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BILASH RAI

**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 362

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

Total votes: 3,751

Weekly Internet Poll # 363. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

**Q. Which political party do you most agree with?**

## When the going gets tough...



# Will the tough get going?

**JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI**  
in MAHOTTARI

The only people who say elections can't be held in the tarai are looking for an excuse to defer polls again. That is the prevalent feeling in the madhes.

The plains may be ravaged by floods and communal extremism, but the situation didn't seem as precarious as it is made out to be in the Kathmandu press.

"The elections are possible, I now have my citizenship papers and I'm ready to vote," says Behsan Mukhiya, a Janakpur rickshaw puller.

The Election Commission is in place, and UNMIN observers have arrived.

"We are ready," says Janak Karna of the Election Commission's Dhanusha unit, who is starting a voters' education program 18 August-18 October. "But none of the parties have come to ask us about procedures."

Local politicians say the floods have delayed things but they intend to plunge headlong into campaigning once relief operations are over. Aid agencies are worried about the difficulty in getting aid to submerged VDCs because of local political interference.

Indeed, the lack of flood relief is of more serious concern at present than security. "Sure there is a climate of fear," says Janakpur resident Hari Katwal, "but it's not as bad as it is

portrayed in the news."

Only well-off pahadis are leaving the tarai, Katuwal says, others aren't. Janakpur municipality has a population of about 1,05,000 of which roughly 22,000 are of hill origin. Local officials say most of them have no intention of going anywhere.

"The high-profile kidnappings and assassinations of pahades makes the militant groups look stronger than they actually are," says a security officer. Threats are made by phone but many have defied them and stayed on without consequences. (See p8-9)

"There is no communal animosity between the two communities," insists the UML's Jha. Local police confirm this,

but say they haven't been able to act on criminal gangs with links to militant groups because Kathmandu doesn't give them the authority or werewithal.

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<b>Fleeing the flood</b>	
<b>After the deluge</b>	p8-9

Even those who were sceptical about elections being held in November said repolling or phased voting may be required in Siraha and Saptari. Despite the highway blockades, violence, and floods, the tarai seems more eager to vote than people in Kathmandu. ●

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The madehsi perception of India is not what we think it is

# Mainly in the plains

## SPLIT PERSONALITY

Last week's Maoist meet was supposed to be an opportunity for stock-taking and expressing a renewed commitment to the 12-point agreement, the peace process and elections.

Despite pressure from its rigid factions the leadership held its ground and forged a consensus on staying in government for now and going for elections. All this had to be couched in warlike rhetoric, but at least it was done.

However, the week since has seen a disturbing rise in the activities of YCL warriors and militant students. Extortion is now accompanied by threats just like during the conflict years. Maoist unions have brought foreign investors still left in Nepal on the verge of quitting. Out-of-camp warriors walk around openly in combat fatigues, carrying knives and other weapons.

Most disturbing for us in the media is the use of labour militancy to exert pressure on editorial content (see: 'Stop press', #354 and 'Meet the press', #359). Two national dailies were shut down for five days, and this week Maoists entered the newsrooms to threaten reporters and even tried to kidnap a journalist from a weekly paper. Not even during the king's military rule was the media subjected to such onslaught.

It is important to separate the genuine interests of media employees from politics. Labour issues can now be addressed through negotiations between employee unions and management under the just-passed Working Journalists Act.

It is when employees are used as political tools to put pressure on media and undermine press freedom that things start getting serious. This is in the interest of neither the employees nor the development of the press in Nepal. And ultimately, it undermines democracy.

We are glad to note that this message has now got to senior levels of the Maoist leadership. On Wednesday, Krishna Bahadur Mahara, who also happens to be Minister of Information, unequivocally restated his party's commitment to safeguard press freedom and asked the Federation of Nepalese Journalists to resolve outstanding issues through negotiations.

Then, the leader of the Maoist-affiliated trade union which has been responsible for all the havoc in media and other industries gave a written commitment that his group would no longer disrupt the publication and distribution of newspapers while staging protests. The Patan Appellate Court earlier issued a stay order against the stoppage.

We will have to see whether these commitments translate into behaviour change. The comrades have to address their split personality and decide once and for all whether they are now a political party that believes in pluralism and has abandoned violence as a political tool. Or are they still a rebel force that is determined to establish a totalitarian state by force.

We have given them the benefit of doubt, saying the guerrillas needed time to get used to the politics of compromise. One-and-a-half years is enough time. Continued use of violence and threats (pic: pedestrians skirting burning tyres during lightning strike by Maoists on Wednesday) in the run-up to November will prove that they don't want elections for which they fought a war that cost this country so dearly.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

As far as Kathmandu is concerned, Nepal's madhesi look like Indians, talk like Indians, behave like Indians, are pro-Indian. And some would even go so far as to say they are Indian.

What they don't know is that there is actually resentment in the tarai against the Indian government. The madhes's relationship with India is complex and multi-layered. Madhesi have kinship, cultural, linguistic ties, a *bahu-beti* relationship with folks across the border.



TARAI EYE  
Prashant Jha

And across the border in India there may be general sympathy for the madhesi cause, but this has not translated into active support. Indian policymakers do not want the madhesi movement to get too radicalised and would prefer a snappy solution.

Madhesi feel that New Delhi has never supported them in their struggle for rights, from the days of Vedanand Jha's Nepal Tarai Congress in the 1950s to the present agitation. They believe New Delhi has taken them for granted, and always used them as a bargaining chip with pahadi rulers in Kathmandu.

From Biratanagar to Birganj, it is common to hear people gripe about India's unhelpful attitude.

Till a few years back, most of India's development and economic assistance to Nepal was concentrated in the hills. Only recently has this changed. India never used its enormous leverage to push Kathmandu into giving madhesi a fair deal despite the fact that they were excluded and dismissed as Indians. All it has done is privately fund the Nepal Sadhbhabana Party which was ineffective in raising madhesi concerns. If New Delhi had wanted and put pressure on the government, 40 Madhesi would not have been killed during the movement and the government would be more sensitive to their demands.

Some of these perceptions may be exaggerated, but it is certain that New Delhi has not invested its political capital to push the madhes issue. New Delhi's interests, from maintaining Gurkha linkages and other political relations to securing hydropower, are intertwined with the hill elite and peoples. Those in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh who may have an incentive in supporting madhesi do not have influence in shaping India's foreign policy.

Some madhesi argue that active Indian support may have created more problems for the movement, by reinforcing the impression that madhesi are Indians and India wants to instigate trouble. Others say that Nepal's political history shows that unless India gets involved, no major political issue can be resolved. But while recognising India's influence, madhesi are unanimous that they will have to fight this battle themselves, the time to depend solely on Indian help has passed.

India's policy on tarai is work-in-progress. From Delhi to Patna to border towns, politicians and bureaucrats were thrilled to see an erosion in the Maoist influence in the tarai when the movement began. The support for the madhesi struggle remains strongest in bordering towns among people who have

direct relatives across and understand the issues. There were solidarity demonstrations during the movement, local legislators continue to voice their support and may have helped madhesi armed leaders staying in India. Local administrators and security personnel turn a blind eye to movement of activists. Places like Gorakhpur are directly affected by politics in the tarai, a Hindu fundamentalist leader asked for support in local polls on an anti-Maoist plank.

In Patna and Lucknow, awareness of the madhesi issue is limited. Many politicians and bureaucrats term madhesi as people of Indian origin. Madhesi outfits have lobbied with politicians across the spectrum, from the ruling JD (United)-BJP coalition to the Samajwadi Party. There is sympathy, but there are few signs of active political or financial support by state politicians or governments to madhesi outfits.

South Block is anxious. Foreign policy mandarins do not want to see the peace process destabilised. India has invested a lot in the present rapprochement and Delhi diplomats are more irritated than anything else at this complication. They think the government has bungled up on tarai and the fractured nature of madhes politics doesn't help.

Indian diplomats are telling the madhesi groups that if they want support, they must forge a common understanding, and make the most of the constituent assembly elections. At the same time, there are reports of intelligence agencies keeping channels of communication open with the armed madhesi groups. It is difficult to ascertain whether this has translated into support to them.

If the conflict in the tarai continues, it will have a much deeper cross-border implication than the Maoist rebellion ever did. India can help by trying to exert pressure on both the government and the madhesi groups to get their acts together. ●

## LETTERS

### NO TURNING BACK

Re: Editorial, 'No turning back' (#361) Your analysis that the problem now is that none of the political parties are confident of achieving the result they desire in the election is right. But a new constitution can still be drafted. The consensus of all the parties is that they will form the constitution through an elected constituent assembly so that before the preparation of the manifesto there should be clear commitment between the political parties for durable peace, fundamental rights, a federal system of state, and a multilingual and multi-cultural policy.

