Madhesis are sickened by the bombings claimed by a previously unknown tarai group

RAMESWOR BOHARA in NEPALGANJ, CHANDRA KISHOR and AJIT TIWARI in JANAKPUR

Terrorism, cowardice and inhuman are three words madhesis have been using a lot this week to describe last Sunday’s murder of two schoolchildren and a woman in Kathmandu’s bombings.

“Such an act of terror and the targeting of unarmed people is not politics at all and we condemn it very much,” a furious and frustrated Surya Dev Ojha, Banke chairman of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum said.

The bombings, claimed by an unknown group called Tarai Army, sparked a torrent of debate among madhesi political activists who wanted to make it clear that ‘real’ Nepali madhesis had no hand in the attacks.

Militant madhesi groups, including JTMM, were also critical, saying the bombs put a strain on the pro-madhesi movement. Even leaders Jwala Singh and Goit, whose cadres have been responsible for much of the violence, killings and abduction in the terai, stepped forward to condemn the attacks.

“A madhesi group admitting to such a heinous crime is an attack on the sentiments of all our madhesi people and our country,” says activist CP Singh from the Human Rights Alliance. He believes such incidents serve only to jeopardise the madhesi movement and fuel communal violence against madhesis.

“We don’t know who these people are, but they are definitely trying to disgrace our movement and people,” said another frustrated madhesi leader, Barun Yadav, vice president of Jan Uttan in Janakpur.

After the attacks, Madhesi leaders called for an emergency meeting organised by Madhesi Loktantrik Samaj, which has a strong network in the eastern terai from Morang to Parsa.

In the past, madhesi leaders have sometimes been reluctant to criticise the violence, assassinations and abductions that have become commonplace in the terai, but this time they have spoken out, expressing their disgust and promising to hunt down the bombers.●
The parties still haven’t understood that the winner can’t take all
Some past the post

Terrorism is a terrible tactic for one simple reason: it targets non-combatants. No goal or grievance can justify acts that cause deaths of innocents by design. Terrorism may create more bang for the buck in visibility, but it doesn’t take long for the propaganda of the deed to become counterproductive. The Maoists are a case in point. Having disarmed, the guerrillas now seem to be getting a crash course on how to run an election campaign. But don’t expect a repeat of the conditions for constituent assembly elections. The blasts are not going to wash. To begin with the eight-party agreement will fall short of achieving a consensus to create an atmosphere of public disaffection. It’s not unusual to hear in conflict-torn societies that editors@nepalitimes.com
www.nepalitimes.com
Kiran Maharjan
Kiran Panday is a human rights lawyer and a freelance columnist.

In a state of fear
Some powerful forces don’t want elections

maximum impact. Balaju, Sundhara and Trivuneshwar are crowded at any time of day, but during the peak afternoon hours they are teeming, nobody would have paid any attention to the lethal packets. But why would anyone want to disturb Nepal’s fragile peace process? Who gained? Potbelly blast groups that don’t want constituent assembly elections. The blasts also sparked protests of Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sharma, and the shambles at the intelligence bureau in his ministry. The performance of YCL was also typical. Though there is no evidence on the streets they were still protesting the arrest of comrades. The traffic gridlock they created delayed the transfer of blast victims to Bir Hospital. The Maoist leadership was also tainted. Their allegations of the involvement of royalty was knee jerk and laced with hypocrisy. The Maoists should now accept that there never will be an environment conducive to completely peaceful and perfect polls for elections. Attacks on innocent civilians in broad daylight have also demonstrated the confidence of criminal gangs that stalk city streets. Such audacity wouldn’t be possible had the law enforcement agencies been doing their job properly. Big crimes grow out of what has been called the broken window syndrome, preponderance of petty crimes signifying the failure of policing. It’s not unusual to hear in conflict-torn tarai towns that if the police stopped accepting their weekly tribute (hatha) from criminal gangs, the level of violence would have decreased. Perhaps, they do not feel safe in their own neighborhoods. With tarai groups ostensibly claiming responsibility of the blasts, the design appeared to turn even sinister: it held alarming risks for communal conflagration similar to the Gtk. Roshan riots on 1 September 2004. Fortunately, the people of Kathmandu exercised admirable restraint at this time as they did then. Other than bereaved families of the dead and the distraught relatives of the injured, everyone else went about their task on Monday with an apparent nonchalance. The people refused to be afraid, and refused to retaliate. The government must do whatever it can to create an atmosphere of public confidence. The Maoists need to accept the challenge of constituent assembly elections to defeat those who want to turn the elections into an affair of one-upmanship at election time. Facing fear is the only sensible way of addressing. Most don’t even have manifestations on how they propose to restructure the state. They are using the issue of federalism to get an extra power sharing. These are issues on which the parties have to work together, not resolve it, make not a subject of one-partyism at election time. They must agree on the universal tenets of democracy, on a balance between the sovereignty and integrity of the country and the aspirations of separate identity among various ethnic, linguistic, and regional, and linguistic groups. They must have a plan to include rights to education and health, and on the constitutional tools for social inclusion. This will enable them to single out and isolate the anti-national, anti-democratic, and the regressive forces. Regrettably, the parties aren’t doing anything of this kind, and don’t seem to be geared to do so. The parties seem to have forgotten that even if they win the election with an absolute majority they can’t have their role say in the making of a new constitution.

