptics have been proved right. There is a certain déjà vu here that harks back to the way the Mallik Commission report let everyone off the hook after 1990.

In fact, the Mallik Commission became a metaphor of the business-as-usual insincerity of elected governments after 1990 that ultimately tarnished Nepali democracy. Once denied justice, people lost faith in the leaders they had helped propel to power. This erosion of public faith in politicians ultimately led to the collapse of Nepal's second experiment in constitutional monarchy.

The Mallik Commission was constituted by the interim government of Premier

Krishna Prasad Bhattarai on 23 May 1990 to investigate the excesses of the Panchayat regime that had suppressed democracy. At that time, it was unimaginable that a commission's findings could be ignored by a democratic government. Mallik was regarded highly for his uprightness and sense of fair play. Justices Uday Raj Upadhyay and Indra Raj Pandey were colleagues in the commission, both equally renowned for contributions to justice during the Panchayat dictatorship.

But the reputation of three of the country's most respected judges proved to be powerless in the face of king Birendra's pressure. Birendra reportedly told Bhattarai that he was solely responsible for everything done by his minions. Since no action could be contemplated against the king at that time, the report of Mallik Commission was consigned to the darkest recesses of Singha Darbar.

When king Gyanendra staged his royal-military coup in 2005, he brought back almost everybody identified by the Mallik Commission for gross violations of human rights and habitual abuse of authority: Parashu Narayan Chaudhary, Niranjana Thapa, Kamal Thapa, Satchit Shamsheer, Bhakta Bahadur Koirala, Badri

Mandal, Sahabir Thapa, and Achyut Rajbhandari.

Not only were they rehabilitated, but they were given positions of authority to repeat their Panchayat era repression. Once again they escaped the net of justice, and there is no guarantee (given the way the Rayamajhi Commission has been handled) that they will not stage a come back to hound out Sitaula and his friends. Rayamajhi is justifiably furious over the way his report is being ridiculed by the eight party government, and royalist opposition alike.

As for Mallik, he has made peace with the harsh social realities of Nepal. When he headed the CIAA he scrupulously avoided getting into any controversy. Perhaps it was the stress caused by this contradiction between his belief and behaviour that hastened his death. He had been a witness to history and wanted to testify for truth in the court of public opinion, but political realities of the day prevented him from acting according to his conscience.

Soon Rayamajhi and his colleagues too will face a similar predicament. The path they choose will determine whether we have to keep tolerating endless repetitions of blighted history or make a bright future for ourselves. ●



## LETTERS

### ADOPTION

As a regular reader of the *Nepali Times*, I had been dismayed by your front page article ('On sale' #339) which was incredibly unbalanced. The more recent followup 'Kids in Limbo' (#359) is a bit more balanced, but the biases of the journalist are perpetrated in many of the same allegations. Where are the facts? Here are some data: one in 20 children under 18 is an orphan, according to the 2006 Demographic Health Survey for Nepal. This is a huge number given that Nepal's population of 27 million is very young, 41 percent are under 15. In Nepal, children are often sent, lent, or 'given' to relatives or wealthier families to try to make sure they will have sufficient food and, perhaps, an education. At best, these children become 'second-class family members'. Mostly, however, they are treated as little more than domestic servants, fed and maybe provided the opportunity of a little education. In a very small minority of cases, abandoned children and orphans are adopted internationally. International adoptions have increased to about 400 cases per year over the past two years, but this is a fraction of an orphan population of at least 500,000 children. These children are taken into loving families, provided full inheritance rights, and treated exactly as if they were biological children. Yes, there are some irregularities in the adoption process, but they are not as extensive or widespread as your articles imply. Instead of exaggerating the 'market' for international adoptions, and claiming that all of these children are being stolen, the *Nepali Times* should investigate the kinds of child-labour abuses that continue to be perpetuated on children through 'domestic absorption'. The lack of opportunity, unequal treatment, and reservation of care and love are the norm in these situations – and this is in marked contrast with the love, devotion, and opportunities provided orphaned children in international adoptee families.

Name withheld, email

● 'Kids in limbo' (#359) quotes Joint Secretary Vinod Adhikary as saying that the new terms and conditions for international adoptions are "...in the best interests of the child..." and for this we are all grateful and encourage the new terms and conditions to come into effect as soon as possible. However, for the more than 400 orphaned children waiting 'in limbo' who have been proposed to, and accepted by international adoptive parents around the world under the current or 'old' adoption rules, it is hard to understand how waiting for the new terms and conditions to be passed, before their

final paper work can be processed, is in their best interests, especially when some of them had been proposed and met their future parents as long ago as July 2006.

While these proposed children with waiting parents, continue to live in orphanages it means that other orphaned children of Nepal are not able to get into these orphanage beds. Is this in their best interest? After signing their initial paperwork in Nepal, and meeting their proposed child, families around the world wait, their hearts filled with love, yet the child's bed in their home remains empty, is this in the best interest of the children?

The minister now needs to act in the best interest of these children, and process the pending files under the laws and rules that were in place when the four hundred plus children were proposed and accepted.

Name withheld, email

● I commend Mallika Aryal on her article about intercountry adoption, which brings up the issue that there have been indefinite delays since April in the processing of over 440 adoption files in progress. In fact, the delay has been in effect since February, when the adoption committee at the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare last met to review adoption files. In every single one of these cases, the adoptive parents have developed a strong bond over many months of waiting (usually years of waiting and preparing for a child) and in the majority of cases, one or both parents have been required to travel to Nepal to meet their child and submit their file to the CDO in person. Minister Biswokarma and others are to be commended for identifying the need for additional stringent procedures that will improve the system and bring it closer to new international standards for intercountry adoption. However, an important fact must be mentioned. The Ministry of Law and Justice has determined that the old files must be processed under the current adoption law, which has never been dissolved and therefore is still in effect. The statement by Minister Biswokarma that the new regulations must be passed in order to resume the processing of adoption files is inaccurate and misleading. What then is the use of making all these children and their waiting adoptive families hang in the balance? If the minister truly wishes to "improve the plight of orphans and unwanted children in Nepal," he needs to immediately finalise the current pending adoption files ahead of the approaching Nepali holidays.

A parent, email

### FLAG CARRIER

Re: 'Insult to the Flag' that you translated from Samaya (#360). Nepal's national airline is not the insult to our unique sun

and moon flag. What brings the insult to the flag and the country is the degradation of our national economy and unstable politics. Our economy is remittance based, and we think negotiating better working conditions is enough. When will we start making investment friendly laws so jobs will be created in Nepal? We still only take the tourists who land in our laps, there is little effective promotion. Agriculture has never gone beyond subsistence because irrigation, extension, and microcredit has lagged behind. Domestic industrialists are so greedy, they're out for the fast buck. We are proud to have a FNCCI president who thinks it's not necessary to resign on moral grounds even though he is a prominent bank defaulter. But, being an optimist, I think this country can easily be put on the right track. All it needs is some vision, integrity and good managerial skills.

Pravesh Saria, Slovenia

### TARAI

Frederick Gaige (1975) was right in saying that the criteria for the nationality determination is not limited to the geographical difference between hill and tarai. He correctly pointed out for the first time that, while Nepal's economic power

privileged (Chamar, Dushad, Dhanuk, Halkor) of the tarai are bridged.

This could come sooner rather than later because of the continued discrimination and negligence of the pahadi administration. Add to this decreasing productivity and fragmentation of land-holdings, floods, food shortages and frustration in the tarai and there is only one way it can go.

Ram Manohar Sah, email

### MAOIST RIFT

The fissures that have emerged in the Maoist movement during their current convention ('Prachanda vs Kiran', #360) shows that Prachanda is now left with a Hobson's choice to accept the proposal from the Mohan Baidya faction or get damned by his own party leaders. The way YCL is carrying on with its threats and extortion clearly proves the Maoists couldn't care less whether the elections are held or not. Their veiled attacks on the press are premeditated, despite a Maoist being the minister of information. Maoism has failed and has been abandoned in the very country where it originated, when will our Maoists learn from that?

Prabin Jung, email

● The current discord within the Maoist party is but natural. They started with an impossible task at present: establish a communist regime based on armed rebellion and with the premises that the parliamentary system was a forum of the oppressors. Now? It looks like the grapes are sour, comrades.

With the weakening of the party, it was a question of time that those who had less say in the party would try to gain more power. Even so, Prachanda is so powerful it is unlikely that the challenge will bear fruit. So, this week a drama will be staged to gain back the support of the dissidents and make the party look democratic.