Pusp Prasad Luintel,  
Green Party Nepal

● Your editorial 'No turning back now' (#361) smacks of trying to be more politically correct than the politicians themselves. While less than 100 days remain for the said election, freedom of press is being strangled right here in the capital (eg *The Himalayan Times*), and the security situation across the country remains hopeless. No party has come up with individual or collective position for the election other than to continue to flog the dead horse of royalty. Federalising the country would have been a fitting issue for a constituent assembly to deliberate, but in the democracy practiced by our brand of politicians the mandateless parliament has foreclosed the issue. So, why go for the CA election in the first

place, and not settle for a less costly referendum on monarchy? Nothing other than the date fixation through amendment to the nascent interim constitution allows us to share your sense of evangelism regarding the CA.

Bihari Krishna Shrestha,  
Lalitpur

● The new loktantric constitution is to be framed by the constituent assembly and not by this SPAM government. This being so, the Seven Parties and Maoist government's main function is to hold elections so a new constitution can be debated and drafted. The government should therefore already be forming a drafting committee and charge it with holding talks with

affected groups. The urgent task is the removal of obstacles to a free and fair election and maintenance of law and order.

Ishwari Pradhan, email

● Though I find the idea of the multiparty system practical ('Small is beautiful', #361) I disagree with the atmosphere of political chaos that it goes on to create. It is necessary for the parties to be much more transparent about their agenda for elections. This would create the atmosphere for informed debate and also allow the public to see if the leaders and their parties are actually worth voting for and electing. My problem with the multiparty system is based on their record of unaccountability

and also that their ideologies don't seem that different from each other. Let politics be the arena in which the best manager wins.

PSR, email

### TARAI FLOODS

Prashant Jha is correct when he says that the tarai movement is fractured ('Sandbagging the plains', #361). However, even the eight parties in Kathmandu are no better in finding a consensus. In times of national tragedy like the recent floods, it was imperative that the government provide urgent relief to the affected population. Sadly, even the Nepali media has not covered the floods comprehensively.

A Mulmi, email

# Polls or bust

## Elections will address economic inequity



implication: rise in social unrest and political violence.

Gini is easy to understand: it's a number between 0 and 100 where 0 means perfect equality (everyone has the same income) and 100 means perfect inequality (one person has all the income, everyone else earns nothing).

Among 22 of the ADB's developing member countries, seven had Gini coefficients of 40 or more while 15 had coefficients between 30 and 40. Gini merely represents relative inequality (the difference between top 20 percent and bottom 20 percent of population). Other measures of well-being such as nutrition, access to education and

availability of health services aren't covered by Gini. However, it tells us more about the stability of a society than any other measure of poverty.

The fact that incidence of absolute poverty figures are almost as alarming (a third of all Nepalis somehow survive on less than a dollar a day) makes the situation even more volatile. The poor in Nepal know that they are poor. Many of them think they also know why they are poor. But nobody seems to know what to do about it.

Yet, doing something about it through political initiatives is a pre-requisite to long-term peace.

The sad part is that the interim government doesn't seem to understand how bad things are. Baburam Bhattarai loves to grandstand but he essentially correct in his assessment of Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat's budget. The free-market fundamentalism embraced by Messrs Mahat, Mahesh & Co has contributed to make Nepal one of the most asymmetrical countries in the world. Nepal's Gini coefficient increased from 34.2 in 1996 to 41.4 percent in 2003/04 and even crossed 47 last year. Democracy and the insurgency seem to have helped some Nepalis prosper at the expense of all others.

Besides fixing politics, the constituent assembly election therefore also has an economic rationale. That perhaps is the reason nobody in power seems to be terribly enthusiastic about going to the polls. Relative poverty causes corruption, social unrest, riots and even revolution, and putting off a political solution will make worse.

Postponing the polls again will postpone a resolution of the socio-economic inequities that lead to violent conflict. That is all the reason Girija Prasad Koirala, Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhab Nepal need to muster the political will to push through with the November elections. ●

Persistent political inequality even after the restoration of democracy was what led to the demand for state restructuring. The constituent assembly to be elected in November will have to do much more than decide the fate of a discredited and defunct monarchy.

Framers of our new constitution will have to begin by examining the very organisation of the state. Nepal has been unitary for nearly two-and-half centuries and a smooth switchover to a federal structure will need some ingenuity.

Then there are longstanding issues of social exclusion based on caste and creed or gender. There



**STATE OF THE STATE**  
C K Lal

are regional, ethnic, linguistic and cultural

aspirations. In their obsession with the past, none of the mainstream parties seem to be aware of the challenges ahead.

If a framework of restrained contestations and consensual decision-making isn't agreed upon in advance, constituent assembly will end up being a fractious body instead of a uniting one.

If the country's economic disparity is not addressed, economics will always sway politics. The rate of poverty in Kathmandu Valley according to the *Nepal Living Standards Survey 2005* is 3.3. Corresponding figures for the eastern hills is 42.9 and it is 38.1 in the western tarai. The eastern tarai was the scene of this winter's madhes uprising and it is where a majority of janajati own very little land and most dalits are landless.

The Manila-based Asian Development Bank has just released its *Key Indicators 2007: Inequality in Asia* report (see p 4) which shows us just how bad Nepal's rich-poor gap is. A Gini Coefficient of 47.3 makes us the most unequal country in Asia. The ADB economist who announced these startling findings in Beijing this week underlined the

people whom I know personally. There is a vibrant sense of community there and everyone knows everyone. Living in Europe now, I realise how rare this is. However, there is one sore point still about Chibakhel: the disposal of buffalo parts by the local butchers. There hasn't been a commensurate improvement in hygiene and cleanliness. The entrails and bones are all thrown into the Bishnumati and the children playing around in the decaying filth. Can't something be done about this too?

Nirmal Ghimire, Spain

### 'Twas Padma

I have been with the Nepali people practically without a break since 10 December 1944. You begin your

editorial 'No turning back' (#361) by stating: 'Ever since Rana Prime Minister Padma Shamsheer granted the first written constitution in 1948, Nepali have been...' Surely 'twas Mohan Shamsheer? I only make this query because I had an audience with Padma Shamsheer in February 1947 and believe that, with my friend, we were his last visitors before he handed over to Mohan.

J P Cross, Pokhara

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

1948 January: Padma Shamsheer Rana promulgates constitution.  
1948 April: Following Padma Shamsheer Rana's resignation, Mohan Shamsheer Rana becomes prime minister and 'maharaja'.



### CHIBAKHEL

Thanks a lot for publishing such an interesting article related to the local initiative to revive Chibakhel. I spent most of my childhood there and I know every corner of that corner of Kathmandu. The happiest thing for me is to go there and explore my childhood habitat and visit

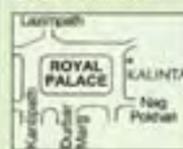
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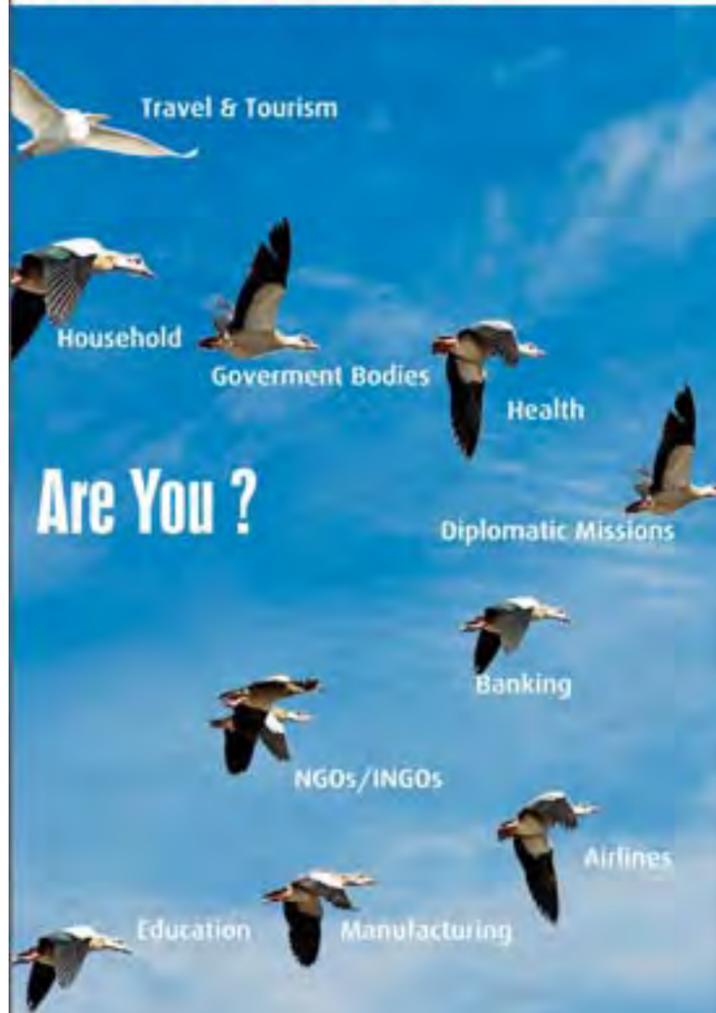


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# Gini out of bag

## Nepal is the most unequal country in Asia

According to a report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), income inequality in Asian countries has increased over the past decade or so in 15 of the 21 countries it has studied. The three main exceptions are Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, the countries worst hit by the 1997 financial crisis. The biggest increases in inequality were in China, Nepal, and Cambodia.