The winner can’t take all. The constituent assembly election is an opportunity for the ethnic, regional, or linguistic groups to ensure their fair share in state functioning. For some, it may be an opportunity to secede, for the Maoists it may offer the pretext to return to the jungle. For the king it may be a means to avoid constitutionalism and save the monarchy. For NC and the UML it may be one more opportunity not to repeat their mistakes in the 1990s. The choice is theirs.

Jainendra Jeevan is a bureaucrat and a freelance columnist.
The Kathmandu-Madhesi political disconnect is worrying. A day after the government-MJF deal (above), the two leading English dailies reported that the tarai tangle was resolved. But events over the past week have shown that the accord has in fact led to further polarisation.

So what triggered this sudden agreement? Upendra Yadav stood his ground as long as he was convinced polls would not take place in November. But with Indian pressure mounting for elections, Yadav felt he missed the bus.

Given the shrinking MJF base, and the fact that people were in no mood for more agitation, Yadav decided to lap up the legitimacy the government gave him as the representative of the madhes movement. He felt the deal would portray him as a responsible leader and ensure that if polls were delayed, he would not be blamed.

The Indians assured Yadav of support for the polls while making it clear he would invite Indian wrath if he did not compromise. India was motivated by its desires to engineer a breakthrough in Madhes to hold the polls, and to form the basis for a ‘democratic’ alliance in the plains to defeat the leftist parties.

Sources in Baluwatar and MJF confirm that Yadav has been assured of financial and political support to help him win a minimum number of seats. Yadav, who is terrified of the Maoists, was also promised full security.

So how has this deal been received? It does create some positive momentum and address some demands at the heart of Madhesi discontent. Many issues in the deal had already been agreed elsewhere. What is now needed is implementation.

Nevertheless, it is positive that the promise of inclusion has been reiterated. Some in Madhesi civil society give Yadav credit for attempting to break the deadlock and create a suitable environment for polls.

But the agreement has also bred resentment. It does not reflect slogans that had become emotive issues on the ground—a fully PR electoral system, recognition of madhes as one unit, an immediate increase in madhesi presence in political positions and bureaucracy.

For madhesis, these have come to symbolise their aspiration for a rightful share in the power structure. The radicalisation engineered by the MJF and others has now led people to suspect Yadav has sold out.

He has a lot of explaining to do on why he conceded several core issues. And it is in this respect—communicating his strategy and decisions, and engaging with others—where he has been an abject failure. More than the substance, the problem is with the process and manner in which the deal was done.

Yadav has been in Kathmandu for more than two months. He signed the deal unilaterally without consulting his close advisers, and has done nothing since then to explain his reasons for the compromise.

With the government silent, district units of NC inert and angry with the party leadership for giving MJF more weight than it deserved, and Yadav still not out in madhes, there are few active proponents of the deal. Even those in civil society who are supportive do not want to be seen as apologists for a weak MJF and a leader addicted to Kathmandu power politics.

It is these factors that have given the MJF dissidents the confidence to walk away. At the same time, the Maoists sense a chance to regain lost ground in the terai. Their strategy is to dismiss the MJF deal, press for PR and round-table talks, and engage with select Madhesi groups for further agitation.

The vacuum also presents an opportunity for those who do not want a solution at all and wish to create instability.

The deal does not help address any of the fault-lines that exist in the terai, between state and madhesis, among madhesi groups, between Maoists and madhesis, or between pahadis and madhesis.

The agreement’s relevance lies not in finding a long-lasting solution, but in the fact that it has added actors and reconfigured alliances in madhes, besides generating illusions in the capital.
Justice in the balance
Is Nepal ready for a truth and reconciliation commission?

ANALYSIS by NAVIN SINGH KHADKA

Perhaps this will be the trickiest part of Nepal’s peace process. Leaders of the coalition government’s major partners have warned that if the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is allowed to go the way international bodies indicate regret or if both parties agree to an amnesty too easily, even for the worst politically-motivated human rights violations, if the perpetrator will just continue to abuse because they know they will not be punished.

Could it be any different in Nepal? Each violent incident in Nepal today reminds him of his involvement in the conflict and the people involved in it,” he says. “It’s one thing to face up to the truth, but quite another to forgive and forget, says Campbell, who was prominent at a potentially explosive stand-off between Protestants and Catholics at Drumcree in 1995, where he worked with the United Mission to Nepal as conflict transformation advisor, is surprised at the speed of the peace process. Those who are making comments about the TRC don’t know the reality on the ground in Nepal and they have no right to speak on behalf of the Nepali people.”

But if it is not, human rights groups fear the peace will not last. How can Nepal get off the ground? Their common concern is that it grants an amnesty too easily, even for the worst politically-motivated human rights violations, if the perpetrator will just indicate regret or if both parties agree to a reconciliation.

Ram Chandra Poudel, who heads the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction that released the TRC-draft, says it is indeed a fudgy Jobs. “If we consider taking action against anyone for human rights violations, no one directly involved in the conflict will be spared,” Poudel says. “In that case what would happen to the peace process?”

The CPN-M has taken the same line. Says Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai: “We need to be mindful of whether the commission’s work would hamper the peace process. Those who are making comments about the TRC don’t know the reality on the ground in Nepal and they have no right to speak on behalf of the Nepali people.”

But others believe these are all short-term concerns. Sandha Rimal, who heads the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Nepal, says the issue is to break the cycle of impunity. “It may take time because there are many obstacles to overcome,” she says. “Moreover, those responsible for violations and abuses continue to abuse because they know they will not be punished.”

TIME FOR TRUTH: Families like this one in Nawalparasi, whose members were victims of Maoist attacks and state atrocities, are still awaiting justice.