Kumari Sarala, email

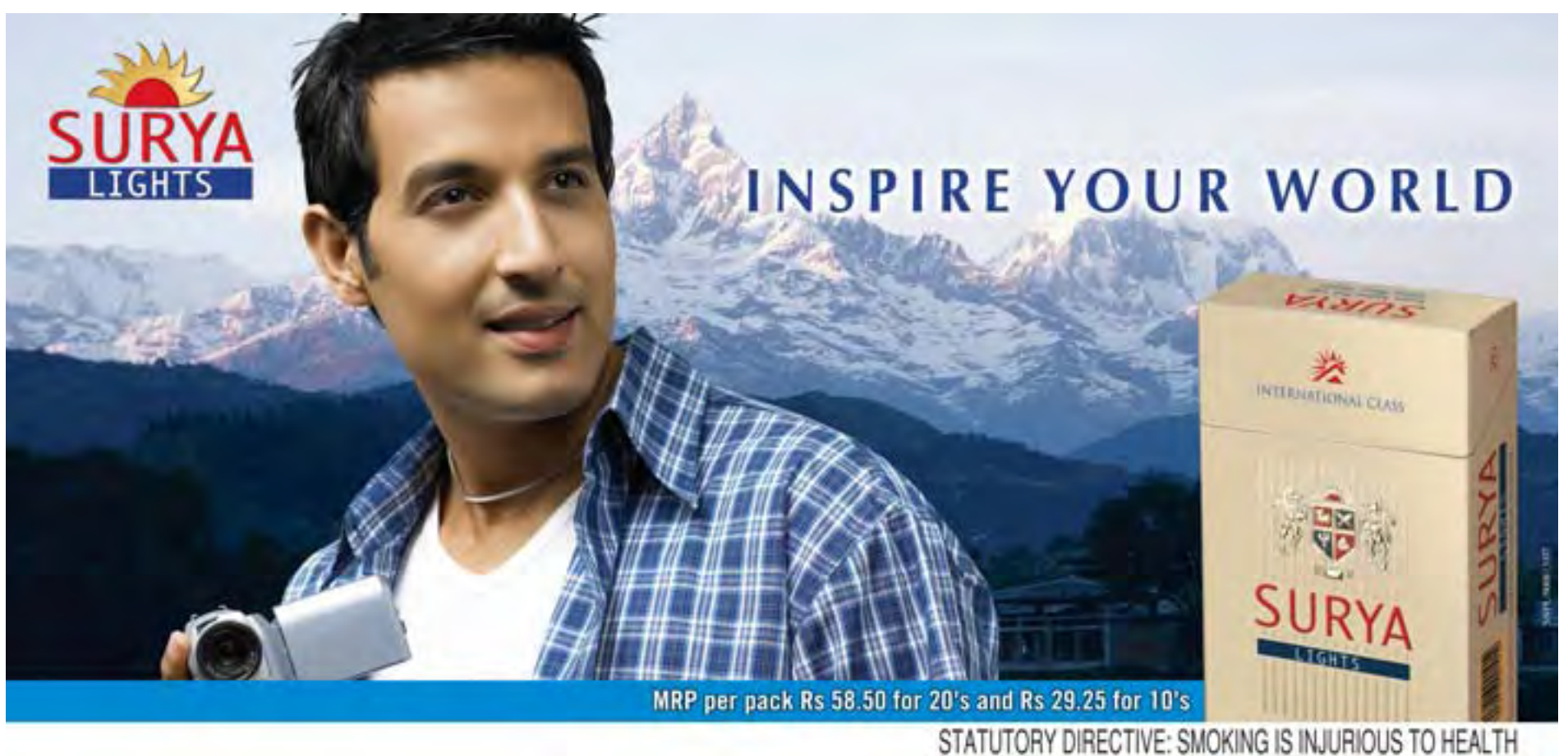
### COMPUTERS IN SCHOOLS

I am not against initiatives like the One Computer Per Child or the Linux Terminal Server Project (#360). My concern is sustainability. Where is the technical staff to maintain the systems, or the electricity to run them? What is the socio-economic environment? Every project makes it look like it has all the answers. In rural Nepal recently I saw the plight of schools and their very basic facilities. Where do computers fit in? Are we just after publicity, donor funding, and awards? Nepalinux also started with a bang, and now it is going woo.

M Merdini, email



was generated along the plains, political power was in the hills. This asymmetric distribution of economical power has disappeared with the flow of remittance money. Economic dependence has decreased since 1975, altering the original ecosystem of political power. At the same time, as CK Lal points out ('The revolt of the aristocrats', #360) political awareness in the tarai has increased with the spread of education and media. It is to be seen how much soon the gap between the privileged (Thakur, Goit, Jha, Yadav, Singh) and the less



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# Out of the closets

## Nepal's lesbians are tired of hiding



KIRAN PANDAY

**HAPPY TO BE GAY:** Members of Mitini Nepal at their office in Baluwatar on Wednesday pose for the media for the first time after deciding to go public. More Nepali lesbians have come out after Mitini was set up two years ago to provide support, counselling, and skills training.

**MALLIKA ARYAL**

A modest house in Baluwatar, just five minute's walk from the prime minsiter's residence, has become the official home of Nepal's lesbians as they come out in the open.

Most members of Mitini Nepal were fired from their jobs or ostracised by their families and communities after they were found out. Here, they get skills training and learn to be beauticians and office assistants so they can be financially independent.

With help from Austrian and Norwegian groups, Mitini members also conduct research and outreach to find out more about lesbians who still haven't come out in the open. So far, Mitini has a data base of more than 1,200 women, most are middle class, some are from the upper crust of Nepali society, there are atheletes, policewomen, and soldiers.

Mitini was set up two years ago, but Nepal's low-profile lesbian community hit the headlines this week after two soldiers at an army base in Bhaktapur were detained and discharged for alleged homosexual behaviour. Media coverage of the

issue and international outrage forced the army to backtrack and reinstate the women this week.

The human rights of Nepal's gender and sexual minorities is being raised with government officials and MPs by lawyers and activists. They have demanded a 'third gender' status to transgendered people, and guarantee of representation at policy making levels.

Sunil Pant, an activist with the gay rights group, Blue Diamond Society, says the army's dismissal is the first reported incident of discrimination in the military, but it isn't uncommon.

"For a long time we have suspected and heard of discrimination and harassment, but the victims don't know where to go and ask for help," Pant told us. He also wonders why only women are being targeted. "There must be so many gay men in the army, have their cases ever come out?" he asks.

Advocate Sharmila Dhakal is glad the Nepal Army retracted its dismissal of the women. "But it proves that there are many in the army who are conservative," she says.

Says one Mitini member: "Society will take time to change its attitude, but if the law protected us we would feel safer ●

# Inclusion, not just on paper

Member of the Dutch parliament, Boris Dittrich is now based in New York as the advocacy director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Program at Human Rights Watch. In Kathmandu recently, he spoke with Laxmi Murthy.

**How did you go from politics to be an advocate of the rights of sexual minorities?**

I served as a Member of Parliament for more than 12 years with Democrats 66, a socialist party and was the leader of the party for three years from 2003. Wanting a break from active politics, I did not stand again, and decided instead to focus more on human rights work. My involvement with the European Parliament continues, and in September we are trying to lobby for a resolution to endorse the Yogyakarta principles [which codify the rights of people with different sexual orientation or gender identity].

**How did you come to visit Nepal?**

In 2006, during the HIV/AIDS conference at the UN, I led the team from Netherlands and, thanks to alphabetical listing of countries, sitting next to me was the team from Nepal. During the long sessions, I got talking to Sunil Pant, Director of the Blue Diamond Society (BDS). During the last few months, with all the churning that is

going on in politics, identity and inclusion in Nepal, groups such as BDS working on the rights of marginalised sexualities, have also been taking the discussion forward. I was approached by the embassy of the Netherlands to come to Nepal, since I was also vice-chairman of parliament and of the Standing Committee on Justice, heading the constitutional affairs branch. Since Nepal is going through a process of constitutional revision, I was invited to share my experience of the Dutch Constitution and the European Constitution with Nepali parliamentarians.

**Do you think such issues will get a hearing?**

I individually met several ministers across parties. Everyone I met was supportive, and agreed that discrimination against sexual minorities (for instance the metis) is very wrong. They expressed their concern about recent incidents of metis being beaten up by the police. However, some senior leaders I met said that they were not aware of the issues of sexual minorities, whereupon, I tried to discuss 'non-discrimination', which is a very universal concept.

**But why do sexual minorities need to be specifically mentioned in the new constitution?**

Well, I am not here to tell politicians what to do. I can only

share the European experience where it has been important to name sexual minorities to share a core value of inclusion, a sense of identity, and feeling of belonging. How this can be operationalised in Nepal needs to be worked out locally by organisations working with sexual minorities, such as the Blue Diamond Society, and the political parties. Because, if there is inclusion only in the Constitution, and the reality on the streets is different, it reduces inclusiveness to just a word on paper.

The most important is for society to recognise that it is wrong to discriminate against sexual minorities. As long the police can beat up metis and there is no public outcry, simply including some words in the constitution will not help. A just, wise, and sound constitution, is a constitution that serves as a unifying factor in society. It should reflect values that are non-negotiable. Especially in countries like Nepal where there is a great diversity of cultures, religions, race, people from different ethnic origins, castes, beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identity, an overall inclusive constitution plays a major role in bringing all these differences together.



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### Flood of flood relief

Companies, media houses, and banks have all chipped in to help people who have been affected by floods. Among them, the Association of Nabil Staff (ANS) of the Nabil Bank collected cash donations from the bank staff. These donations were further matched by the Staff Welfare Fund. Rs 151,151, along with several sacks of clothes and utensils were presented to the Hridya group, a relief NGO.



### More networking


United Telecom has started operations in Bhairahawa from this month. The company will provide mobiles with limited mobility for Rs 2,000 and CDMA wireless phones for Rs 6,000, including all taxes. UTL boasts the cheapest phone call rates and plans to start services in Pokhara as well.

### Two more for BoK

With the opening of two new branches, in Gongabu and Kohalpur, Bank of Kathmandu now has a total of 16 branches and six extension counters throughout the country.

### City Express

City Express is the latest money transfer venture that aims to make remittances a lot easier. City Express is in partnership with Nabil Bank, and has its offices at Ghantaghar, Kathmandu.