Income inequality is usually measured by a country's Gini coefficient, in which 0 is perfect equality (everyone has the same income) and 1 is perfect inequality (ie, one household takes everything). China's Gini coefficient rose from 0.41 in 1993 to 0.47 in 2004, the highest in Asia after Nepal (see chart). High and rising inequality played a big role in Nepal's recent troubles. Rumbblings of discontent across the region suggest governments cannot afford to ignore such risks.

On this measure, China has more income inequality than America (whose Gini coefficient is 0.46). Governments in Beijing and elsewhere in Asia like to comfort themselves with the thought that they still have less inequality than Latin America does. Argentina, Brazil, Chile and

Mexico all have Gini coefficients of considerably over 0.5, Brazil's is 0.57.

This suggests inequality in many Asian countries could now be nudging Latin American levels if measured on a comparable basis. The figures in the chart are for 2004, but inequality has been rising in China, while in Brazil it has been falling over the past decade. Assuming this trend has continued, China's inequality may be as great as Brazil's already.

Moreover, in some Asian countries, expenditure figures may understate the true extent of inequality. India's Gini coefficient is in the lower half of the chart, yet health and education measures suggest the country suffers from wide disparities. In the richest 20 percent of households, only 5 percent of children are severely underweight, compared with 28 percent in the poorest 20 percent—a wider gap than in countries which have higher Gini coefficients.

The main cause of increased inequality is the differing fortunes of rural and urban households. A second factor is the widening gap between those

with and without skills.

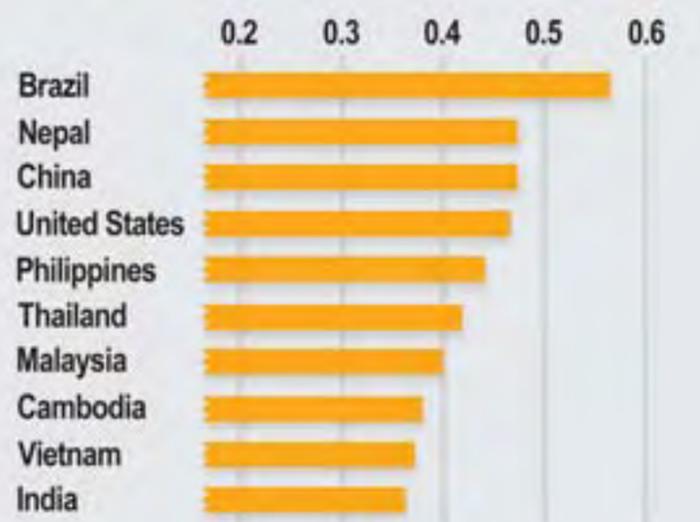
Does rising inequality matter so long as poverty is falling? It is clear that Asia's poor have not been bypassed by growth—popular claims to the contrary notwithstanding. Even where inequality has increased sharply, the poorest 20 percent of households are still better off in real terms than they were ten years ago everywhere except in Pakistan. The number of people living on less than \$1 a day has fallen everywhere except in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Indeed, poverty has fallen by much more in some countries with high and rising inequality than in more egalitarian ones. The share of India's population living on less than \$1 a day fell from 42 percent in 1993 to 35 percent in 2004. China saw a sharper fall, from 28 percent to 11 percent, largely thanks to faster growth.

But even if poverty has continued to fall despite rising inequality, it may not have dropped as fast as it might have if economic gains had been more equally distributed. The other main reason to worry about widening inequality, says the ADB, is that it can threaten growth if it results in social unrest. ●



MIN BAJRACHARYA



## What to do?

Populist measures to soak the rich are not the answer: they would stunt growth. The ADB instead recommends governments focus on policies that lift the incomes of the poor, such as improving rural access to health, education, and social protection. More investment in rural infrastructure could boost productivity in farming and increase job opportunities for the poor.

But that is easier said than done. Rajiv Gandhi famously remarked that only 15 percent of government money intended for India's poor ever reached them. Most of it leaks out in bureaucratic incompetence or corruption—fattening the wallets of those who are already well-to-do. (*The Economist*)



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AadhuroPrem	Axix	N1886
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## THT and AP are back

The Himalayan Times and Annapurna Post returned to newsstands Thursday after Maoists disrupted the distribution of the papers and even entered the newsroom to physically threaten reporters. The closure triggered an unprecedented solidarity from various media



groups, even competitors. In a written commitment the president of the Maoist trade union said his group would "no longer disrupt the publication and distribution of newspapers while staging

protests taking into account the sensitivity of the media sector".

The manufacturing sector has also been affected and industrialists said they want a similar commitment from the Maoists for non-media investors as well. The Dabur factory in Bara, already affected by bandas re-opened Wednesday after a week of forced closure by Maoists.

Meanwhile ten editors of The Himalayan Times, Annapurna Post, Kantipur, The Kathmandu Post, Samaya, Nepal, Image Channel, Nepal Samacharpatra, Himal Khabarpatrika and Nepali Times have set up a pressure group called the Editors' Alliance to defend press freedom.

## WLC in Nepal

WLC College, an Indian academic institution, has now established itself in Hattisar, Kathmandu. The college offers courses in management and creative courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. It also offers career options in fashion, advertising, graphic designing, and media.

## Equipment dealers

Auto-electro-mech is now the authorised dealer for Terex Vectra construction equipment. The company deals with backhoe loaders, skid steer loaders, compactors, and excavators. The office of Auto-electro-mech is located in Balkumari, Lalitpur.

## Expanded

Dhaba Restaurant and Bar has expanded its premises to include more shades, and a wider parking area. The restaurant is providing a 20 percent discount on lunch till 4PM on this occasion.



## NEW PRODUCTS



**CRACKER:** Macoos is the latest brand of snack food to hit the market. Macoos Chicken Cracker is manufactured by Vikyash Food Industries under technical assistance from Japan. Vikyash Food is managed by Ramesh Kaji Tamrakar and Samyak Udas.

**FEMINYL:** Marie Stopes services has launched a female oral contraceptive, Feminyl. Feminyl will soon be available in the Kathmandu market and shortly, all over the country. Marie Stopes Nepal has been providing quality services in the field of family planning and reproductive health for the last 13 years. MSS also produces the Jodi brand condoms.



# Brokering relief

## Why every disaster becomes a money spinner

There is a flashflood of flood relief donation drives in the streets of Kathmandu. Many of them are self-declared good samaritans who have left paying jobs, colleges, and politics to raise money for flood victims. All very well and good.



**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
Artha Beed

Some have pre-invested a part of the proceeds into getting matching caps and jackets. Others have printed receipts. Brokering relief has always been a money spinner for governments across South Asia. In Nepal, every disaster brings in its wake an opportunity to amass funds.

The focus is on how to collect the funds, not really on spending it properly. The government, of course, sets the example by showing how one can amass money in the name of relief and use it for purposes that have nothing to do with the disaster for which the money was created.

The apex fund for disaster relief in Nepal is the Prime Minister's Natural Disaster Relief Fund, which is supposed to distribute the charity to the neediest. Contributions to this fund even enjoy tax breaks making it the most desirous route of contribution.

However, till today, we haven't yet heard about incomes and disbursements and to whom. The Beed is given to understand that this Fund is used to dole out pork-barrel funds to political cronies and withdrawals are made in cash. We are waiting to see audited results of the Fund and potential corroboration of data from recipients to check whether the intended purpose was met or not.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

The Fund must be managed more transparently and be freed from the fingers of politicians. The people of Nepal are owed this information from the trustees of this fund, they need to be told about the procedures for allocations, how one is eligible to apply and so forth. At the moment contributing to the Prime Minister's Fund is like pouring water on the sand.

Relief operations require a lot of coordination, and as Nepalis we have a profound dislike towards coordinated efforts. We do not have a nodal agency that has the competency in managing relief. While the Red Cross Society is there politics and infighting in even that non-profit makes one wonder what makes positions in that supposed charity organisation so lucrative.