Her boss, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, said that justice and peace are not contradictory forces. “Justice should not be held hostage to the interest of those who threaten to resume conflict in order to avoid facing their own responsibilities,” she said during her visit to Nepal in January.

Human rights activist Krishna Pahadi says those in the government have simply forgotten the pledge. “If only there is the political will, the TRC can be formed to bring the perpetrators to justice and to provide reparations to the victims.”

Former home minister during the royal regime, Kamal Thapa, says he would be ready to face the TRC. “The TRC is not just about the 10-year conflict and the people involved in it,” he says. “It’s about putting things on the record for generations to come.” For different reasons, the international agencies are also in favour of not hurrying up.

“It is essential not to rush the process but rather to ensure those behind the constituencies, including victims’ groups and human rights NGOs, at all levels, are thoroughly consulted and participate in shaping the design and focus of a future truth-telling process,” Arbour said during her last visit.

Question of balance

Delaying justice means impunity goes unpunished and there will be danger to long-term peace. For almost two decades of conflict, five former senior security officials, including the then security minister, Adriaan Vlok, were given suspended ten-year jail sentences for their role in ordering summary executions of innocent civilians.

All pleaded guilty 17 years after the incident, yet South Africans are divided over whether the TRC process helped the country move forward.

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Learning from Northern Ireland

It’s one thing to face up to the truth, but quite another to accept reconciliation after a time of great suffering. That, at least, has been the experience in Northern Ireland after decades of conflict, says Irish conflict mediator Joe Campbell, now working in Nepal.

“A TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) can help with some answers, but in Ireland we want to wait until time is right,” Campbell says. “Reconciliation is our biggest challenge and by far the hardest thing.”

He points out that in Northern Ireland it took more than a decade of political negotiation to reach a peace settlement, and the proposed truth commission is yet to get off the ground. “There was so much violence that the pain is so real even now,” he says.

He expects Nepalis to feel the same, given the violence, torture and death that so many have been exposed to in the past decade, whether at the hands of the Maoists or of government forces.
**NIC in Damak**

NIC Bank has opened a new branch at Damak, Jhapa. This is NIC’s eleventh branch and second in Jhapa after Biratnagar. NIC also plans to open three additional branches in the coming fiscal year.

**Signature living**

Lifestyle housing’s new colony at Tenu is open for booking. The new Signature Apartments offers subsidised rates for the first few customers. Surrounded by lush greenery, the apartments are built on earthquake-proof technology with a security detail, ample parking, two elevators, and 24-hour electricity and water.

**eX2**

China Southern Airlines has selected the Panasonic eX2 system for its in-flight digital entertainment. With over 50 unique in-flight applications and services, a variety of handsets, and high performance and high resolution displays, eX2 is the state of the art in-flight entertainment system. China Southern is the ninth largest airline in the world and the largest in China. It is the first airline in China to select the new Panasonic eX2 for the Boeing 787 Dreamliner.

**Star clothing**

Stars by Serendipity is a new women’s and kids’ clothing store in the Woodland Complex, Darbar Marg. With branded Indian wear, the store offers a mix of western and ethnic wear, bags and accessories as well as tops and dresses.

**S&K**

The Samuel and Kevin brand has been launched in Nepal and is available at the Nike showroom at Darbar Marg. The S&K brand was established in 1997 and has over 610 stores over China, Thailand, Malaysia, and the Middle East. Avenue Marketing is the authorized dealer for S&K in Nepal.

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**Jai Nepal**

Being compulsively optimistic about Nepal

I first visited in the monsoon of 1973. This monsoon I spent three months in Kathmandu, a city I have loved since. Kathmandu Valley is no longer a serene, emerald valley. Even Nepal has been infected by terrorism and militarism, urbanisation, and environmental decay. A pall of despair hovered over the valley as I prepared to leave as news came in of serial bombs.

**Nepali Pan**

Maura Moynihan

Despite all this, there is optimism and hope that Nepal will survive the present crisis of governance and forge a new identity for the 21st century. Why? Because Nepal is unique. The slums slice of earth that comprises the nation state of Nepal contains one of the world’s oldest and most sophisticated civilisations in an ecosystem from Chomrongma to the Ganges plains, equal to the Amazon in water power and diversity of species.

Nepal is also unique as a political entity. The Himalayan belt, once a chain of independent kingdoms reaching from Bhutan to Ladakh was crushed by the 20th century. Nepal is the only sovereign state left between India and China. Development economists rank Nepal as one of the world’s poorest nations on earth, and it is painful to see millions of citizens trapped in a crippling poverty cycle. But culturally Nepal is one of the world’s richest nations. The people are as gifted as they are diverse, world renowned scholars, authors, and artisans. Their religious and cultural tolerance is astounding. Farmers recite poetry, philosophy, and history.

It is both a superstition and a plausible fact that Nepal’s stability is sustained by the artisans, shramans, and pujaris who perform the rituals that are the foundation of daily life. Nepal’s civilisation has survived centuries of regime change, famine, famine, and flood. Given the chance and the tools, the people of Nepal will apply their talents to their development needs, and they will prosper. Nepalis are also supremely gracious hosts, and it’s no wonder that the most successful economic force in modern Nepal is tourism. It has lifted millions of Nepalis out of poverty, creating jobs, sponsorships, and exchange programs. In 2002 the US State department put Nepal on its Terror Watch List and issued a travel advisory for Americans. This reactionary policy has closed hundreds of businesses and left thousands of porters and guides are without work, isolated, and vulnerable. It is also inaccurate: no foreigners have ever been harmed in the 10 years of the Maoist insurgency. But the US travel advisory forced the withdrawal of the Peace Corps and dozens of successful American organisations had weakened the central government and emboldened the Maoist rebels.