### VLCC in Nepal

VLCC Health Care, India's largest health and beauty brand, has opened its first centre in Kathmandu. VLCC is the first slimming, fitness, and beauty corporate to be awarded the ISO 9001:2000 certification, and has also received the ISO 14001 for meeting global environment standards.



### Trip to Liverpool

Contestant number 015622 is the official winner of Carlsberg's 'win a football trip to Liverpool' campaign's second promotion. The winner will travel to Liverpool to watch a Liverpool FC match and give away the Carlsberg Man of the Match award. Carlsberg sponsors Liverpool FC, and is also the official sponsor of Euro 2008.

### NEW PRODUCTS

NEW PULSAR: Hansraj Hulaschand has launched the new 200cc oil-cooled Bajaj Pulsar DTSi. The new Pulsar comes with a new advanced console that includes an odometer, speedometer, fuel gauge, trip meters, engine temperature, battery voltage, and oil level – all digital. The Pulsar 200cc is available on easy installments from Everest Bank, Teku.





MIN BAJRACHARYA

# Abuse of authority?

## The CIAA's hurried attempt to pounce on top Central Bank officials smacks of a gotcha attitude

Last November, the Commission for Investigation of the Abuse of Authority (CIAA) lost its cases against two politicians: Khum Bahadur Khadka and Govinda Raj Joshi. Citing an old law, the then Special Court said that a public officer could only be slapped with a corruption-related lawsuit



**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
Ashutosh Tiwari

within one year of his leaving office. Since that length of time had elapsed in the case of both Joshi and Khadka, the court let them go free. The court's message to the CIAA was, "You guys were late in filing these lawsuits." Chastened, in part, by that experience, the CIAA seems to have lost no time last June in hauling up the governor and executive director (ED) of the Central Bank before a court on charges of corruption. The governor and the ED have since been suspended. Released on bail, they are awaiting trials. Meantime, it is worth commenting on two signals one can peel off the CIAA's letter of accusation, which it submitted on 29 June.

**The workflow problem:** The CIAA's charge can be reframed not as an issue of corruption per se but as a workflow problem. That is, the failure on the bank's part to file, index and follow up on a piece of work that it had contracted out. This failure could well be attributed to the bank's negligent attitude toward the task of crossing the t's and dotting the i's. In its letter, the CIAA lays out what the accused did not do to



KIRAN PANDAY

claim appropriate damages from 'dubious' foreign consultants, who had been paid large sums of donor money despite having done unsatisfactory work. Assuming this were true, it would be game to question the effectiveness of the bank's internal monitoring system. But to use this broad governance issue as a narrow platform from which to pounce on the top brass smacks of a gotcha attitude that only showcases the CIAA's hurried eagerness to catch big fish at the expense of its own credibility.

**The oversight issue:** The Central Bank has its oversight committees and its own board of directors. Their collective job is to ensure that the work that the Bank does or contracts out conforms to appropriate procurement and delivery requirements. That the CIAA gave a clean pass to all others, who were also responsible for oversight work, and chose to zero in on two individuals make it vulnerable to the counter-charges that it is settling unidentified personal scores under the lofty guise of battling corruption. Even after assuming that the accused

were indeed corrupt, it's hard to see how they could have done what they did without others at the bank being complicit in some way. These score settling activities are all too believable given that almost all of CIAA's staff members are on deputation from government ministries. This means that the members' long-term incentive is to stay loyal to their possible future bosses (i.e. politicians and bureaucrats), who, it's no secret, can use the CIAA to get rid of rivals and nuisances. To be sure, smarting over the loss of major corruption cases in the last three years, the CIAA wants a big win this time. It has never had any problem garnering press coverage for its initial arrests. But the many of its wins have come from a mundane strand of work: verifying government officers' educational credentials. Though the CIAA may hope that this particular case will be its crowning achievement, chances are high that a bench of judges will ultimately say, "You came to court too early with inadequate homework." ●

# Half the sky

When Nepal's newly-restored parliament passed a resolution in May 2006 directing the government to reserve at least 33 percent seats for women in state bodies, initially there was jubilation. This was a landmark legislation for a country with one of the lowest levels of participation in Asia of women in government and among elected representatives. But for some women not only did the bill not go far enough, there was also a danger that like past laws it would never be implemented. So they registered their own political party, Sa-shakti Nepal. "An entire year has gone by, many meetings have been organised, there has been a lot of rhetoric about gender equality, but they are just words," says party's chair, social worker Padmini Pradhananga (pictured). "We say reservation is not enough, we are equals so give us 50 percent not 33 percent." Sa-shakti Nepal is now registered with the Election Commission for the November polls and has the scales of justice as its symbol. It has nine working committee members and recently opened its membership to those interested in joining, including men.

Vice chair Sarala Lama says many of Nepal's ills can be traced to under-representation of women in politics. "I think violence, hatred, communalism have come up in Nepal because women are not in decision-making positions," says Lama, quickly adding, "we are not extremist feminists, we are only asking for equality and what is rightfully ours." According to the party's manifesto Sa-shakti Nepal will 'struggle against all kinds of extortion, inequality, injustice, and feudalism, reactionary regression and all kinds of anti-nationalism'. Some of the party's goals like 'supporting world peace, disarmament, national, and social freedom movement and fighting imperialism, communalism, violence, and discrimination based on caste and gender' may sound a bit self-righteous. But what may appeal to Nepali voters are more specific goals like decentralisation, social security, transparency in public administration, and the setting up of village cooperatives to help create jobs for women. "Men and women should vote for Sa-shakti because we aren't politically affiliated and our main agenda is equality," says Pradhananga who says her group's social service and wide network across Nepal will allow the party to hit the ground running. ● Mallika Aryal



# Cold feet

Yubaraj Ghimire in Samaya, 10 August

Two events coincided with the Maoist central committee meeting this week. The admission by a Maoist guerrilla that some 1,000 inmates of the Nawalparasi cantonment have recently fled the camp accusing their seniors of not giving them the Rs 3,000 a month allowance they were due. Then, there was the YCL action in Dolakha where the CDO became the target of terroristic outrage. Home Minister Krishna Sitaula who has by now lost all his credibility assured civil servants that their security would be guaranteed. But no one believes him.

It is getting difficult to say for sure that the behaviour of the attackers and the inaction of the Home Minister are not deliberate. The political parties and their leaders have been publicly making the constituent assembly election a life-or-death issue, but there is also a conspiracy to use the excuse of security to scuttle it.

Koirala has hatched a plan to induct dissident madhesi, janajati, and dalit into the interim parliament and turn that body into a constituent assembly for now. It is clear that Koirala has been bouncing this idea off the Maoists and UML. His only fear is that the international community may

not go along with it, and the Indians have sent a clear message that this is just not on. So, the option is to cite deteriorating law and order and the madhes as an excuse not to hold elections. If the Maoists go along with this plan, that would be all Koirala needs. It's only India's negative reaction that has stopped him for now.

The prime minister has proposed to give the MJF 37 seats in the parliament, but Upendra Yadav put a spanner in the works by demanding that the interim parliament be disbanded. Koirala's plan will only work if the security situation gets worse, indeed he seems not at all interested in improving law and order. The inability of the police to control the YCL, the militant tarai groups running rampant, and Sitaula remaining put at home minister despite these failures all prove that Koirala is determined to let the situation deteriorate so much that elections will not be possible.

Prachanda's long meeting with Koirala just before his central committee meeting was obviously not about the Maoists leaving the government. It was to ask Koirala to understand why the Maoists had to be so critical of the government. All this goes to show that there is some kind of agreement at the highest levels of government. The fact that they are letting things drift is what arouses suspicion. But the parties must improve the security situation, they must govern, they must let the UN fulfil its mandate on arms management and human rights and electoral code of conduct. Otherwise, the three leaders will take decisions behind closed doors to have their way.



KIRAN PANDAY

## Listen, don't talk

Kishore Nepal in Rajya ko  
Rupantharan, July 2007

After the April Uprising, Nepal is ready for transformation. Established power centres are in tatters, yet the Nepali media is unable to shed its dual characteristics. In last 50 years, the media has always found itself hobnobbing with power. In first phase, the media was divided along the party lines, in the latter phase, it is divided around personality and attitudes.

After the 1980 referendum, the media appeared proactive, but was vigorously discouraged by the establishment. The 1990 restoration of democracy the media didn't change its spots. The government merely amended the words of the Panchayat era policy, but continued the same practices.

Even now, the press is divided by media personalities. The formula of use and consumption remain the guiding policy. When the Maoists launched the people's war, the media failed to form a clear view of the movement. It didn't look at the human cost of the war, those caught in the crossfire. The Nepali media have never really looked at the possibility of news outside the perimeter of power. Most of its time is spent chasing loose talking politicians and leaky bureaucrats, or a policy-less government. Any politicians

buying expensive goods from abroad becomes spicy news. It was never bothered by ethics. The media is also psychogenic, journalists have an illusion of undisputed qualification. They can't appreciate viewpoints that differ from theirs, the achievements of fellow Nepalis, they are paranoid about competition and take pleasure in their own limited accomplishments.

The Maoists now control the Ministry of Information, but they too have failed to appreciate the importance of the media. In this top-down world, the Nepali people who are consumers of media products have no choice but to accept what the journalists and publishers dish out.

This is what our press freedom means: the people are free to listen not to speak out. We media people thrive on our claim of interactive society, but take pleasure at the citizen's inability to speak.