There is no use trotting up the excuse that even the US

government was blamed for relief post-Hurricane Katrina. There are two sets of problems for Nepal's relief 'business':

- a) the growing tendency of using manmade or natural disasters as an excuse to collect money. We can't turn brokering death and destruction into a job.
- b) if this is what we do with a flood that killed 95 imagine what we would do if the Big One struck with hundreds of thousands of casualties.
- c) Last Saturday, as kids put strings and ropes across Kathmandu's alleys to forcibly collect donations to lay the mythical demon Ghantakarna to rest, others were stopping vehicles for flood relief.

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Dabur

# Prachandapath, Gyanendrapath

Chandra Shekhar Karki in *Kantipur*, 15 August

प्रचण्डपथ

As a photojournalist, I usually don't write much, preferring to use pictures. But a recent incident has filled me with so much anger and disgust that I am writing this.

As I was heading to work at 11AM on Wednesday, a group of YCL fighters blocked my path in the middle of the road in Lokhanthali. They let me pass after I showed my press pass and managed to reach Koteswor. There, a furious YCL guerrilla rushed towards me as if I was his enemy. "We actually don't want a *Kantipur* journalist to pass through," he spat, "you better get off your motorcycle and walk." Around me, others had also been forced to walk since none of them had heard of this sudden strike called by the Maoists. After walking about 200 metres, another YCL let me get back on my bike.

Years ago, I had to go through a similar experience during the king's rule and it brought back bad memories. We often had to go through such humiliating experiences at the hands of the security forces in those days, forced to tow our motorcycles past security checks.

At the office, I tried to figure out the differences between these two incidents but found none. The behaviour of the king's soldiers and the YCL was identical. The same arrogance and rudeness and disregard for the hardships of ordinary people.

During the king's repressive regime, the Maoists used to treat *Kantipur* as their own while reporting against the king's repression. Now we are considered their enemies because we report excesses like these. If this is their definition of a free press, what is the difference between Prachandapath and Gyanendrapath?



## Forum freed

Samaya, 10 July

समया

Last Saturday, the Indian daily *Sahara* published a news item in its front-page: 'One dozen leaders of Forum in detention'. According to the paper, those arrested in India's Maharajgunj police were Forum's Rupandehi president Om Prakash Yadav, youth district president Shambhu Yadav, Mohammed Kabil, Kabil Yadav, Durga Mishra, and Janardhan Yadav. As soon as the news was out, Rupandehi police contacted the Indian police, but by that time they had already been released. Nepal police still has no idea why they were arrested or why they were released. Om Prakash faces criminal charges in Nepal. The Maoists have filed a homicide case against him. "We had informed the Indian police about those who had fled across the border, but why they weren't handed to us, we don't know," says Sub Inspector Suresh Bahadur Singh.

The Maoists have blamed Yadav and his associates for the murder of their regional bureau member and YCL central member Jitendra and district leaders Mani. They were killed on 13 June in the Marchabar area of the district. The news item also said the two were in hiding in India for some time to coordinate the madhesi agitation in Nepal. The Maoists, who claim there is Indian infiltration during the madhes

uprising, have now more reason to believe it. Maoists leader Pampha Bhusal says: "This incident has proved it's true."

According to Bhusal, the Maoists had seen them in Nautanwa a few days ago. Following which Nepal police had sought help from the Indian police. But instead of helping, SP Prashant of Maharajgunj helped the perpetrators to flee, adds Bhusal.

The murder of a Maoists youth leader in broad daylight had jolted the Maoist leadership and they had taken it up with the home minister. The Maoists say Indian state police and Hindu extremists are protecting the madhesis. Bhusal has accused the preacher of Gorakhnath temple and BJP MLA Aditya Pandey for provoking "criminal elements" to create instability in Nepal

## Leftie leftists

Editorial in *Nayapatrika*, 14 August

नयापत्रिका

Despite the Maoists leadership diluting its declaration at the 5<sup>th</sup> plenum public consumption, the difficulties are apparent. The conclusion that all ideological, political and moral basis for staying in the government was exhausted has paved a way for the Maoists to quit Singha Darbar.

If the Maoists intended to establish a republic peacefully then their plan hasn't worked so far. Although they displayed

maturity by deciding against opting out from the government immediately or boycotting elections, the widening gap between their ambitions and the practicalities of politics could force them out of the government sooner or later. After that they are likely to take to the streets and eventually hope to launch an urban uprising to grab state power.

The country is likely to be sandwiched between the status-quoist seven parties and the Maoists who want to bring about change by force. Even after the Maoists' decision that basis of unity has been exhausted, the seven parties have not responded. Both the Maoists' path of another round of rebellion and the parties affinity for the status quo is dangerous. Unless the Maoists and the parties redefine their unity, the country is headed headlong to the brink. And both the sides would be responsible if we fell off.

## 4 Weaknesses

From Prachanda's press statement, *Sanghu*, 13 August

सङ्घ

The party has assessed that its policy from the 12 point agreements to the participation in the interim government has been very objective and fruitful. However there has also been serious criticism for stumbling during the process. The failures are as follows:

# Typhoons vs tycoons

Maoist newspaper, *Janadesh*, 14 August

जनादेश

Just when the Working Journalist Act, which protects the rights, provides benefits and security to working journalists was amended and passed by the Nepali parliament, media tycoons that have gained profits from their big media houses have started conspiring against the bill. They are utilising their resources and political network to discredit the working journalists' movement.

The amendment to the first bill that protects the rights of working journalists who publish and broadcast the voice of the people was made by the meeting of the interim legislature on 8 August and was endorsed by the speaker on Sunday. Although the bill has been passed, working journalists in various media houses have gone on strike demanding their rights. Meanwhile their owners are trying to suppress their voice.

Working journalists who have been treated like labourers are happy about the recent amendment, but the media houses that treat these journalists as bonded labourers are obviously not so thrilled. In fact, they fear that they will now have to follow the amended act, which is why they are saying that freedom of press is under attack so that the attention is diverted somewhere else. When reporters at Kathmandu's HBC FM demanded that the provisions of the bill be implemented, the managers of the FM used the strike as an excuse, accused the Maoists for provoking the workers and the so called manager, Birendra Dahal went on a hunger strike.

The Act allows working journalists to start trade unions in their media houses, prohibits employing journalists without appointment letters, and does not allow

more than 15 percent workers to remain under contract. When the journalists asked for their rights, the media houses say that press freedom is under attack, go to the prime minister and sensationalise the issue.

Acting president of the Revolutionary Journalist Union Gobinda Acharya says the owners of media houses are spreading rumours about press freedom being under attack, so that the main issue is not discussed. Meanwhile, general secretary of the Working Journalists Union has said that although the passing of the act was a positive step, workers' discrimination by their owners has still not been addressed.

The agitating workers at HBC FM say that if the provisions of the Working Journalists Act are implemented, they will resume their work. The groups have brought their 18-point demand down to nine points and have clarified that they have not padlocked the news section, just the FM administration section.

Similarly when *The Himalayan Times* and *Annapurna Post* went on strike demanding increase in salary, identification card to be given to the workers, instead of listening to their demands the media house filed case against its workers and had those who were protesting arrested. It is clear from this move by the APCA House that the owners are not keen on implementing the Act. Workers of Nepal One went on strike with various demands in June, and their demands are yet to be fulfilled. During such uncertain times the Federation of Nepali Journalists is working against the agitating groups, which has angered many working journalists.

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 13 August

कान्तिपुर

Time and again the Maoist leadership has talked about its commitment to free press. Although the leadership has criticised mainstream media, it has never spoken out against press freedom. However, the actions by Maoist affiliated unions contradict the public statements made by the leadership.

They shut down *Nepal Samacharpatra* a few months ago. After public criticism, the management and workers sat for talks and the newspaper started being published again. In July *The Himalayan Times* and *Annapurna Post* could not be published for a week. The publication and distribution of both the newspapers have stopped again.

This shutdown of two newspapers is not because the workers are demanding their rights, but because one employee is not happy that the newspaper published a news story against him. Arjun Kumar Gautam, union's APCA chapter shut down the newspapers on Saturday. Gautam showed up at the newsroom on Friday night and

threatened to stop the distribution of the papers if the story against him was published.

At HBC FM, the Maoist affiliated Republican Radio Journalists Forum has interfered and stopped their radio broadcast. The Forum forced itself in and padlocked the news and program production section. As a result, 30 workers and journalists have been directly affected. Station manager Birendra Dahal has accused the group for interfering with press freedom and has gone on hunger strike.