Nonetheless, the peace process is on track and business is up by 60 percent. Young Nepali entrepreneurs have reinvented Kathmandu nightlife, which for decades was choked by miserably tacky casinos. Thamel now teems with French and Italian bistros with imported Chianti, wi-fi coffee bars, and at last, proper discos, open till dawn. Compared to an American city, street crime is nearly non-existent. The most fearsome danger for the western traveler is, as ever, a crippling bout of dysentery.

I believe that as more Nepali citizens exercise their political rights and engage in democratic processes, Nepal will reinvent itself, as it has throughout its history. Nepal should not be caustically dismissed as a failed state, as happens so casually on the Kathmandu cocktail circuit. I believe that as more Nepali citizens exercise their political rights and engage in democratic processes, Nepal will reinvent itself, as it has throughout its history. Nepal should not be caustically dismissed as a failed state, as happens so casually on the Kathmandu cocktail circuit.

Nepal’s lands have sustained a great civilization for over 2,500 years. Lord Buddha was a Sakya prince when most of humanity was mired in barbarism. And so I say, Jai Nepal...
In an interview with the BBC, Maoist second-in-command Baburam Bhattarai promised persecution of corrupt people like Gebrinda Raj Joshi and Khum Bahadur Khadka. Maoist supreme Prachanda also said in no uncertain terms that those named guilty by the Rayamajhi commission would not escape. The Maoists have published a ‘black list’ of people against whom they will take serious action. This revelation comes close on the heels of their decision to launch nationwide protests and a persecution campaign of those deemed to be corrupt or wicked. While they have not made this list public, we have managed to get hold of the list. According to a highly placed Maoist source, there are four levels to those who will be punished. First, are those found guilty by the Rayamajhi commission, second are corrupt politicians, third are corrupt public service officers and police, fourth are those that have always opposed the Maoists. The list contains 205 names of those named by the Commission including those who were ministers during the royal regime and those who were ministers that have always opposed the Maoists. Those named by the Commission are: Dan Bahadur Khadka, Gobinda Raj Joshi, Chiranjibi Wagle, Jayaprakash Gupta, and those corrupt from Lauda and China Southwest Airlines. Many police officials have been accused of collecting money illegally from casinos, restaurants, dance bars and discos. Also on the list are Nepal Salt Trading head Paraswar Mahaseh, the head responsible for the sinking of NAC Gautham Das Shrestha, various bank and financial institutions and those suspected to be smugglers.

Following the Maoist decision to take action against such individuals, the YCL and the All Nepal Women Association–Revolutionary, have decided to step up their own campaigns. A senior Maoist official told us that they hold the identities of all those who would scheme against the constituent assembly elections and action against them is already under way. UML central committee member Shankar Pokhrel attributes the Maoist decision for persecution to increasing low morale inside the Maoist camp, thus the reason for propaganda. “During the civil war, the Maoists persecuted and punished whoever they pleased, and now, even in times of peace they wish to do the same, but that is not possible. To do so would weaken their own position,” says Pokhrel. “Before, they made people follow them with the threat of guns, now they wish to do the same with the threat of persecution.”

Expectations

Editorial in Samaya, 8 April

After nearly 15 months the appointment of 18 ambassadors was finally carried out on the principle of bangladesh on the three main parties. The message to the Nepali people is: it is not to use their new appointments for personal or partisan gain. The new constitutions have stripped all cultural and political rights from the king. Prime Minister KP Oli is all set to replace him as the new king, starting with the pura at the Krishna Mani where he went as head of state. The new constitution had clearly stated that the nation is now secular and this means that the state has no obligation towards any religion, temple or our old Hindu traditions. But now there is a question as to why Oli had to pose as the king by taking his place during photo Jat. If the state’s presence was necessary, then the premier should have sent his minister for culture or local administrator. Why was it important for him to go there as a protector of the Hindu religion? This only proves that the state is taking the issue of secularism lightly. It is disappointing to see Oli’s decision to see. Now there is a question as to why Oli had to pose as the king by taking his place during photo Jat.

As the interim constitution has been approved by the constituent assembly elections and action against such individuals, the YCL and the All Nepal Women Association–Revolutionary, have decided to step up their own campaigns. These new diplomats will be going to their new posts in a policy vacuum. The least we can expect of them is not to use their new positions for personal or partisan gain. Other countries encourage career diplomats to specialise in the foreign country where they have strategic or economic interests. Let’s hope their Excellencies will do a minimum amount of damage in their new jobs. Let’s hope they rise above personal interests, that is the minimum hope we have for these new appointees.

New king

Bhaduriz, 5 September

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feudal culture and establish an egalitarian society.

Already Koirala has started taking Gyanendra’s place in the way he is behaving with a similar authoritarian fashion. There is nothing wrong with a head of state visiting a temple, mosque, chaitya or monastery, but it would be anti-democratic for someone to simulate all the king’s doings.

No surrender

Editorial in Kantipur, 3 September

The bombing on Sunday (2 September) in public places was targeted at innocent people. This was done deliberately with the aim of killing a lot of people given that the bombs were planted during busy hour in a public place usually crowded with young students, women and poor Nepalis. In this way they have intentionally targeted innocent people; the group’s only intention must be to spread terror. This immoral act deserves not only absolute condemnation but also harsh penalties for to the culprits.