## Army won't do it

Dhurba Kumar in Himal  
Khabarpatrika, 1-17 August

The possibility of an army takeover amid this fluid political situation needs to be carefully examined. The possibility of army doing the king's bidding is almost negligible at present. The brass doesn't wish to be isolated from the world by trying to save a king and his kingdom. In the past



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KIRAN PANDAY

the army has tarnished its image more to protect the interest of the king rather than pursuing its own institutional ambitions. I don't think it will repeat the same mistake.

There are officers who believe in democratising the army and adapting with the changing times. The Americans have coopted moderate leftists by funding their NGOs. It still wants to neutralise the Maoists, but wouldn't want to use the army for the job.

India has unprecedented influence over the parties. Nepali academics like us don't imagine meeting the Indian Prime Minister as soon as we land in Delhi, but Indian academics like SD Muni have easy access to our prime minister despite his ill-health. Furthermore Muni goes to the reporters' club and declares India's full support for Nepal. Who's Muni? This gives us a sense of how much influence India has in Nepal. And perhaps it indicates India doesn't need the army to extend its influence.

The real danger comes from the parties. Koirala is using the army in ways that remind us of Gyanendra. This is dangerous. The defense ministry is not active and the national Security Council hasn't been formed so Koirala continues to deal with army one-on-one. The army has the government's support, and most political parties lead by the NC are keen to maintain the status quo.

The Maoists are pushing for the security sector reform before the election. YCL anarchy is unabated. Combatants in the camps have a similar style. There is speculation the army might step in given the political climate and the deteriorating situation in tarai. But that won't happen without the consent of the political parties and foreign powers. It's not just the monarchy that is history on the world stage, so are military juntas. Except in areas where world powers have a strategic interest (Burma, Pakistan).

It is the political parties who deserve blame for the present uncertainty, not the army. The parties who came to power on the strength of the mass uprising have forgotten who is sovereign here. They are harbouring the illusion that they can continue to cling to power indefinitely.

Aspirations

Editorial, *Nayapatrika*, 9 August

The agreement between the government and the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NFIN) sets a precedent for finding a peaceful solution to all demands for fair political representation to Nepal's diverse communities. The agreement sets an example for madhesis and other groups who have been using violence to draw the attention of the state. They should all learn from NFIN.

Political ethnification or ethnic politicisation are debatable concepts. But there can be no two opinions about the need to give political representation to minorities. The agreement on making the election to the constituent assembly more inclusive and proportional is a welcome development. NFIN has given up its demand of full proportional electoral system. But it is likely raise the issue of a broad agreement with the parties to

ensure that all indigenous nationalities are given their share of seats by the parties. It isn't clear whether the federation has postponed this demand, yet.

In the beginning it seemed as if there was coordination between the MJF and the federation, though the two groups had different styles. The federation was more constructive, whereas the forum seemed destructive. Extreme pressure is often counterproductive and the forum should learn lessons from NFIN. The main characteristic of democracy is finding amicable resolution to all problems.

Democracy has obviously raised the expectations of the people and this is as it should be. The unitary state ignored the multicultural realities of Nepal for a long time. Now the country needs to be unified, but in a different way. The quest for justice to the past discrimination isn't wrong, but the motive shouldn't be to settle scores. The agreement with NFIN has opened new possibilities and has shown that amicable resolution is possible.



Sitaula: Now we'll make the laws and prosecute them.  
Reporter: Prosecute the guilty or the Rayamajhi Commission?  
Paper Headline: 'Rayamajhi Commission Report Out'

Jana Bhawana, 6 August


QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ The Maoists demand for proportional representation and republic can only mean one thing: they don't want to take part in elections in November. ”

Peace and Reconstruction Minister Ram Chandra Poudel, in *Kantipur*, 9 August.

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## Vacancy Announcement

### RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION FUND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

**KHASKOSH PROGRAM**

The Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Fund Development Board (the Board) is facilitating a community-based Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Program funded by IDA and DFID. The focus of the Program is to facilitate rural communities for sustainable water supply service delivery through participatory demand-driven approach and group decision making to implement their water supply and sanitation schemes with the assistance of the Board.

The Board invites qualified individuals to apply for the following post:

**1. Post: Deputy Executive Director- 1**

**Duties and Responsibilities:**

The Deputy Executive Director (DED) is primarily responsible for day-to-day operations of the Board office; coordination of the various Divisions of the office on a functional basis; and overseeing the computerized Management Information System of the office. The DED calls and coordinates regular meetings of the office staff including Technical Appraisal Committee (TAC) meetings for which the DED ensures preparation of appropriate documentation. The DED is required to assist the Executive Director in managing the recruitment of Support Organizations (NGOs/INGOs/CBOs) and Service Agencies (consulting firms, individual consultants, private agencies, etc.) to provide services for the schemes, and in checking on all key steps in the scheme review process. The DED supervises the preparation of budgets and prepares necessary progress reports, initiates and undertakes the financial audits of support organizations and undertakes the liaison work with local bodies in coordination with Portfolio Managers of the Board office. The DED acts for the Executive Director in his/her absence.

**Minimum Qualification and Experience:**


1. S/he must be a citizen of Nepal.
2. S/he must have a master's degree in social science or civil engineering from a recognized university.
3. S/he must have at least five years work experience in community based rural development or drinking water and sanitation related activities.

**Applicants must not be convicted of any criminal case of moral turpitude and must not be affiliated with any political party. They must not be a relative of any of the Board members and the Board employees. They must include a statement to these effects in their applications. Those who are Government employees and civil servants of government-owned universities, academic and research institutes and any other government organizations will not be eligible to apply. The applicant should not be above 50 years of age.**

**Terms of Employment:** The initial term of employment will be 3 (three) years on contract basis (including probation period of first six months) with possibility of extension on satisfactory performance. Other terms and conditions of employment will be as per the Board Rules. The candidate selected for appointment must submit a letter of approved resignation from the previous employer if the individual is employed at another organization.

**Duty Station:** The post is Kathmandu Valley based. The post holder will be required to undertake extensive traveling to districts outside Kathmandu Valley.

**Application Procedure:** Eligible candidates are required to apply with a copy of succinctly written CV, copies of citizenship, qualification and training certificates and employment records and a passport size photo by **27 August, 2007** to.



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The CV should distinctly show the number of years of previous relevant experience and the tasks performed emphasizing the applicants' own contributions/achievements. Documentary evidence of the relevant experience is essential.

**Selection Procedure:** Only candidates meeting the minimum qualification and experience will be evaluated applying various screening measures as per the requirement or the experience relevant to the assignment. Undue influence will result in automatic rejection.

**Rural Supply and Sanitation Fund Development Board encourages Women, Dalits and individuals from marginalized/ disadvantaged communities to apply.**

Females, Dalits and individuals from marginalized/ disadvantaged communities are encouraged to apply.



# The sands of the Bishnumati could

SCOTT BERRY

Chibakhel is not usually counted among Kathmandu’s attractions. Situated in Ward 19, it is off the tourist trail and few even in Kathmandu have heard of it.

But like the valley’s other hidden corners, it is oozing with history. More importantly, a local citizen’s initiative has begun to transform a neighbourhood that was one of Kathmandu’s dirtiest and least appealing.

There are supposed to have been 12 Ashoka Stupas in the Valley, and it is surprising how frequently you stumble across one. Chibakhel (from Newari chibakhyo, ‘Place of the Stupa’) is one of these. The stupas probably date from the Licchavi period, and Chibakhel is on a spot that gives it a good claim to antiquity situated on the banks of the Bishnumati where there has probably always been a bridge on the road to Swayambhu.

When the city walls were built, Chibakhel wound up outside them. Since people who did necessary ‘polluting’ work were not allowed inside the walls, the neighbourhood became the home of Newar butchers who still live there.

The stupa had a pipal tree growing out of it, and it was restored a few years ago, though not with the greatest sensitivity. Still, what was once the scene of daily butchery is now a pleasant square and a playground for children. The initiative to further revitalize the neighbourhood has been taken by Kamal Shahi, who was born in the square and was one of the first to take in hippies in the 1960s (see box). The stupa plinth is now covered with potted plants, looked after by a gardener with copious advice from the local women. Rubbish collectors stop by to collect trash so it doesn’t pile up in the streets. The square has become part of the route for the Duwadashi procession just before Indra Jatra, and Shahi states proudly that, in spite of this being the butcher’s quarter, the offerings in front of the stupa are uniquely vegetarian.

But his big idea is to build a small Buddhist Vihar on an abandoned plot, not only for ceremonial purposes but as a community centre and library, where young people could learn traditional Newar arts like image casting and paubha painting activities from which ‘lower castes’ have

traditionally been barred. Having fought caste prejudice to become a sculptor of Buddhist images, Shahi has personal experience.

Shahi also feels that sometimes Newar Buddhism leans too far towards ceremony and superstition, while forgetting the

original message. Now, in preparation for the vihar, Shanta Ratna Shakya, chairman of the Nepal Rashtriya Gyanmala Samiti comes and teaches Pali chanting, while a Newar Theravada monk gives brief sermons on the original message of Buddhism.

The rebirth of Chibakhel has happened because of local initiative. There are no aid agencies or foreign charities involved. It is taking time, but it has a sustainable momentum. Once the Vihar and community centre get built, the locals plan to clean up the river bank. There is not much the inhabitants of the square can do about the sludge coming from upstream, but they can take care of their own part of the Bishnumati.