Private media houses have suffered due to systematic attacks by Maoist affiliated unions. There's no question that the rights of workers, employees, and working journalists have to be safe. The management in the media houses should take the responsibility to guarantee that. Such internal issues of media houses and FM stations could have been solved via talks. To shut down a radio station and publication of newspaper must be condemned.

The Maoist leadership has denied its interference in press, but all the unions in these media houses are affiliated to the Maoists, so they can't try to distance themselves from their responsibility. If the Maoists are really not against press freedom, they should direct their unions to not be involved in shutdowns.

The Maoists have announced that they will start an urban uprising soon. One wonders if interference and attack on the press is one of the strategies for the urban uprising?



1. After the Gaur incident the party failed to make a coordinated effort between struggle and compromise. This was a major mistake.  
 2. While compromising with the seven parties, the people should've been kept abreast of the situation. On the issues of federal set-up and proportional representation, the party failed to communicate its struggles with the seven parties. Especially in madhes, reactionaries and the opportunists used that weakness to their advantage.  
 3. After the induction in the interim parliament and the government, the party failed to do enough homework and preparations to ensure that the people were being helped.  
 4. Similarly, there were weaknesses in internal and external communication, madhes, and in the economic sector.

### Provocations

Main news in *Janakpur Today*, 12 August

In the capital's New Baneswor chok, some anti-social elements targeted madhesi entrepreneurs and looted their shops. According to UML Dhanusha leader Chandrahdev Rawat at around 5:30 in the evening, a group of robbers in the hundreds, looted and mercilessly beat madhesis. Rawat, who claims to be an eye-witness, said the group has been active for some time and that it has been targeting madhesi community. Pro-palace forces are trying disrupt the polls by stoking communal fires, Rawat said, adding that if madhesis are mistreated in Kathmandu, there could be reprisals in tarai. The leaders and activists of The Chure Bhabar Ekata Samaj who are in the capital, are believed to behind such incidents.



Sign: Constituent Assembly  
 Puspha Kamal Dahal on republic: "Straight ahead!"  
 Girija Prasad Koirala on party unification: "No over there!"  
 Madhab Kumar Nepal: "Over there, over there!"

संवाद नेपाल in, 12 August

### Maoist paradox

*Drishiti*, 14 August  
 The contradictions in the Maoist line:

Abandon violence	Use threats and violence
Peaceful transformation	Threaten to return to jungle
Keep the PLA in camps	Keep military wing active
Committed to CA	CA won't happen
CA decides on monarchy	Declare republic before CA
Stay in government	Quit government
Insist on proportional representation	Oppose proportional system
Mobilise army against madhes uprising	Against army bodyguards
Label India 'expansionist'	Meet Indians in Siliguri
For ceasefire and peace process	For 'urban uprising'
Decision-making with Congress	Left party unity

### QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The politicians have only paid lip-service to the problems of the indigenous people.”

National Federation of Indigenous Nationalities' Om Gurung, in an interview with *Budhabar*, 15 August

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# After the deluge

ARUNA UPRETY in MAHOTTARI

The dalit families have been living on road embankments ever since the flood waters inundated their homes in this eastern tarai district two weeks ago. They had just started going back to their homes when the floods returned on Wednesday.

The CDO was here to distribute blue plastic sheets, and tried to get them to move back so the children would not get hit by passing trucks. But the families were reluctant to go back because their houses have been washed off, or they are near collapse.

"We have got only one kilo of *chiura* and four packets of noodles to eat," says Sita Debi, a mother of four, sitting on a wooden bed with four goats underneath.

"We treat the goats like family," she adds, "they are our only source of income. We have some rice in the storeroom at home but that is all rotted by now we'll just have to turn it into fertiliser."

A three-month old baby of another destitute family nearby is being bottlefed because her mother is sick. Flies are swarming all over the nipple of the bottle which is lying on the ground. The child's 13-year-old sister is baby-sitting and puts the bottle in the baby's mouth so she'll stop crying.

## The real crisis begins after the flood waters recede

Now that the flood waters are receding, it is disease and hunger that are of immediate concern. But the villagers also need to rebuild their houses and their landlords are willing to loan them money at 36 percent interest.

The villagers didn't know about the government's announced grants scheme under which they are entitled to Rs 15,000 if the houses are completely destroyed and Rs 5,000 if partially destroyed.

The women from the Musher, Mandal, and Dom communities were skeptical. They'd heard about such schemes before. "What has the government done for us till now? They have always cheated us, at least we get immediate cash from the businessmen to rebuild, and our men can go to India to work and pay back the loan," said one woman with a firmness in her voice that was surprising for a dalit woman.

There are banners along the road announcing the forthcoming Constituent Assembly election. Pushpa Kamal Dahal stares out of a Maoist poster at a nearby teashop, and there is another one of Prime Minister Koirala addressing some big crowd. None of them have ever visited, and neither have their party workers or madhesi activists. But closer to the elections they'll probably all be here promising the villagers the sky, because they know that the dalits are a powerful vote bank.

Wading knee-deep from house to house in the village of Simadhai it is difficult to see how all the money collected for flood relief in Kathmandu will ever get here to make a difference. Relief is also not coordinated. People in Kathmandu are collecting clothes which the people here will never wear.

"The priority here is shelter, food, medicines, credit and long-term flood mitigation," says the head of an NGO here, "please don't send us what we don't need. And don't forget that the real misery begins when the waters recede, when the floods are not in the headlines anymore." ●



# The waters have not extinguished the Fleeing the f

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI  
in DHANUSHA

These are the worst floods in living memory. And just as the waters receded and people starting going back to their homes, there was another wave of flooding early this week.

Bad weather and flooded roads hamper relief, but it is the security situation that is worrying relief officials.

"Humanitarian assistance must be delivered without obstruction," says the ICRC's

Nepal head, Mary Wernitz, "it should be distributed solely on the basis of need, independently of all political, communal and other considerations."

The UN's World Food Programme (WFP) which has pledged food for 60,000 people in the worst affected VDCs for three months says Nepal Red Cross is having problems with delivery.

"If we don't get safe and unhindered access, we will be unable to provide much needed food assistance," WFP's Nepal director Richard Ragan said

Thursday.

Santosh Jha of Tulsiyahi Jabdi VDC was marooned with his wife and three children in his house for over two weeks. His house is badly damaged, crops are washed away, and the granary destroyed.

As the immediate emergency recedes, a food and health crisis is erupting. "There is food only for five more days, my roof is leaking, and my house is about to collapse," laments 30-year-old Jha. Children are falling sick due to contaminated water.

Nepal Red Cross workers, who

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are leading the relief efforts, have finally reached Jha's village. They seem to be doing their best, but in most places the relief arrived only on 8 August, nearly a month after the floods first struck the eastern tarai. "It's true, the help arrived

politicking and dysfunctional intra-agency coordination. Political parties are pressuring relief workers to list their own constituencies as 'flood affected' which entitles villagers to government compensation of up to Rs 10,000 each.

At one eight-party and inter-government agency meeting in Jaleswor, the CDO's relief efforts were at the mercy of a Department of Roads engineer who wouldn't build even one diversion.

Another engineer at the Waterborne Disaster Center told the meeting he couldn't repair the embankments without approval from Kathmandu. Armed groups in the tarai continued to threaten government staff, and civil servants use that as the excuse not to do anything.

Heavy rainfall was only one of the causes of the floods. Deforestation in the Chure silted up the river beds, making them overflow. New roads and irrigation canals that cut east-west across the plains act as dams impounding water for weeks on end.

"Riverbeds are rising every year and in many places they have risen higher than the farms on either side," says Dhanusa CDO Ram Sharan Chimoriya. ●



AMIR DAS RAJBHANDARI

**MATERNITY CLASS:** Mathura Pariyar with the four-day-old baby girl she delivered in a school classroom in Bhajani, Kailali district last week. Nearby is her sister-in-law with her own baby.

# Classroom No. 9

**M**athura Pariyar, 28, a week away from child birth, was tending her two girls in the village of Thapapur in Kailali when flood waters crept into the village. It had been raining incessantly for days and the nearby river was rising.

Even when they were knee-deep the villagers didn't want to leave their homes. They piled cots and secured sleeping babies and children so that they would not fall into the water.

By morning the water was up to Mathura's waist. It had leaked into the granary and was gnawing away at the mud walls of their house. That is when the families decided to leave for higher ground. Mathura, heavily pregnant, gathered her girls and started wading towards Bhajani village, a day's walk away.

The villagers took whatever they could carry on their heads, on bicycles or bullock carts. Those who left early could take their livestock too. Those who waited too long lost their animals.

When Mathura reached Bhajani she found more than 300 other families already there. She found a small spot inside Classroom No 9 of the Mahanyal Higher Secondary School where a dozen other families were crammed. Livestock were tethered to trees in the school playground.