Although criminal in action, this has the purely political motive to disrupt the constituent assembly elections. The incident took place just a day after home minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula announced security arrangement for the elections. The environment for elections had been gradually improving. The group’s terrorist act only shows that they want to stop the elections through targeting the civilians.

Such a group, which carries out crimes against humanity for political gain, does not deserve to be listened to. There is no alternative but to take stern action against this group immediately. In a country passing through a transitional phase, there is a need for elections for a peaceful political process. Political parties are trying to patch up differences and are interested to participate in the elections.

Such an incident should not be allowed to jeopardise peace efforts. The aim of this incident has been to polarise the parties, and if they let that happen, the group that created this terror will have won. The parties must forge an alliance and work together to retaliate and boost the government’s morale to arrange better security. This is also an opportunity for the political parties to reach an understanding. But if they let this incident demoralise the parties then the environment for elections will be disrupted for sure.

In New York
dai and I walked inside a giant statue

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The smart way since 1933
Cloudscapes of the mind

Every monsoon, people swoon over Kathmandu Valley’s landscape: how the rains wash away the grime and pollution. The 360 degrees of hills are emerald green or blue-black, the terraced paddy fields on the outskirts are a quiltwork of every shade of green you can imagine.

But this is also the season when we should turn our eyes upwards to admire the post-monsoon cloudscape. As any photographer will tell you, it is the light that makes a picture come alive. A monsoon afternoon following a day of rain, when the sun comes slanting from the gap in the west between the Thankot pass and low clouds bathe the valley in exquisite halogen yellow.

And when this glow spotlights low-hanging clouds from below, bathing the city from its reflection, the effect is sublime. Take time, allow yourself the luxury of gazing up at the sky.

Despite this week’s heavy rains, the sun will come shining through and by the middle of September, these cloud displays will be more frequent. Towering cumulus that soar into the stratosphere, billowing vertically so fast that they stretch and bend alto-stratus clouds.

They don’t have silver linings, but rainbow-hued edges as ice particles refract the sun. The clouds glow in pastels of gold, pink, blue, and grey. They cast shadows on each other, bringing out many shades of these hues. Then, as the sun finally dips behind the hills, the spotlight climbs higher up the cloud ramparts leaving the foundations in inky darkness. A yellow moon rises from behind a range of mountainous clouds to the east. The cloudtops glow in the moonlight, and the inside of the clouds are incandescent with silent lightning. By nightfall, there is a sudden sharp coolness as the moisture turns into mist, and the mist in turn into a fine gauze of rain again.

It has been a good, healthy monsoon. For three months in a year, the Himalaya from Kashmir to Assam act as a gigantic atmospheric dam to store water.
monsoon

vapour. The mountains are such an effective barrier that the Tibetan plateau to the north is left high and dry in the rain shadow.

The rain will soon ebb as the monsoon starts to lose its momentum and the sun comes out again. The sky is navy blue and dotted with kites, and in the terraces the golden rice is ripening in the sun.

ANUP PRAKASH

PICS: KUNDA DIXIT
“Nepal should be a Hindu rstra again”

Sitting in a palatial house that also serves as his office next to the Gorak Nath mandir, Yogi Adityanath is signing a sheaf of papers. As supplicants crawled under the table to touch his feet, the Bharatiya Janata Party MP and the future head of the temple talked to Prashant Jha about politics in Nepal.

Nepali Times: What is your relationship with Nepal and the monarchy?
Yogi Adityanath: When Prithbi Narayan Shah began the process of unifying Nepal, Gorak Nath Maharaj blessed him. The bond was strengthened because Nepal has been a Hindu rstra with a Hindu monarchy.

What is your view of current Nepali politics?
Like any nationalist Indian, I am worried. There is anarchy in Nepal. The Maoists haven’t given up arms and want to grab power through goonda raj. They want to extend their influence from Pashupati to Tirupati. For the first time, there is a possibility that Nepal might disintegrate. The unifying force in Nepal, like the soul that unites the body, is the Hindu king and Hindu culture. The imposition of secularism and sidelining the king will lead to devastating consequences.

The Indian diplomats are fools. The Maoists haven’t given up arms and want to grab power through goonda raj. They want to extend their influence from Pashupati to Tirupati. For the first time, there is a possibility that Nepal might disintegrate. The unifying force in Nepal, like the soul that unites the body, is the Hindu king and Hindu culture. The imposition of secularism and sidelining the king will lead to devastating consequences.

But don’t you think that the king had his chance and, in the present context, is more of a divisive than unifying force?
No, the king was never aggressive enough. I have not met him since 2004 but my assessment is that he gave up too easily. The king should not be silent but take matters into his hands. India’s unification, out of 550 plus princely states, was possible because there was one umbrella party and the states were too small to rebel. In Nepal today, you have too many parties with limited base and growing regionalism. This never happened during monarchy—there was no discrimination, the king does not loot and divide people like politicians are doing. What is going to keep your country as one? Who is the king is not important. What is essential is that he should be a Hindu.

What is your relationship with Madhesi groups?
Madhesi leaders had a meeting in Gorakhpur in December 2006. Some of the major leaders came to see me and ask for support. I have given my moral support to those who want to fight for equality and rights within Nepal, but am not actively involved in their agitation yet. I am opposed to secession. My aim is that the leadership nor the resources.