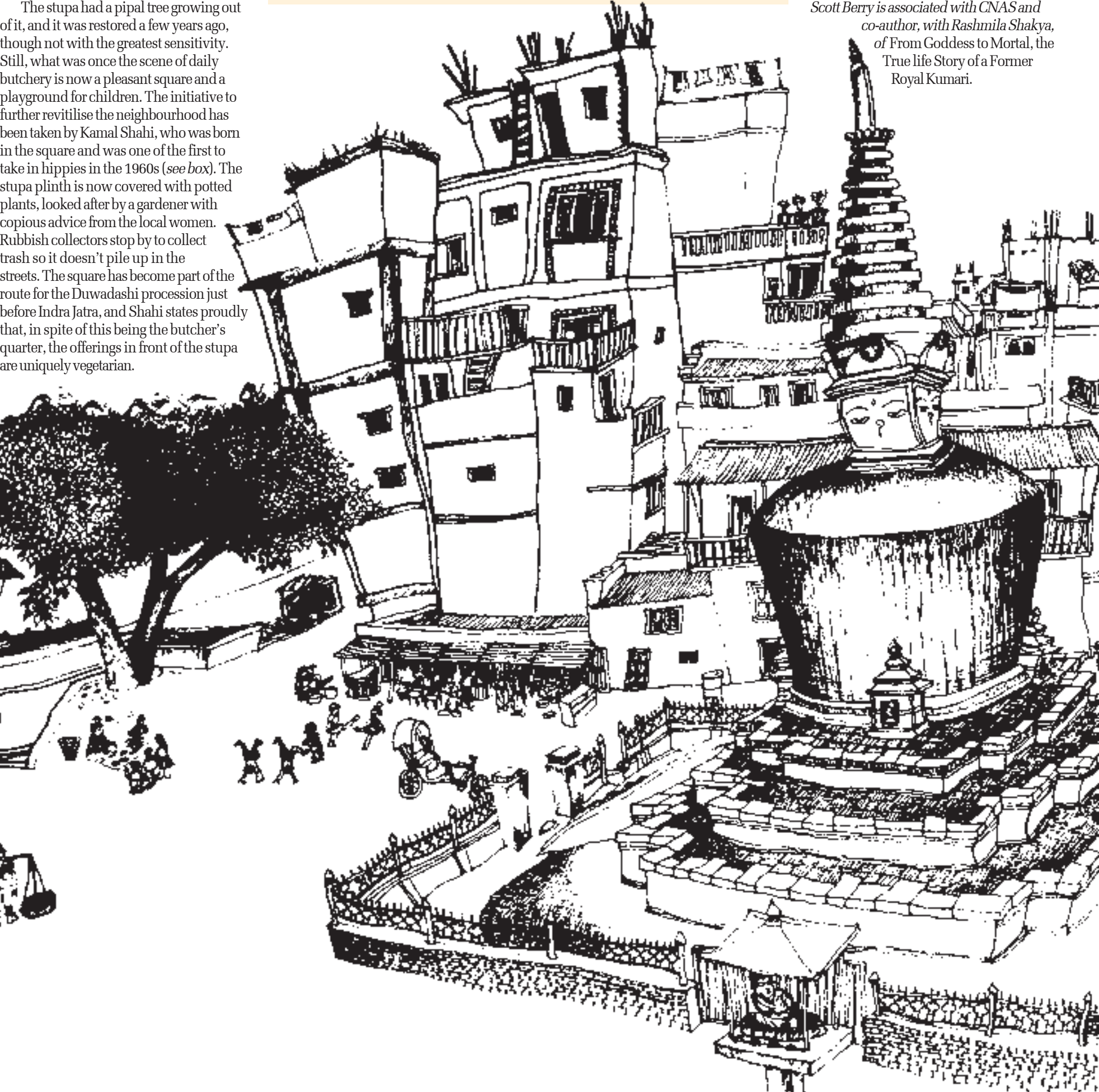
If such local initiatives take off everywhere along the river, who knows, maybe someday the sand will again turn to gold. ●

Scott Berry is associated with CNAS and co-author, with Rashmila Shakya, of From Goddess to Mortal, the True life Story of a Former Royal Kumari.

## Golden sands and human sacrifice

Raja Ananda Malla of Bhaktapur learned from an astrologer that sand taken from a certain spot on the Bishnumati at an auspicious moment would turn to gold. That spot is probably Kankeshwari, one of the eight mother goddesses whose temple stands on the banks. The sand did turn to gold, by the way, but the coolies sent to fetch it had already sold it to a Kantipur merchant who subsequently became so rich that he paid off everyone’s debts and established Nepal Sambat (880 BCE).

In medieval times there was a wild stone-throwing festival held here in which the young men of two neighbouring toles competed. It was a rough sport: anyone knocked unconscious or captured by the opposing side was taken to the Kankeshwari temple and sacrificed. The festival was only ended by Jang Bahadur when the British Resident, a Mr Colvin, who had come for a look, was struck by a stone. There is no record of Colvin being sacrificed.





# ld turn to gold again Chibakhel

## Pig Alley and the flower children

In the sixties when curious and curiously dressed young people started arriving in Kathmandu from Europe, the US and Japan, most Nepalis didn't know what to do with them. How ritually polluting were these people anyway? This was no problem for the Shahi since by a strange coincidence, the Muluki Ain of 1854 put butchers and Europeans on the same level of the caste ladder. Whether they were actually aware of this or not, the local people opened their homes as lodges and feeding houses. Long before Thamel there was Freak Street. And before Freak Street there was Pie Alley (Maru Tole), and before Pie Alley there was the unfortunately named Pig Alley. And at the very end of Pig Alley stood Chibakhel with its little lodges and teashops clustered around the stupa.

When the people up the hill noticed how well the butchers were doing feeding hippies, they seem to have decided that perhaps foreigners were not very polluting after all and the scene began to move up the hill. But not everyone left. Earlier this year an Italian veteran of the 1960s passed away in a room overlooking the stupa and was cremated just up the river at Bijeshwari. This was an occasion for many old-timers, Nepali, Tibetan and Western, to get together and reminisce.



ALL PICS: SCOTT BERRY

**STUPENDOUS STUPA:** Chibakel Square (top) looks spick and span after a neighbourhood cleanup campaign. Kamal Shahi, a butcher-turned-Buddhist sculptor who is a moving force behind Chibakhel's rebirth. Devotees line up with vegetarian offerings at the Duwadashi festival.





The weakness of madhesi groups shouldn't make us complacent about the tarai crisis

DIPAK RAUNIYAR

# Sandbagging the plains

Floods have devastated the tarai. Thousands are displaced and almost a hundred people have died. But like the Kashmir earthquake and the tsunami in Sri Lanka, the human tragedy offered an opportunity for conflicting sides to build bridges.



**TARAI EYE**  
Prashant Jha

The state could have used the moment to reach out to the alienated madhesi population. A sincere relief program with effective use of international assistance, an appeal to agitating groups to come on board and mobilisation of madhesi civil society as interlocutors would

have helped create an environment for engagement.

But given the government's track record in dealing with the madhes, it is not surprising that nothing of the sort happened. What is more telling is the reaction of the madhesi groups. The MJF came out with one statement days after the flooding began, and its district units have done little to organise assistance. The armed groups neither declared a ceasefire nor directed activists to work for relief. Instead, they exploited the weakness of an over-stretched state machinery to continue with killings, abductions, and looting adding to the misery of the people they claim to represent.

When political entrepreneurs rely solely on identity

chauvinism, they lose sight of the other factors that affect people's lives. The response illustrates all that is wrong with the madhesi movement: crisis of leadership, lack of a coherent political agenda, limited organisational strength and their inability and unwillingness to engage in true mass politics. These weaknesses prevent madhesi outfits from filling the political vacuum in the tarai, besides posing a roadblock to serious negotiations.

Just look at the government-MJF talks: the lack of progress has as much to do with MJF's internal problems as the government's unwillingness to compromise. Upendra Yadav is trapped. If he strikes a deal, he will be seen as having sold out,

if he walks out he will need to resume the movement. The problem is people are not in an agitation mood right now, and he has little to go back to. The MJF's organisation is in shambles. It has not been able to capitalise on the brand recognition it won after the movement. Its tactical blunders have made district-level political figures reluctant to join the party and its Yadav pre-dominance had bred resentment among other castes.

Upendra Yadav himself has been out of the tarai for more than five weeks, first in the US and then in Kathmandu, at a time when he should have been focussing on recruitment and mobilisation. Instead, he is happy shifting goalposts and

prolonging the deadlock. The only explanation for why MJF is not acting with more urgency is because the leadership, like many in the tarai, is convinced that elections will not happen in November because the major parties don't want it. The Forum is relying more on raw anger in the tarai for the next round of confrontation than thinking of building the party machine for polls.

The other groups suffer from similar weaknesses. Goit is a respected political figure but does not keep well and has a weak organisation. He appears more committed to the idea of secession but admits that the next generation will have to take the struggle forward. Jwala Singh is more active and has expanded his organisation rapidly, but at the cost of including more criminals. Neither leader has a pan-tarai appeal or a large popular base though there is increasing acceptance of armed action.

Both Goit and Jwala expressed willingness for talks in the past realising it would give them legitimacy. They had even declared a ceasefire but the government snubbed the initiative. They feel insulted and now appear more reluctant to negotiate, at least in the absence of certain preconditions. The armed factions have calculated that the government will not give in on any major issue, and they can instead capitalise on the radicalisation on the ground. But this attitude can change and they may come for at least one round of talks if the government creates the environment and Madhesi civil society exerts pressure.