A week after her arrival at the school, Mathura gave birth to a baby girl. Laxmi Shah, a Female Community Health Volunteer from Thapapur had also fled the flood and urged Mathura to go to the health post for delivery, but Mathura wanted to be with her family. The baby was Mathura's fourth offspring, her son and husband are away working in Mumbai.

When we arrived four days later, Mathura was weak with malnutrition and we tried to convince her to go to the health post, but she was worried about leaving her two girls behind. While the women stayed at the school, the men made multiple trips to their submerged village salvaging what they could.

When we left her, Mathura was weak and anemic. She wasn't producing enough milk to breastfeed her baby. Her hands and feet were swollen, and her lips looked pale. Like the other women at Classroom No. 9, she was waiting for the flood waters to recede so she could get back home. ●

*As narrated by Uddhab Khadka to Rupa Joshi on returning from a monitoring trip to Kailali district last week. Khadka is senior program assistant with UNICEF Nepal.*

# madhes fire flood

late," admits rescue and relief coordinator, Rajan Ghimire of Caritas, "in many places it was just impossible to get to."

Eighty percent of the farms in Dhanusha and Mahottari have been washed off. Some farmers want to salvage this year's monsoon season and replant rice, but there is a scarcity of seedlings. In the medium and long-term much more needs to be done for food security and flood protection.

Relief efforts have also been hampered by the eight parties'

# Revolt is not reform

Convert popular anger into good government

The political change in April 2006 was a revolt that reflected the Nepali people's mounting frustration with the lack of progress in political, social, and economic development of the country.

Yet, fifteen months after the event, one can't shake a feeling that things have slid back to the old ways. How to convert popular anger into good government?

Where will the sustained energy to establish transparency and accountability in politics and government come from? There are two: communities and leadership. In Nepal, many community-based



GUEST COLUMN  
Ken Ohashi

programs have delivered impressive development results: community forestry, women's groups, community-based rural drinking water programs, micro-

hydro projects, community management of schools, and the Poverty Alleviation Fund.

This is not to say such programs have been free from elite capture and exclusion of certain groups, but overall results have been impressive. But such programs are critical not only for development in a narrow sense, but also for a more profound social transformation. In fact, that is probably why they work well. In a typical community-based program, a user group is formed. It receives a block grant from the government or a donor agency, mobilises its own resources, makes a collective decision on creation of public goods, and executes the project.

What fascinates me is that this is precisely what a local government is designed to do. The only difference is it seems to work even better, though on a much smaller scale. DDCs and VDCs have not been able to mobilise much in the way of local taxes, many user groups have been very successful in doing so. This difference is telling.

Many Nepalis are not sure their taxes will benefit them through public services. But, the members of many user groups are confident that their common investment will benefit them because they must feel they have the power to hold leaders accountable.

In short, such a user group is a functioning micro-government, and there are thousands of them across Nepal. At higher levels of government common citizens are still unable to overcome the old system of hierarchy and patronage. That should not be surprising in a

society that is bound by centuries of feudal traditions. So, why not start the process of establishing democracy from where it actually works?

This is a central reason why the World Bank is prepared to support the government's new initiative to provide block grants directly to communities. Imagine what would happen if those small villages of 20 to 50 households are allowed to 'federate,' or join with neighboring villages. Relatively large investments will become possible, and such federated units would quickly begin to resemble a local government.

Without ignoring the formal local government structure, Nepal can build on the strength of community level development efforts. This will inculcate a culture of democracy that will make formal local governments, when the new elections are possible, more effective.

I have often been critical of 'leaders' in Nepal. But there are also excellent leaders who have vision, integrity, and commitment. Their role is critical, and they can continue to provide the energy for sustained change. Nevertheless, they fight a difficult up-hill battle. Like in business, in politics too those who have the temerity to break rules to grab power tend to define the rules of the game and degrade the standards of behaviour. Many honest leaders simply do not gain positions of much power. Thus they seem wisely to have opted for working with the enormous energy for change in communities, rather than attempting to lead Nepal with a powerful vision and central authority to implement development programs.

If what transpired in April 2006 was about implementing deep reforms and creating a good government in Nepal, then the steadfast work and the smart leadership shown by reform-minded people of influence in politics, the civil service and elsewhere are really the people's movement. It is not flashy, but it will in time bring real change.

As I leave Nepal after serving six years, I do so with a sense of hope, because there is a real Jana Andolan underway in this country.

The author recently wound up a six-year assignment in Nepal as the World Bank Country Director for Nepal. He is currently the Bank's Country Director for Ethiopia and Sudan.

# No news from Krishna Bhir is good news



PICS: BADRI PAUDYAL

## Ever wondered why this notorious landslide is no more on the front pages?

BADRI PAUDYAL on the PRITHBI HIGHWAY

Krishna Bhir. For the past decade, this infamous landslide on the Prithbi Highway has become synonymous with road closure. Every monsoon, the massive slide 83km west of Kathmandu would block the road for weeks on end, cutting the capital off from the rest of the country.

This year, despite heavier than usual monsoon rains Krishna Bhir is not in the news. The reason is that a Nepali road engineer has used biology to fight gravity.

Naresh Man Shakya is a geotechnical engineer at the Department of Roads (DoR) who worked for four years to stabilise the slopes above the highway by planting special grass, shrubs and trees, building check dams, and constructing proper drainage.

This is nothing new. Shakya and his colleagues just borrowed from Nepali farmers who have protected their terrace farms by planting special shrubs. Combined with modern engineering structures, this has been a cheap and effective way to control landslides on Krishna Bhir and along other highways.

Nepal's fragile geology and heavy rainfall makes it expensive to build and maintain roads. Usually, costly civil works are needed to protect a highway from slides. Bio-engineering offers a cheap alternative. The technique has been used on the Dhangadi-Dadeldhura and Lamosangu-Jiri highways, but it was on the Dharan-Dhankuta road that it was employed most extensively since it passes through terrain with very high rainfall.

What is remarkable about Krishna Bhir is that Shakya and



**FIGHTING GRAVITY WITH BIOLOGY:** While the vegetation holds the topsoil together, water and debris at Krishna Bhir are managed by check dams, sloping drains and culverts (above). "The great thing about plants is that they make the slope stronger as they get older," says Naresh man Shakya (left).

this notorious 200m stretch of highway that used to be one huge gash above the Trisuli River. In fact, the highway is now wider than normal at this point. Looking up the slope at what used to be a moonscape, where a whole mountain side had slid down to the river, there is now a lush green forest.

And it's not just Krishna Bhir, the technology has been applied to stabilise the 100 or so major landslides triggered by heavy monsoons in 2001 on the Prithbi and Mugling-Narayanghat highways. The Department of Roads (DoR) has now made the bio-engineering of roadside slopes a part of its standard operating procedure on new roads and maintenance of existing ones.

Shakya has found the best combination to strengthen slopes: grasses act to hold the soil together with their roots, while dense shrubs work as a catch wall. Bamboos retain the slope and broad-leaf plants like bhujetro, which can even grow in harsh conditions and reduce damage from direct rainfall.

Prakash Bhakta Upadhyaya, an engineer at Bharatpur Division Office of DoR, says slope degradation is considerably lessened along highways where bio-engineering is applied. He says: "It extends the lifespan of roads and reduces the maintenance cost." ●

his team successfully solved a problem for only Rs 38 million, a fraction of the cost being proposed by a Japanese aid group. Shakya, who turned down offers to work abroad, has now been called upon to apply his geotechnical skills on roads in Bhutan and Laos.

"If the right person is placed in a right place for a challenging job and given enough authority and support, anything can be achieved," Shakya says modestly. But that is exactly what is not happening after Shakya's success along the Prithbi Highway. He has been transferred to a desk job in Kathmandu instead of challenging jobs in new strategic highway projects.

There are many road engineers in Nepal who have the zeal and commitment and can be trusted for any work that foreign consultants are doing here for huge amounts of money. But they are underutilised, that is what makes Shakya a bit unhappy.

Today, as bus passengers whiz along the Prithbi Highway from Kathmandu to Mugling, they don't even realise they've crossed

# India's thali democracy

At 60, India's castes, creeds, colours, cultures, cuisines, convictions, costumes, and customs rally around a democratic consensus

The India that emerged from the wreckage of the British Raj is the world's largest democracy, poised after years of rapid economic growth to take its place as one of the giants of the twenty-first century. A country whose very survival seemed in doubt at its founding offers striking lessons in constructing, against all odds, a working democracy.



**WORLD IN WORDS**  
Shashi Tharoor

No other country embraces such an extraordinary profusion of ethnic groups, mutually incomprehensible languages, religions, and cultural practices, as well as variations of topography, climate, and levels of economic development.