What do you think of Indian policy towards Nepal in the last few years?
Complete failure. If Nepal slides towards anarchy, there will be a direct impact on India, especially in the border areas. Nehru understood Nepal and that monarchy was essential for peace and stability—so he re-established the king after the Rana rule. That stability has now gone. Nepal will either disintegrate or go the Tibet way with China stepping in. India has just gone on accepting the Maoist agenda and this leniency has also led to increased Naxalite activity domestically. The Maoists are Chinese agents. The Indian diplomats are fools.

Is it true you have property interests in Nepal?
I don’t have personal property but yes the Gorak Nath has temples in Mighasthali in Kathmandu, Dang, and some other places.

The Gorakhpur connection

PRASHANT JHA in GORAKHPUR

A railway junction, a line of hotels opposite the station, blaring horns amid a swarm of cycle rickshaws, hoardings of politicians at every street corner, a ramshackle movie hall showing an old Govinda number, and new malls signify the Gorakhpur more significant than its size and appearance suggests. Gorakhpur’s politics revolve around the temple and its leadership, who claim a centuries-old link to Nepal’s monarchy and are active supporters of Nepal as a Hindu rstra. From the days of Mahant Digvijaynath in the 1940s, who was accused of conspiring in the Mahatma Gandhi assassination but was later acquitted, the temple has backed the Hindu rstra.

But the presence of the Gorak Nath temple and the town’s proximity to Nepal make Gorakhpur more significant than its size and appearance suggests. Gorakhpur’s politics revolve around the temple and its leadership, who claim a centuries-old link to Nepal’s monarchy and are active supporters of Nepal as a Hindu rstra. From the days of Mahant Digvijaynath in the 1940s, who was accused of conspiring in the Mahatma Gandhi assassination but was later acquitted, the temple has backed the Hindu rstra.

The election is the national priority. If the electoral system is changed now, it would not be possible to hold timely polls. As responsible political actors, we compromised to enable polls to take place. We

“They’re”

MUF leader Upendra Yadav defends the deal in a conversation with Prashant Jha.

Prashant Jha: How do you see this agreement?
Upendra Yadav: This is a historic agreement. It takes the country from a unitary to a federal state with autonomy, and ensures proportional representation of Madhes in all state organs. This addresses the issue of identity. This is the best deal, the maximum achievement possible under the present situation.

Why have you given up on core demands like a fully PR electoral system?
The election is the national priority. If the electoral system is changed now, it would not be possible to hold timely polls. As responsible political actors, we compromised to enable polls to take place. We
The Indian town where Nepal is a domestic political agenda

Immature

Do you think this deal will solve the Madhes problem given that there are so many other groups? The entire country is in a fluid situation. There will be clarity only after the elections, both in bordering areas and have deep links with Nepal. We tried to convince them but now the central committee has decided to expel them for anti-party activities. This group is being driven from elsewhere, by those who do not want elections. We are a small party. The situation is constantly evolving and a few people have to manage everything—all the problems that come up. I met lots of people here, several issues came up. Now we have finally arrived at an accord.

What is your reaction to the rebellion within the party? This is not a split. Those opposing the deal are against the constituent assembly and will have little impact. They are immature and do not have a practical vision. We tried to convince them but now the central committee has decided to expel them for anti-party activities. This group is being driven from elsewhere, by those who do not want elections.

Who are you pointing towards – the king or the Maoists? It could be either. They have no direction and are confused. Some statements indicate they are willing to work with the Maoists. This is completely against MJF policy.

Have you given up on the demand and expressed a note of dissent?

What is your future strategy? We are keeping alive the non-violent thread of the Madhes struggle. Madhes has got too radicalised and the problem will not be solved by dealing with one person, or deploying strategies of divide and rule. If we had not split, then the sympathy of Madhes would have been fully for armed action. We will now talk to the armed groups and try to bring them into the peaceful movement. Only a round table conference can lead to a solution.

Will the elections happen on 22 November? Madhes want elections more than anyone else. But there is no political environment right now. The government needs to give in on key demands; we need to engage with Goit and Jwala Singh. If elections are held without these steps, then it will be meaningless and will sow seeds for a longer conflict.

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Do you think this deal will solve the madhes problem given that there are so many other groups? The entire country is in a fluid situation. There will be clarity only after the elections, both nationally and in Madhes. Yes, to solve the madhes problem, the government will need to bring other groups on board. This process of indirect contact has begun, including with armed groups.

Some critics allege that the problem is that you spend too much time in Kathmandu and have not engaged with people on the ground. We are a small party. The situation is constantly evolving and a few people have to manage everything—all the problems that come up. I met lots of people here, several issues came up. Now we have finally arrived at an accord.
There is a new kind of ‘tout’ accosting development and humanitarian agency officials at international meetings. They are smart, well-heeled and are not looking for a supply contract. In the age of spin, they are offering agencies ‘product placement’ in the globalised news media.

“I can get your agency on BBC World,” is a common claim. This is not an over-enthusiastic journalist looking for a scoop. These intermediaries are peddling access to highly visible news and current affairs TV channels. Some are freelancers or stringers, while others are film production company executives. Their media access is hard earned: they all have track records of producing TV news features or documentaries to international broadcast standards.

Worryingly, the development community does not find anything ethically or morally wrong with this practice. One possible reason is that competition among development and humanitarian organisations for public recognition has intensified in the past decade. Their communication officers are under tremendous pressure to raise the profile of their organisations and in some cases, of egotistic bosses.

So when a cash-for-media coverage opportunity comes along, it is too good to be missed. The obvious question is hardly raised: How come access to a trusted news outlet is being marketed? Instead, many development professionals simply ask: How much?