The madhesi movement is fractured, disorganised, and directionless. But there is anger firing it still. Faultlines are getting deeper and confrontation between the state and madhesi, Maoists and madhesi groups, and between hill-origin people and madhesi is likely in some form. The weaknesses of the madhesi groups shouldn't make anyone in Kathmandu complacent about the gravity of the situation. ●



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# Small is beautiful

## Small parties are much more enthusiastic about elections than the big, established ones

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

The Election Commission is getting ready for the 22 November elections. More than 17.6 million Nepali voters are ready. UNMIN is standing by. But the main political parties are not.

Most of the 64 parties in the fray are small and new, and they're mostly ready for the November polls. But the main political parties are not. Except perhaps for the UML, the big parties have suddenly developed cold feet. While most of the established parties don't have clearly-defined election manifestos, the smaller ones have specific and coherent agendas. Some are concerned with the restructuring of state, others with bringing back the Hindu kingdom, still others are only interested in uplifting the status of women or in improving the people's living standards. While the larger parties are vague and idealistic, smaller parties like the Nepal National Development Party has a concrete vision to make Nepal a middle-income developed country in 20 years.

Chief Election Commissioner Bhoj Raj Pokharel doesn't find it unusual that the big political parties haven't yet submitted their political platforms. "The election itself is a political agenda, and that is the agenda of the political parties," he explains, "I don't think they will allow themselves to be left behind in promoting their own agenda."

We asked the chief whip of the NC in parliament, Ananda Prasad Dhungana, about his party's election manifesto, he told

us there isn't any. When pressed, Dhungana muttered vaguely about the NC standing for "democracy, nationalism and socialism". The UML already senses victory and is the most keen to have the elections over and done with. It has a platform that underlines a democratic republic and equity. UML leaders have been on the campaign trail, but even they don't seem to be completely geared up.

The Maoists, still hungover after a bruising party plenum, have realised that whatever support they had has eroded because of the threats and high-handedness of their own cadre during the past year. The Maoists did not split during its plenum, but it put Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal on the dock for trying to weaken the party by taking the poll route.

The lack of enthusiasm among the main parties towards elections has dismayed the new players. "These old men do not have much of an agenda, what are they going to take to the people?" asks Upendra Yadav of the Madeshi Janadhikar Forum (MJF) which has registered as a party.

"The big parties aren't ready because they know that election won't happen," Yadav adds, "they have been scared to death by the ethnic and regional awakening of the masses."

Political analyst Krishna Khanal believes that fear of an uncertain outcome in the elections has petrified some party leaders and held them back from getting into serious campaigning. Such is the lack of electoral preparedness that the major political parties haven't even

handed in their manifestos to the Election Commission.

"Under the law, they have to submit their manifesto for registration," says Election Commission's Narendra Man Shrestha, but none of the bigger parties have formally done so, and some haven't even updated their contact addresses.

Out of 64 applicant parties, 58 have already been registered. Most of these are small, new parties which all had to procure at least 10,000 verifiable signatures. There are several that are one-agenda parties to restore Nepal as a Hindu kingdom, like the Peace Party and Shiv Sena Nepal or turn Nepal into a Hindu republic, like the Hindu Democratic Party.

Some, like the Nepal Cooperative Party, is totally devoted to development. "Our party is a response to the monopoly of the eight parties," says Toyenath Dahal, whose party wants to create jobs by establishing rural cooperatives. But Dahal is first to admit his party doesn't have much of a chance and he will be satisfied if it can just be a pressure group.

But there are others who are much more ambitious. The Nepal National Development Party headed by naturalised Japanese Takashi Miyahara has a 20-year masterplan to develop Nepal based on huge investments in infrastructure. Miyahara's plans include an east-west railway and link highways, moving the capital to Naryangarh to ease the population pressure, three river (Koshi, Gandaki and Karnali) projects, among others. "We are here to do development, not politics," says Miyahara firmly. ●



**Nepali Congress**  
Symbol: Tree  
Agenda: Democracy, nationalism, socialism, equitable development, federal-setup, not decided on monarchy or republic  
**CPN-UML**  
Symbol: Sun  
Agenda: Democratic republic, end of feudalism, non-feudalistic economy, socialist state, egalitarian state, preservation of sovereignty of the people  
**Nepali Congress-Democratic**  
Symbol: Jar (kalash)  
Agenda: Federal-setup, inclusive society, restructuring of the state organs, territorial integrity, total multiparty democracy, promotion of national and local languages. For republic (uncertain after unification of NC).  
**CPN-Maoists**  
Symbol: Hammer and sickle within circle  
Agenda: Proportional representation, People's Republic

Small Parties  
**Madhesi Jaanadhikaar Forum**  
Symbol: Hand held torch  
Agenda: Inclusive federal democratic republic, proportional representation, mixed economy, social justice, regional autonomy, separation of powers and end to all forms of ethnic, racial, and regional discrimination  
**Hindu Democratic Party**  
Symbol: Woman  
Agenda: Hindu republic, end to all kinds of dictatorship.

**Democratic Janamukti Party**  
Symbol: Comb  
Agenda: Proportional representation on the basis of ethnicity, ethnic liberation  
**Sa-Sakti Party**  
Symbol: Scale  
Agenda: 50 percent representation for women, cooperatives in every village, and employment for women.  
**Nepal Green Party**  
Symbol: Mango  
Agenda: Poverty alleviation, inclusive society, federal-setup, protection of personal freedom and property

**Nepal Cooperative Party**  
Symbol: Notebook and pen  
Agenda: Cooperative in every village, employment for youths, vocational tanning, and markets for local products, ceremonial monarchy  
**Nepal National Development Party**  
Symbol: Radio  
Agenda: Elimination of unemployment through development projects, promotion of tourism and preservation of the nature, social security, development of education  
**Peace Party Nepal**  
Symbol: Two triangles  
Agenda: Declaring Nepal a Hindu state

**Naba Janabadi Morcha**  
Symbol: Baby  
Agenda: Autonomy for madhes, federal-setup  
**Nepal Janbhawana Party**  
Symbol: Panas  
Agenda: Pension for farmers, equal opportunity for all, democratic republic  
**Prajatantrik Shakti Party**  
Symbol: Clock  
Agenda: Constitutional monarchy



KIRAN PANDAY

## "We are ready."

Chief Election Commissioner Bhojraj Pokharel spoke to *Nepali Times* about groundwork for November.

political parties have to campaign, the government and the civil society also have roles to play. Security is of paramount importance to the election. The Election Commission alone cannot hold the election. At best, we are a coordinating body.

**What is the one thing that stands in the way of holding a credible election?**  
We shouldn't hold elections for the sake of it. The November election is a key component of the peace-building process. If everyone does their part, we can hold a successful election.

**The parties are not yet in an election mode, is that affecting your work?**  
The election itself is a political agenda, it is the agenda of the political parties, and I don't think that they will want to be left behind in promoting their agenda. But sure, the civil society and others need to focus on the key actors in the process and their activities so that they do not forget whose agenda it is. But election campaigning will speed up once we finalise the election programs. Because of the floods in the tarai and other circumstances, things haven't quite paced up, but I am confident it will gradually build its own momentum.

**Nepali Times: So how are preparations coming along?**

**Bhojraj Pokhrel:** The Commission is busy finalising its technical preparations...

**...and you think elections will really take place on 22 November?**

There is only one date in our calendar. And that is 22 November. We are ready and prepared for the elections.

**But are the political parties and their leaders in the government prepared?**

We are happy that the parties are with us. Their support keeps us going.

**But you have expressed concern about the security situation.**

When we talk about election and security, there are many stakeholders responsible for it. The security agencies have a responsibility of enforcement, the

## United, they stand

After weeks of wrangling and dispute over who should be more senior, leaders of the NC and NC-D say they are on the verge of unity.

"We are doing our homework and we hope to announce unification by next week," Ram Krishna Tamrakar of the NC told us. NC-D leader Sher Bahadur Deuba's threatened to walk out of unity talks if party unity didn't happen by 15 August. The five-time prime minister's tantrum seems to have worked.

The NC-D says it is the NC that was holding things up. "We are clear on the unity, if anyone is not it's them," says Bimalendra Nidhi, NC-D's general secretary. Deuba wants the simultaneous merger of both the local and central committees, while the NC wants to just do the central committee for now and leave districts for later. The NC-D is also proposing a leadership panel at the central level comprising of Deuba and Koirala to sort out any outstanding issues until the unified convention of the party takes place.

"The unity process is going through labour pains," says NC leader Anand Prasad Dhungana, "but the baby will be born soon."





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MIN BAJRACHARYA

# Does the UN still matter?

Ban Ki-moon is more secretary than general

**W**ith 192 members and a mandate that covers everything from security to refugees to public health, the United Nations is the world's only global organisation.

But many think the UN is doing a poor job, and believe it was tarnished by corruption during the Iraq oil-for-food program under Saddam Hussein. Many also blame the UN for failing to solve the Middle East's myriad problems.



**MIGHT AND RIGHT**  
**Joseph S Nye**

But such views reflect a misunderstanding of the UN's nature. The UN is more an instrument of its member states than an independent actor in world politics. True, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon can make speeches, convene meetings, and propose actions, but his role is more secretary than general.

Sometimes likened to a 'secular Pope', the UN Secretary General can wield the soft power of persuasion but little hard economic or military power. What hard power the UN has must be begged and borrowed from the member states. And when they cannot agree on a course of action, it is difficult for the organisation to operate. When blame is assigned, much of it belongs to the members.