In 1947, India's leaders faced a country with a million dead, 13 million displaced, billions of rupees worth of property damage, and the wounds of sectarian violence still bleeding.

But India made a strength out of its major weakness. Instead of suppressing its diversity in the name of national unity, India acknowledged its pluralism in its institutional arrangements: all groups, faiths, tastes, and ideologies survive and contend for their place in the sun.

This wasn't always easy. India suffered caste conflicts, clashes over the rights of different linguistic groups, religious riots, and separatist threats. Despite



never forgot that he derived his power from India's people, to whom he remained astonishingly accessible.

By his personal example, democratic values became so entrenched that when his own daughter, Indira Gandhi, suspended India's freedoms in 1975 with a 21-month State of Emergency, she felt compelled to return to the Indian people for vindication. Having imbibed the most important of her

father's values, she held a free election, which she overwhelmingly lost.

Though Indian politics is hardly immune to the appeal of sectarianism, its people have come to accept the idea of India as one land embracing many differences of caste, creed, color, culture, cuisine, conviction, costume, and custom, yet still rallying around a democratic consensus. The heart of that consensus is the simple principle that you don't need to agree all the time, except on the ground rules about how you can disagree. India has survived all the challenges that have beset it for 60 years because it has maintained a consensus on how to manage without consensus.

For example, India permits all religions to flourish while ensuring that none is privileged

many stresses and strains, India has remained a freewheeling multi-party democracy, corrupt and inefficient, perhaps, but nonetheless flourishing.

It helped that India's founding fathers, from Mahatma Gandhi on, were convinced democrats. India's first and longest-serving prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, spent his political career instilling in his people the habits of democracy: disdain for dictators, respect for parliamentary procedures, and abiding faith in the constitutional system.

For example, on the one occasion that he publicly criticised a judge, he apologised the next day and wrote an abject letter to India's Chief Justice. Though there was no serious challenger to his authority, Nehru

by the state. This includes the granting of group rights, under which Muslims are governed by their own Personal Law, distinct from the common civil code. If America is a melting-pot, then India is a *thali*. Each tastes different, and does not necessarily mix with the next, but all belong on the same plate.

Democracy in India is not an elite preoccupation, but matters most to the underprivileged masses. As a result, the explosive potential of caste division also has been channeled through the ballot box, with the lowest of the low attaining high office. Mayawati, a dalit woman, has ruled India's most populous

state, Uttar Pradesh, as chief minister three times, and now enjoys a secure majority.

More generally, the logic of the electoral marketplace means that no single communal identity can dominate others.

Democracy has sustained an India that safeguards the common space available to each identity. That idea has knit together a country that many thought would not survive, and whose 60th birthday is therefore well worth celebrating. ●

*Project Syndicate*

*Shashi Tharoor is a former Under Secretary General of the United Nations.*



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# A new biography of King Birendra by his professor at Harvard A king who could do no wrong

For Francis G Hutchins, author of *Democratizing Monarch - A Memoir of King Birendra*, his pupil at Harvard during the academic year 1967-68 could do no wrong.

The late king, then crown prince, was a good student "always affable, polite and attentive, deferential toward his parents, wore jeans like other



**BOOK**  
Chiran S Thapa

students at Harvard at the time, and retained his remarkable modesty even after he returned to Nepal and became officially...both an emperor and a god, albeit of a benign and approachable sort." Small wonder that the late king became "part of (the author's)... life."

King Birendra was a cut above lesser mortals but, whether Aristotle would have been as uncritical of Alexander had Aristotle outlived his pupil of another time and place, will remain one of history's mysteries. The Aristotle-Alexander reference is derived from Hutchins' fascination with that tutor-king relationship.

Professor Hutchins has delved deep into Nepal's history and assisted by Fr Ludwig Stiller's seminal works has used state-of-the-art analytical tools developed and used at Harvard's Department of Government to assess King Birendra's three-decade reign. He places King Birendra as a successor to Kings Tribhuban and Mahendra, and above all to Prithbi Narayan Shah, comparing Nepal's unifier to George Washington.

To Hutchins, the problems faced by Prithbi Narayan Shah,



**YES, YOUR MAJESTY:** King Birendra (right) while he was studying in Eton in 1964 with Chiran S Thapa, who would later be his secretary and adviser.

who succeeded in founding "a dynamic pre-modern empire more socially progressive than any seen before" became even more complicated and difficult during the five-decade restoration of Shah rule 1951-2001.

With "Mao's China having swallowed Tibet in 1959" and relations with India having "necessitated greater vigilance," even greater than toward China to "forestall cultural if not political absorption."

In such an adverse geopolitical environment, one would have thought that the right strategy would have been to examine alternatives to forestall hostile military action. King Birendra chose to have one kind of relationship with India, based on the shared practices of Hinduism and India as the transit country for international trade and a strategic relationship. With

China, it was the Himalayas as the boundary and the Tibetan culture and way of life common to the peoples on either side of the mountains.

In other words, he chose to go it alone, but it could well have been that with a better appreciation of the postwar role of the United States he could have looked to a partnership which could have guaranteed the preservation of Nepal's sovereignty.

The author is critical of US actions in general and of China's policies and Indian behaviour toward Nepal specifically. In sharp contrast, his analysis is one of high appreciation of the efforts of King Birendra and his ancestors in preserving Nepal as a country where no foreign flag has been allowed to fly while continuing with a tradition of constitutional monarchy as

formulated in *Dibya Upadesh* to King Birendra's re-introduction of parliamentary democracy in the early 1990s.

The book is not without lighter moments. The author's bizarre three-way exchanges with Lord Casey (one time governor of Bengal) and Lowell Thomas (the pioneering tv explorer) during King Birendra's wedding celebrations in 1970 and the description of Imelda Marcos and Lord Mountbatten ('failure as the last viceroy of India').

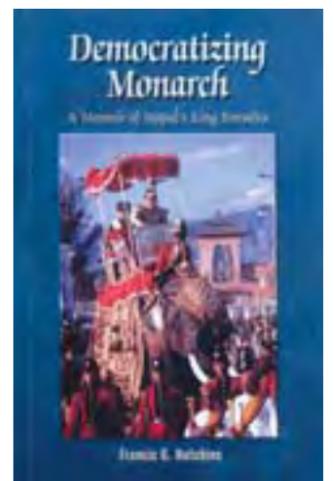
Hutchins attended both the wedding and King Birendra's coronation as guest of his pupil-King. The author's knowledge of Sanskrit seen in the translation of the epic *Hitopadesh* provide depth and relevance to the book.

His erudition is manifest in pithy but eye-opening analyses of much of contemporary significance in South Asia, such

as his view on the appropriate solution of the Kashmir problem.

Unfortunately, in peddling a rehash of conspiratorial bazaar gossip of the palace massacre of 1 June 2001, the author inserts a discordant note to the otherwise even tenor of the major part of his work. He would have risen to the book's general lofty level had he, for example, put the massacre in the perspective of the assassinations of three Gandhis (the Mahatma, Indira and Rajiv) which surely is within his area of research competence. But his object of love is "the last great Shah ruler, Birendra, a pivotal figure in the history of Nepal always a deeply constitutional ruler". ●

Chiran S Thapa was adviser and secretary to King Birendra and is currently a freelance writer and commentator on political and economic issues.



**Democratizing Monarch - A Memoir of King Birendra**  
Vajra Books 2007

pages 138  
price Rs 350

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LIESL CLARK

## Phoebe's libraries

Phoebe Coburn may be little but she has a big heart. The 14-year-old from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, in the United States is leading a library project to bring books to Nepali children.

She and her friend Liesl Clark thought up the Magic Yeti Library that is already running in Khumjung and has more than 1,000 Nepali and English titles. Clark is an Emmy-nominated film director.

After Clark promised to back the project, Phoebe launched a book drive in her hometown and sent out emails for financial assistance. Coburn raised enough money from the Alex Lowe Foundation, Room to Read, and others for nearly 700kg of books, with enough for library renovation and the salary of a fulltime librarian in Khumjung.

**ONCE UPON A TIME:** Fourteen-year-old Phoebe Coburn reading with visitors at the Magic Yeti library in Khumjung. Her project is building three more libraries in Mustang, Gorkha, and Syangja.

Coburn is no stranger to Nepal, she spent two years here as a pre-schooler and grew up with tales of the country from her father, Brot Coburn, author of *Nepali Ama* and *Everest: Mountain Without Mercy*. Brot helped his daughter get the books to Nepal and oversaw the building of the library.

The Magic Yeti in Khumjung is just the first of three other libraries that Phoebe is setting up: Tsarang in Mustang, Nubri in Gorkha, and Syangja where Ama in Brot's book was born.