The answer depends on how many precious seconds of airtime, on which broadcast outlet and for what kind of story. But we are not talking about small change: some of these deals involve up to $100,000. And those funds are drawn from the already tight communication budgets of development and humanitarian agencies.

At Asia Media Summit 2006 in Kuala Lumpur, the regional communication chief of a leading UN agency told me how she’d worked with such an ‘access peddler’ to get a post-tsunami story on BBC World. The few minutes of coverage almost drained her budget, but the agency management was highly pleased with their few minutes of fame.

It was not a BBC staffer but a freelancer who was involved. As development organisations compete more intensely for external funding, they are increasingly adopting desperate strategies to gain higher media visibility for their names, logos and bosses.

Communication officers in some leading development and humanitarian organisations have been reduced to publicists. When certain UN agency chiefs tour disaster or conflict zones, their spin doctors precede or follow them. Some top honchos now travel with their own embedded journalists, all at agency expense.

In this publicity frenzy, these agencies’ communication products are less and less on the issues they stand for or reforms they passionately advocate. Instead, the printed material, online offerings and video films have become logo delivery mechanisms.

It is not just the development sector’s vanity that fuels this process. Many 24/7 news channels are struggling to fill their air time inexpensively. Some media outlets are harder to penetrate than others and prevent access peddling by its staff or intermediaries. Sadly, not every broadcaster is as careful.
A love affair turns into a psychotic journey
through fear when the imagination takes over

Bugged by paranoia

The horror genre is in something of a rut. The East Asian nations churn out a macabre parade of gore-fests, only to be aped in the States a few years later. Each Hollywood incarnation is a poor facsimile of the last, whether it’s copying the East, its own classic from the heyday of horror, or the seemingly inevitable sequel. It’s enough to make you want to gouge your eyes. However, whereas in Exorcist Friedkin quite effectively strums the nerves of its time, here with Bug he turns violence quite popular, turning it into a crawling dread, even stomach-turning violence quite popular with the genre’s adherents. But Bug would be far more successful if it trod more effectively the line between the psychoses of its characters and the credibility of their crazed imaginings. Instead, from fairly early on, the viewer is left with the notion that the characters are clearly psychotic. What’s worse, not only does Friedkin do a terrible job of convincing us of the cockamamie scenario presented by Peter, he does a terrible job of making credible the pair’s descent from the maladjusted, odd couple to outright nutcases.

It’s a shame because, for a couple of chills, we would generally be happy to go along.

ANIL KUMAR GHOSH KAKSHAPATI

CRITICAL CINEMA
A. Angelo D’Silva

The film’s sparse setting and tight cast belies the source of the material, an off-Broadway play that attained considerable accolades. Indeed, many scenes are conceivedly more enthralling on stage. Bug is no shoddy project when it comes to performances. Here, scantily clad nymphets screaming won’t suffice. Instead, we are treated to acting of an impressive caliber. Likewise, Friedkin manages the cinematography adeptly, using the cramped set to his advantage. With a concession to the horror genre, we are provided material, an off-Broadway play, and its director, Bug promises to be a harmless loner. His paranoia proves to be a military experiment to control the nerves of its time, here with Bug.

Our protagonist Agnes (Judd)—a hard-drinking, dope-smoking Joan Jett-type waitress—spins into spectacular depths of delusion when she follows her companion Peter (Shannon), a misfit drifter, down the rabbit-hole of psychoses. Peter, whom Agnes takes on as her lover seemingly out of pity, appears to be a harmless loner. His pannao is first quirky—charming even. But as he reveals his belief that he is infected by bugs as a subject of a military experiment to control the general populace, the character grows increasingly disturbing. And his paranoia proves extremely infectious. Now, however, five years into America’s misadventure in Iraq, our suspicion of the US government can no longer take the form of Big Brother. It’s unimaginable that its military could carry out any degree of planning to manage its military could carry out any degree of planning to manage. But with William Friedkin as its director, Bug promises to be a horror flick of a higher breed.

Not that the marketers would want you to know that. Bug is packaged as if it’s a typical horror flick, its posters indistinguishable from its gory cousins, pronouncing its director, Bug promises to be a horror flick of a higher breed.

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EXHIBITIONS
- Out at Nepal - an exhibition of exclusive handcrafts produced by artisans families of Kathmandu, at Siddharta Art Gallery, Babar Mahal. Revisited, 9-17 September, 11AM-6PM. 4218048
- Exhibition of contemporary paintings, art and crafts of the Kathmandu Gallery, Thamel Chok, until 8 September. 4248094
- Confronting transitional period a solo painting exhibition by Sabin Prakash Saiju at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, 10AM-6PM, every Saturday, 4220735
- Heritage Panoramas acrylic paintings by Pradeep Bajracharya, until 12 September, at Park Gallery, Pulchok. 5522367