Consider the oil-for-food program, which was designed by member states to provide relief to Iraqis hurt by sanctions against Saddam's regime. The secretariat did an inadequate job of monitoring the program and some corruption was involved. But the much larger sums that Saddam diverted for his own purposes

reflected how the member governments designed the program, and they chose to turn a blind eye to the abuse. Yet the program's problems are portrayed in the press as 'the UN's fault'.

The cost of the entire UN system is about \$20 billion, or less than the annual bonuses paid out in a good year on Wall Street. Of that sum, the secretariat in New York accounts for a mere 10 percent. Some universities have larger budgets.

Another \$7 billion supports UN peacekeeping forces in places like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lebanon, Haiti, and the Balkans. The rest, more than half, is spent by the UN's specialised agencies, which are located around the world and often play an important role in managing global trade, development, health, and humanitarian assistance.

For a brief moment after a broad coalition of countries acted together to force Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait in 1991, it looked like the original concept of collective security would become 'a new world order'. Such hopes were short-lived. Consensus within the UN proved unachievable on both Kosovo in 1999 and Iraq in 2003.

Skeptics concluded that the UN had become irrelevant for security questions. Yet in 2006, when Israel and Hezbollah fought to a stalemate in Lebanon, states were only too happy to turn to a UN peacekeeping force.

Ironically, peacekeeping was not specified in the original charter. It was invented by the second Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, and Canadian Foreign Minister Lester Pearson after Britain and France invaded Egypt in the Suez crisis of 1956.

Since then, UN peacekeeping forces have been deployed more than 60 times.

There are now roughly 100,000 troops from various countries wearing UN blue helmets around the world. Peacekeeping has had its ups and downs. Bosnia and Rwanda were failures in the 1990's, and then Secretary General Kofi Annan proposed reforms to deal with genocide and mass killings.

In September 2005, the states in the UN General Assembly accepted the existence of a 'responsibility to protect' vulnerable peoples. In other words, governments could no longer treat their citizens however they wanted.

A new Peace-building Commission was also created to coordinate actions that could help prevent a recurrence of genocidal acts. The current test case is the situation in Sudan's Darfur region, where diplomats are trying to establish a joint peacekeeping force under the UN and the African Union.

In the poisonous political atmosphere that has bedeviled the UN after the Iraq War, widespread disillusionment is not surprising. Ban Ki-moon has a tough job. But, rather than calling the UN into question, states are likely to find that they need such a global instrument, with its unique convening and legitimising powers.

While the UN system is far from perfect, the world would be a poorer and more disorderly place without it. ●

*Project Syndicate*

*Joseph S. Nye, Jr. is a professor at Harvard and the author of Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics.*



# Sick of it

## Michael Moore's new documentary

What's up with Michael Moore bashing? Just read the reviews for his recent release *Sicko* and you may not believe that a person could be described with a more contradictory set of words. He is, apparently, a genuine activist, but also a disingenuous demagogue. He is manipulative, it is said, yet his analysis too simplistic. He is a regular guy (a blue-collar philistine even), but—as it's beginning to be pointed out—not from the same tax bracket.



**CRITICAL CINEMA**  
**Diwas Kc**

The right hates him for obvious reasons. The centre finds him too passionate for its taste, whereas the left finds his jaunty, patriotic populism too annoying. Regardless, Moore is a popular man, and he sells documentaries as if they were fantasy films.

If you have followed Michael Moore's career, you know what he is about, and moreover, what he is against. With *Roger and Me* (1989), *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), Cannes and Oscar-winner *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), and now *Sicko* on his résumé, Moore is perhaps the most outspoken filmmaker contemporary America has seen. For over a decade and half, Moore has stalked the devious American bureaucracy and corrupt corporations with a rage.

In *Sicko*, it is the private health-care system of America that has caught his eye. And what a sick system it is! Here are



Director: Michael Moore  
2007  
123 min.

doctors who ask individuals with chopped fingers to choose between a \$60,000 middle finger and a \$12,000 ring finger. Hospitals that drop off patients in infirmary garbs in the middle of the street. Insurance policies that decline applicants for being thin or fat or... err... simply liable to illness. And a government that touts the heroism of its fire-fighters but denies them their medical dibs.

Moore may have you believe that the US is barely better than a third world country on this matter. But it is astounding that the country that spends the highest amount on health system in the world holds the pathetic position of 37<sup>th</sup> in WHO's ranking. Moore's intention, then, is to expose the shadiness of this system and demonstrate, in a basic way, that there is an alternative.

Analysts will be disappointed that this alternative comes only

in the form of romanticised trips to Canada, UK, France, and Cuba. More debate on the inferiority of Moore's polemics will inevitably follow, even though everyone will agree that he is onto something here. But consider this: his methods have made the custodians of this system go berserk. In other words, it works! Capitalists are terrified of being subjected to his ethical gaze, and now even the US Treasury Department hopes to curb him with legal impediments.

Moore has found something that affects Americans in a more general, direct way, and perhaps for that reason, critics will make less controversy out of this film. It's a good thing that Moore has decided this time around to stay out of the picture a bit more. Although a master confrontationalist, he isn't hounding anyone in *Sicko*. Instead we get testimonies from ordinary people who have lost and laboured for the sake of profit. Perhaps his personality, for once, will not overshadow the issue.

But he is there, zany and in-your-face as ever, a modern manifestation of the medieval jester, calling kings fools. For all his foibles, no one better represents the American conscience at the moment. ●

# Top girl

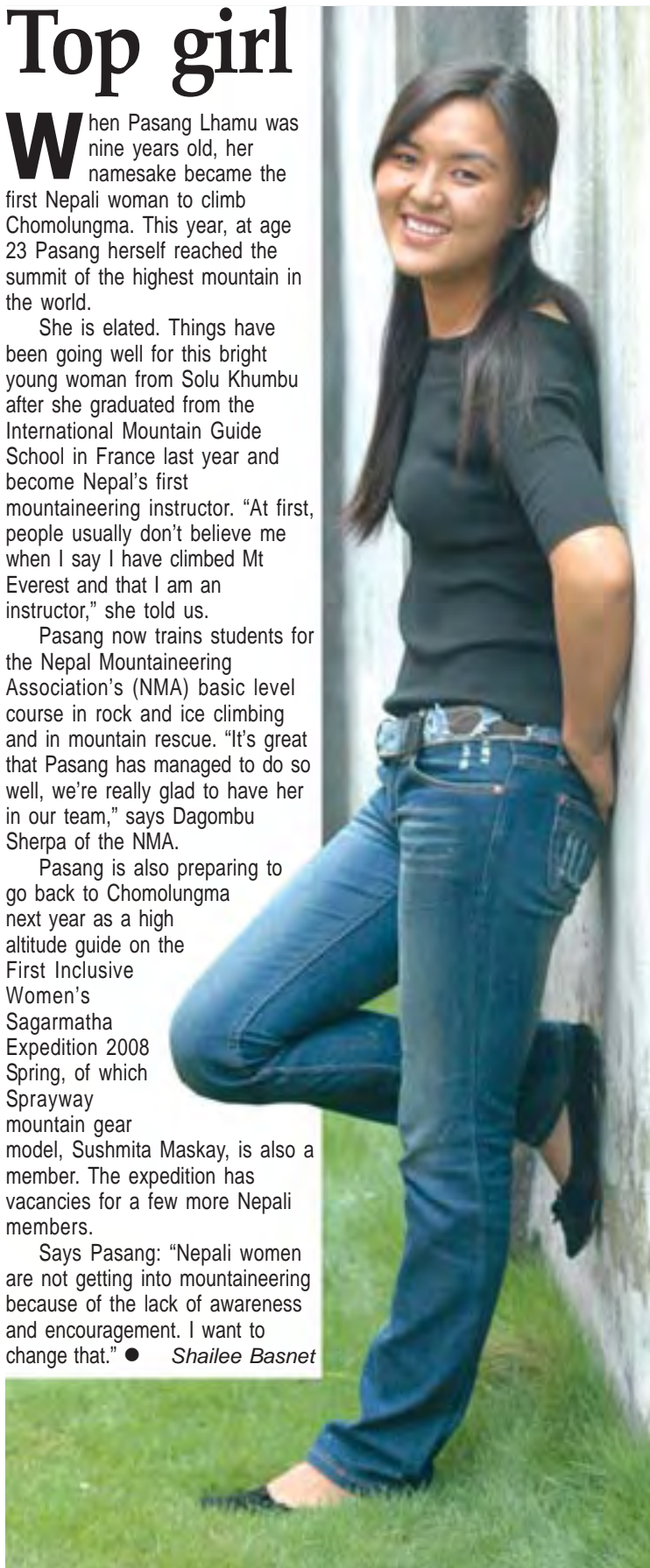
When Pasang Lhamu was nine years old, her namesake became the first Nepali woman to climb Chomolungma. This year, at age 23 Pasang herself reached the summit of the highest mountain in the world.

She is elated. Things have been going well for this bright young woman from Solu Khumbu after she graduated from the International Mountain Guide School in France last year and become Nepal's first mountaineering instructor. "At first, people usually don't believe me when I say I have climbed Mt Everest and that I am an instructor," she told us.

Pasang now trains students for the Nepal Mountaineering Association's (NMA) basic level course in rock and ice climbing and in mountain rescue. "It's great that Pasang has managed to do so well, we're really glad to have her in our team," says Dagombu Sherpa of the NMA.

Pasang is also preparing to go back to Chomolungma next year as a high altitude guide on the First Inclusive Women's Sagarmatha Expedition 2008 Spring, of which Sprayway mountain gear model, Sushmita Maskay, is also a member. The expedition has vacancies for a few more Nepali members.