"I lived here and I have strong links to Nepal," explains Phoebe when asked about why she is doing it, "we felt like we should give something back."

Phoebe is herself an avid reader, and places the Harry Potter series and books like *Uglies*, *Twilight*, *the Diary of Anne Frank* and *The Lord of the Rings*, on her list of favourites. Says Phoebe: "I want to share my passion for reading with my Nepali friends." ● Pranaya SJB Rana

[www.alexlowe.org/magic\\_yeti.shtml](http://www.alexlowe.org/magic_yeti.shtml)

# Landscape of memory



PICS: DWARIKA DAS SHRESTHA



**D**warika Das Shrestha took thousands of photographs during his lifetime but never held an exhibition of his work, except for displaying them at his studio, Das Photo Store. When he died in 2004, he left behind a rich collection of images documenting the people and places of Nepal.

**TWO MOMENTS IN TIME:** Two prints from the exhibition 'A Moment in Time' show Dharara and the New Road gate in 1959. What is striking is the excellent visibility, so the Nagarjun ridgeline looks uncharacteristically close even though it seems to have much less vegetation than it does today. The reason for the clean air could have been that there were very few cars, as seen in the photograph of New Road where the statue of Bir Shamsheer on horseback was still standing.

In these fast-changing times when urban landscapes are transformed from week to week, the photographs suddenly have great archival and artistic value. So, Dwarika Das' grandson Kashish Das Shrestha has become the curator of his grandfather's works in an exhibition at the Nepal Art Council from this weekend.

"My grandfather would be 75, and this is a tribute to his passion, which was photography," says Kashish. Dwarika Das used Hasselblad, Linhof, and Nikon. Although he enjoyed experimenting with slides and color film, for the most part he stuck to black and white.

All the photos will be auctioned throughout the exhibition period and 25 percent of the sales will go to the ASMAN Art Fund that supports the work of talented but underprivileged art students. ●

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Amalgam** an exhibition of paintings by national and international artists at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, until 20 August, 11AM-6PM. 4218048
- ❖ **A moment in time: 1954-2007** photos by Dwarika Das Shrestha, Gyanendra and Kashish Das Shrestha, at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, 11AM-5PM, 18-23 August. 2324495
- ❖ **Dristi** a solo art exhibition by Pramila Bajracharya, starting 16-27 August at Jatra Café and Bar, Thamel. 4256622

EVENTS

- ❖ **Caribbean Carnival** featuring DJs Ankit and Vishal at Galaxy, The Everest Hotel, 17 August, 9PM onwards, Rs 1,000 and Rs 1,600, with a half-shot of Royal Stag. 4780100
- ❖ **Bend it like Beckham** a film by Gurindhar Chadha, 17 July, 6.45 PM at Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Shastrartha** on rural tourism by Rudra Upadhyaya and Lila Baniya, 18 August, 4-6PM at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Nyayapremee** a play by Albert Camus, directed by Sunil Pokharel, until 8 September, at 5.30PM except Mondays and Wednesdays, at the Rimal Theatre, Gurukul. 4466956
- ❖ **Regular pottery classes** at Artworks, Pulchok, opposite Banana Cat Café, starting 12 noon. 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. 4288847



MUSIC

- ❖ **16<sup>th</sup> Yala Maya Classic** with a performance by Sangeeta Rana, 19 August, 5PM onwards at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 5553767
- ❖ **A rhythmic experience of fusion** with sarangi, flute, ghatam, frame drum, cajon, and guitar, 21 August, 8.30 PM at Moksh Bar. 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
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** with coffee, food, drinks, and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel, 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **BBQ Unlimited at Splash Bar & Grill** Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, every Friday 6.30 PM, Rs. 899 nett.
- ❖ **5<sup>th</sup> 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 pasta, pizza, pie, and pool** a special swimming package with a complimentary beer, Rs 650 nett per person, every Saturday and Sunday at Shangri-La Hotel. 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
- ❖ **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

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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL



The two low pressure systems we mentioned last week actually merged over the Indo-Gangetic plains bringing more heavy rain over the Mahabharat last week. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning shows the system now breaking in two which may give us a brief respite on Friday before the heavy showers return over the weekend. Drawn by a big low pressure trough over Bihar moisture laden clouds will be shedding rain as they move from east to west. It is when these monsoon pulses get stuck and linger that we have cloudbursts like the one over Midwestern Nepal on Sunday. It will be a while before the sun comes out.

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SAGAR SHRESTHA/NEPALNEWS.COM

**AND LET ME SAY THIS:** Activist Gagan Thapa addressing a student meeting at Tri-Chandra Campus on Thursday in which he called the Maoists the "biggest royalists" because he said their activities were anti-democratic.



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**GARBAGE IN GARBAGE OUT:** The garbage piling up outside Bir Hospital in Kathmandu's city centre as the dispute between contractors and the municipality dragged for a week. The issue has been partially resolved, but the trash is becoming a serious health hazard.



KIRAN PANDAY

**VICTORIOUS CELEBRITIES:** The team of celebrity rock stars, sportsmen, and actors giving a victory yell after defeating the media team 4-3 at a charity match to raise money for flood victims. The match on Saturday was organised by Himalmedia WAVE magazine.



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- ... Towards 22 November - Deepak Thapa
- ... A tryst with Nepali destiny - Kanak Mani Dixit
- ... Madhes rises - Prashant Jha
- ... Bidesi in Nefall - C K Lal, Bilash Rai

**ALSO IN THE AUGUST ISSUE:**

- Boots, beards, burqas and bombs - by Beena Sarwar
- Manhandling manpower in Bangladesh - by Saad Hammadi
- Mautam trouble in Mizoram - by Linda Chhakchhuak, James Lalsiamliana
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# Khrushchev's ghost

Given the bruising process by which India recently selected its new president (the new one is one step ahead of her astrophysicist predecessor because she believes in astrology) one wonders what will happen after Nepal declares itself a republic in January 2008. Also, is President Patil a *Rastrapati* or *Rastrapatni*?

**The Moustachioed One** has said he wouldn't mind being prez "for a while". Oh sure. Given his striking resemblance to Uncle Joe and his avowed revulsion to Khrushchev it is the Ass' bet that like comrades everywhere he will either have to be bodily removed or die a natural death before someone succeeds him.



Chairman Lotus Flower didn't have an easy time during last week's Balaju assemblage. When Biplob publicly chided him for his junket in Switzerland and the Bolero Culture, he was visibly disturbed and retorted: "I'd rather die than be called a bourgeois revisionist, or be labeled a **Khrushchev**...or be called a UML." And at this point he choked and wiped a tear or two with his handkerchief, thus joining the constellation of Nepali luminaries who specialise in crying in public.

Even if **Makunay** took umbrage at that remark about the UML, he doesn't seem to have brought it up with the Chairman when the two had a private tete-a-tete at Gunther's bash at the Summit. Probably not. But Awesome apparently did broach his brainwave idea to carve up the elections so his chaps are guaranteed at least 30 percent of the seats in November. The two comrades have reason to band together especially if Sushil and Deuba patch up their differences. Now, with First Daughter Sujata working on kangresi unity it may actually happen.



But it's not at all a foregone conclusion who will be president. **Comrade Cloud** has been mysteriously quiet this whole time. Given that he is such a charismatic speaker the Dahal-Bhattarai duo makes sure he doesn't get out in public much. And is that why the increasingly presidential-looking Cloudy One was at Baluwatar recently waiting patiently for an appointment with the prime minister only to be stood up?

Still, Badal asserted himself during the just-concluded plenum and even shook Comrade Chairman's hand to loud applause probably to allay suspicions of a major Bahun-Magar falling out in top management. Wonder if we'll ever have a *Rastrapati* Ram Bahadur someday?



Even if SPAM can agree on ambassadors, which seems highly unlikely, it may be difficult to get other countries to accept baddies as envoys. **Comrade Gajruel** is the Maoists' shadow foreign minister, so the fact that he was refused a Japanese visa last week should send a strong signal. The man is jinxed: he served three years behind bars in Chennai after being caught trying to fly to London on a forged passport. And this just in: **Comrade Chintan** has decided to stay back in London and retire from activism. Baddie candidate for the Court of St James?



Meanwhile, out at Naryanhiti kingji has cleared his electricity dues and is now sending feelers to see if he can take **queenji** to India for a long-overdue medical checkup-cum-pilgrimage. Such a trip before elections would also be a face-saving compromise for all sides to get top royals out of the way and put the monarchy in deep freeze until such time as it can be taken out and thawed.



There are still two journalists NOMIN hasn't yet poached from the Nepali media. They are **Min Bahadur Shahi** and **Min Bajracharya**. What's wrong? Does Un-Min have anything against people whose first names are Min?



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