EVENTS
- Apocalypse a film by Mel Gibson, 4.56 PM at the Lizimpat Gallery Cafe, on 7 September.
- Reading program with Madan K Umbro from his book Fragile Mountains, at the British Council, 7 September at 6PM.
- Nyasapreme a play by Albert Camus, directed by Sunil Pokharel, until 8 September, at 5.30 PM except Mondays and Wednesdays, at the Rimal Theatre, Gunukul. 4468896
- Fiddler on the Roof a play by Mapi International School, at the Nepal Academy Hall on 12 September at 2PM and 13 September at 5.30 PM. 4301519
- Regular pottery classes at the Kathmandu Academy of Fine arts, at Artworks, Pulchok, opposite New Kathmandu Gallery, Thamel Chok, until 8 September. 4248094
- Mahal Revisited, 9-17 September, 11AM-6PM. 4218048
- Krishnarpan a solo painting exhibition by Sabin Prakash Saiju at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, until 8 September. 4248094
- Ciney Gurung a special screening with sekuwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at La'Soon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- Italian barbeque lunch at Al fresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Saturdays, 12.30-3.30PM, Rs 300 plus taxes. 4273999
- Jazz in Patan with coffee, food, drinks, and dessert at the New Kathmandu Cafe, Jawalakhel, 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- BBQ Unlimited at Splash Bar & Grill Radisson Hotel, Lizimpat, every Friday 6.30 PM, Rs. 899nett.
- 5th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival 16 wines at Rs 150 a glass + Rs 600 a bottle, at Kilroy’s of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4240159
- 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
- Rajwaabi curry, kebab and biryani festival, every Friday, 7PM onwards at Shangri-La Hotel, Patan. 5522708
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- Lajawabi curry, kebab and biryani festival, every Friday, 7PM onwards at Cafe Horizon, Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- 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, 9841290019
- Krishnaparan Nepali specially 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, Lizimpat. 5.30 PM onwards. 4417706
- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La Sooon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- Calculta’s rolls, biryani, kebabs Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court, 9741000713
- Rediscover fine Italian cuisine at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, all new exciting menu. 4700812
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

Inclusion in the listing and information to editors@nepaltimes.com

Moondance Restaurant & Bar
Great Food, Coffee & Music:
Laknata, Pokhara (01) 530585

This Saturday
New Orleans Café
Live Western Classical
Violin, Flute & Cello

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MIN BAJRACHARYA

CAUGHT BY THE BLAST: Sandhya Khadka, a student of Viswa Niketan High School killed in Sunday’s bomb blast in Tripureswor, being cremated at Pashupati on Wednesday.

BEFORE THE DELUGE: A YCL rally heads for Singha Darbar on Sunday to submit a memorandum to Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula demanding immediate release of their cadre. Moments later, the bombs exploded.

OVERFLOW: Bagmati River in full spate at Kupondole on Wednesday after heavy rain soaked the Kathmandu valley for more than 12 hours.

CITY OF LIGHTS: Patan’s Darbar Square is bathed in light to celebrate Krishna Asthami on Tuesday.
We've all wondered when Girija would pull out his republican trump card, and it looks like the time has arrived. He had held on to it not to open two armed fronts, but he thinks it is now safe to go for it. Partly it is pressure from within the party ranks from young cadre who think the monarchy is a no-go for elections. Girija banked on making the monarchy the issue on which he could differentiate his party from all the others, but now it looks like even he has decided that it is electoral suicide.

So what does kingji think about all this? Was always hard to tell what ex-Lord Vishnu was plotting, but he has apparently been mulling a quiet getaway to India (provided he can get confirmed seats on the Delhi flight) on the semi-pretext of a health checkup. And the visit could always be extended later so it doesn’t look like he’s been hounded out. A good plan, and one in which no one loses face. The only trouble is sonnyboy taking it badly enough to have a coronary condition. Egged on by buddies, the young man is reluctant to give up this chance to be a sri paunch. Daddy and mummy are so terrified of what he may do, the Ass learns they are unwilling to confront him.

If we Nepalis want to behave just like we would in Nepal when we go abroad, why bother going abroad at all? Here we haven’t started getting excited about elections, but there election fever has already taken hold. In fact, the diaspora is being polarised along party lines with smighting, backbiting, and ideological confusion even more intense than among their parent parties back home.

For example, in Europe the Jana Samparka Karyala serves as the NC front which has the Sujata Faction, the Sushil Faction, and even the Ramchandra Faction. The UML is represented by the Development Forum which recently hosted Comrade Makunay and even that has the Oli faction and Jhulla faction. And the Maoists have their Jana Mukt Morcha, or words to that effect, which acts like the foreign arm of the YCL. And then, there are the Tamu Samaj, Tamang Samaj, Madhes Samaj, a Sherpa Samaj and just about every samaj except a Nepali Samaj. Their agenda: to evict from the samaj anyone found to be taking part in tig dohori, or observing dasain. Some truth in the observations from Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto and Sikhs in Vancouver that diaspora chauvinism is always more radical than among the same groups at home.

Now that Europe is being carved up into spheres of influence by Maoist ambassadors in France and Denmark, a kangresi in London, and the UML in Brussels turf battles among overseas party wings are going to get vicious. For sure, the last thing on the minds of these political plenipotentiaries is going to be their country’s national interest. As the Ass hinted last week, the tearing hurry about sending an ambassador to London was to seal the deal on the sale of the embassy property at Kensington Square Garden which has been Nepal’s property since the 1930s. Apparently the building hasn’t been repaired since it was acquired and the borough council has decided to condemn it. We’ll have to pay a 4 million pound fine if repairs aren’t started right away. So in its infinite wisdom, Shital Nibas has decided to sell off this prime property. The bids are in the 30 million pound range and the Mittals who own blocks opposite are apparently eyeing 12A as well. The UML controlled ministry has been handling the deal so far, and that is why the NC decided to send its trusted man to London so it would have a stake in whatever is being negotiated. The Ass can give it in writing right here and now that the money is sure to go into various pockets, and none of it will be spent on buying a new embassy in London.

Di Ass Pora