Says Pasang: "Nepali women are not getting into mountaineering because of the lack of awareness and encouragement. I want to change that." ● *Shailee Basnet*



KIRAN PANDAY

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## 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
- ❖ **A tribute to pioneering work** a collection of paintings by Chandra Man Singh Maskey, Tej Bahadur Chitrakar, Bal Krishna Sama, and Rama Nanda Joshi, until 11 August at Park Gallery, Pulchok, Rs 50 entrance.

## EVENTS

- ❖ **300** a film based on the graphic novel by Frank Miller, 10 August, 6.45 PM at Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Live! An international bell festival** atop the Swayambhunath stupa, bring along a Nepali puja bell, 6PM onwards on 11 August.
- ❖ **Shastrartha** on electoral system by Surya Prasad Shrestha and Nil Kantha Upreti, 11 August, 4-6PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Rato Bangala School presents West Side Story** 9 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.
- ❖ **Nyayapremee** a play by Albert Camus, directed by Sunil Pokharel, 11 August-8 September, at 5.30PM everyday except Mondays and Wednesdays, at the Rimal Theatre, Gurukul, Old Baneshwor. 4466956
- ❖ **Regular pottery classes** at Artworks, Pulchok, opposite Banana Cat Café, starting 12 noon till late. 9851101837
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **Acoustic music** by Yanki and friends at Moksh Bar, 8.30 PM. 5526212
- ❖ **Rudra Nite** at LeMeridien, fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali, every Friday, Rs 800 nett. 4451212
- ❖ **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

## DINING

- ❖ **Mango Etagère** taste mango crepes suzette, bread scones with mango ice cream at The Lounge, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Starry night BBQ** with live music by Ciney Gurung at The Shambala Garden Cafe, Hotel Shangri-La, every Friday 7PM, Rs 666 inclusive of a beer. 4412999
- ❖ **Traditional Nepalese BBQ** at Splash Bar & Grill, every Friday 6.30 PM, Rs. 799 nett with 1 large Ruslan Vodka.
- ❖ **5th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival** 16 wines at Rs 150 a glass and Rs 600 a bottle, at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Monsoon Magic** live jazz by Inner Groove and a variety of cocktails from the summer special menu, every Wednesday, Rs 599 at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Lajawaab** curry, kebab and biryani festival, every Friday, 7PM onwards at Café Horizon, Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- ❖ **Walk and lunch** every Saturday at the Shivapuri Heights Cottage. 9841371927
- ❖ **Shangri La's Pizza** pizza pie and pool, a special swimming package with a complimentary beverage, Saturday and Sunday. 4412999
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Rediscover fine Italian cuisine** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, all new exciting menu. 4700612
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

## 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 beer, Rs 690. 5560675
- ❖ **Monsoon madness** two nights three days package at Rs.5999 for a couple at Shangri-La Village, Pokhara. 4412999
- ❖ **Experience Hyatt** 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
- ❖ **Overnight package** at Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, Dhulikhel, includes accommodation, snacks, dinner and breakfast. 4479488

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

## Quest Entertainment



*Chak De India* is the story of Coach Kabir Kahn's (Shahrukh Khan) fight and struggles while training the female Indian hockey team. Kabir's Team India must overcome their diverse backgrounds and learn to use everything that life hurls on them to get to the top. A story about honesty, sincerity and integrity, the movie follows the rise of Kabir Kahn's team of diverse yet similar individuals rediscover their love for the sport of hockey.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal  
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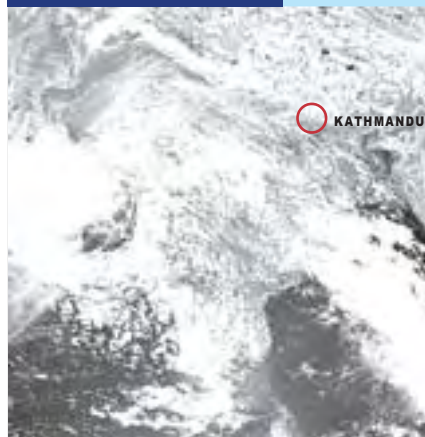
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## WEEKEND WEATHER

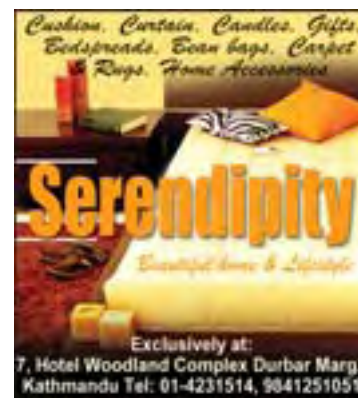
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



## KATHMANDU VALLEY



The southwest monsoon (a bit of a misnomer here since it arrives actually from the southeast) is taking a breather. Thankfully so, considering the havoc in the tarai this past week. But this may not last long since there are two cyclonic troughs, one over the Bay and the other over the Arabian Sea. Both are clearly seen in this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning. They will take another week to reach us and may cancel each other out. But they may also strengthen each other depending on how the isobars arrange themselves next week. Till then, expect the moisture to waft up the mountains and fall as rain, mainly in the late evening and night with light, cool winds from the southeast. And when the sun does shine through, as it will in the mornings, it will be hot and sticky.







MIN BAJRACHARYA

**ALL TOGETHER NOW:** Maoist top brass ( from l-r: Baburam Bhatari, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Ram Bahadur Thapa, and Mohan Baidya) patched up their differences at the party's central committee meeting in Balaju Tuesday and decided to go for elections and stay in government.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**BOOK WORMS:** Two Maoist ex-guerrillas in full combat gear outside the meeting hall in Balaju on Monday set aside their assault rifles to flip through a book about the history of the student struggle in Nepal.



KIRAN PANDAY

**SHE'S HERE:** New US ambassador, Nancy Powell, being received by Charge d'affaires Robert Hugins at Kathmandu ariport on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY


**ART IMITATES LIFE:** Shova Chand, a performance artist based in Paris, performing Go West combining theatre, music, dance, and portraying shocking images of the west, at Jatra Cafe and Bar, Thamel on Sunday.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**GREAT PICTURE:** Sangeeta Thapa of Siddhartha Art Gallery and her family admire the paintings of Bal Krishna Sama at the Park Gallery in Pulchok on Thursday. The exhibition also includes paintings by other greats like Chandra Maskay and Tej Chitrakar and is on till 11 August.

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# Abductors Almost Abducted

Nepal is garnering a well-deserved reputation worldwide for being a pretty incompetent country. Let's face it, our blokes can't do anything right. But, be that as it may, we are a **proud** and **independent** nation. We may not have assets, but we have a whole lot of asses. And that is what makes our country truly great.

✂

Sorry to say, but even our crooks are third-rate. Our willful defaulters are so mediocre they get caught in flagrante with their hands in the honeypot. Then, they're so dense they can't even bribe their way out of being blacklisted. Highway robbers in Chandranighapore get involved in motorcycle accidents as they make too swift a getaway. In Birganj, kidnappers botch their kidnapping and end up getting caught. Only in *The Rising Nipple* do you get to read headlines like: 'Abductors Abducted'.

Ambitious as he was to wield absolute power, even our wily kingji couldn't pull off a proper royal dictatorship. He is reported to have said soon after his half-hearted coup in February 2005: "Those loyal to me are incompetent and those who are incompetent are loyal."

And those who are royal were neither loyal nor competent, the Ass supposes.

✂

Over at our Department of Uncivil Aviation, it looks like folks aren't even smart enough to be really corrupt. If they were, they'd have ordered replacement for X-ray machines long ago and we'd not have to wait in lines stretching right down to the Ring Road just trying to get into the terminal because only one of the x-rated things still works.

And if they were smart enough to be corrupt they'd have ordered two Dreamliners long ago. Instead, what we have is petty graft that involves cabin crew squirreling away undrunk booze after flights and commissions on ordering cabin consumables like plastic cutlery. Makes one ashamed to call oneself a Nepali.

Why doesn't someone just muster the

courage to earn some major kickbacks so that the RB211 engine that is rotting in a Hong Kong hangar for more than a year can be overhauled? If the fight is between HECO and AMECO, for heaven's sake take your cut and get the damn thing repaired.

✂

Really, our guys are just not greedy enough. Instead of embezzling zillions on plane purchases, the very people who are ministers today went for messy leases right through the 1990s. Now, they aren't even immoral enough to lease planes, they are happy with measly baksheesh on maintenance contracts. Pretty soon they'll be satisfied with an underhand payoff on storage fees for the broken engine. Speaking of which, there is a plan to take the engine off the plane that is being checked out in Brunei and fly it back to be fitted on the grounded jet here. Genius, whoever thought of that. But, ummm, how will the jet in Brunei fly back?

✂

So Sri Tin Girija has installed a lift at Baluwatar to get up to his first floor bedroom. Which begs the question: if he needs a dumbwaiter in his official residence how on earth is he going to make it to China on an official visit in Asoj? Isn't it a health hazard for our head of state and government? Besides, how is he going to fly to Beijing if the 757s are still grounded? In a Twin Otter?

✂

Still on the subject of aviation, our unusually reliable source tells us negotiations with Sri Lankan Airlines on flying to Kathmandu have broken down because our guys wouldn't allow the Lankans to carry 100 pax per flight between Delhi and Kathmandu, only 75. Call me an ass, but how can a country that has suspended all international flights by its flag carrier not allow someone else fly passengers? So mean, no?



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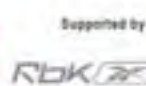
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