No accident

Accidents don’t just happen, they are a result of corruption and war

The microbus carrying a newly-wed couple and their relatives left Dhankuta on Saturday afternoon for the overnight journey to Kathmandu. It was important to cross the troubled eastern tarai at night, despite the danger of highway robberies, because of road blockades and disruptions in the daytime. There was a banda call for Sunday, and the wedding group was in a hurry to cross the plains by midnight.

By the time the bus reached Chandranighapur in Rautahat, it was 10PM and raining heavily. A little ahead, hundreds of vehicles were queued up by the side of the highway in the dark because the bridge over the Dhansar river had been washed away three days previously.

Trucks were fording the river even though the water came up to tyre height. Driver Anil Tamang saw a passenger bus go across and decided to give it a try. But the microbus got stuck mid-river. As the bus headlamps illuminated the swollen river, the passengers got out to push. Just then a flashflood engulfed the vehicle. The newlyweds, Raju and Kimila Shrestha, and two other passengers held on to the roof, but five others were washed away with logs and other debris that the river brought down. Their bodies were found up to 10km downstream the next day.

This would have been just another tragedy on Nepal’s accident prone highways had it not been for the circumstances that lead to the deaths. This wasn’t an accident: it was the result of corruption, war and government negligence. Also, the microbus probably wouldn’t have been travelling at night if the tarai unrest hadn’t made daytime journeys so unpredictable.

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A 50m section of the bridge on the Dhansar on the East-West Highway, Nepal’s main road artery, was knocked out by a flood three years ago. Make-shift repairs allowed it to keep functioning while wheeling dealng on the contract delayed construction of a new bridge.

The work had just begun at the height of the Maoist war in 2004 when guerrillas demanded Rs 1.5 million from the contractor. He said he couldn’t pay, and work stopped after three of the pillars were completed. After the ceasefire last year construction resumed but the contractor faced extortion again, this time by the Bula faction of the JTMM. Work was halted once more.

On the night of 5 September there was a massive storm upstream in the Chure hills, and the flood washed away the same section of the Dhansar bridge once more. For four days, there was no effort to repair the damage or warn buses on the highway of the broken bridge.

Whenever the water receded, passengers would make the perilous crossing on foot to catch a bus on the other side. The microbus arrived at the broken bridge and seeing a bus making it safely across, took the fateful decision to cross.

This isn’t the first time a bus has been washed away by flooded rivers, and it won’t be the last. Sometimes it is a casualty of war as in last weekend’s tragedy in Rautahat, at others it is because disagreement over kickbacks has delayed repairs. Interestingly, the Road Department rushed equipment and repaired the bridge the day after the tragedy, just to prove how quickly it could act if it wanted to.

This tragedy was proof that corruption kills. Negligence can be fatal. And the sorrow of war lingers long after the fighting stops.

Kunda Dixit in Rautahat
The coming potato riots

The fuel crisis masks a coming food crisis

cars will be cheaper after 2009 when import duties will have to be reduced to suit WTO guidelines. The petrol lines are an admissible conversation piece. The high society lady may complain that her chauffeur disappeared for the day on the pretext of procuring petrol. An upwardly mobile journalist can admit without embarrassment that he pushed his motorcycle through the queue for four hours only to be told at the end of his ordeal that the petrol was finished. However, nobody likes to raise the point that we never see politicians, bankers, media moghuls or other holy-laity waiting in the fuel queues. A passenger on the Lagankalin bus the other day pointed out another very visible incongruity: other than two-wheelers, most of the vehicles queuing up for petrol are taxis. This adds one more mystery to the as yet unexposed fuel supply arrangements of vehicles belonging to international agencies.

Some taxi-drivers claim that they make more money by driving in line to the petrol pump than they would by driving around town carrying passengers; the premium on a five-litre jerrycan of petrol is often more than Rs 200. In a way, the scarcity of petrol has undeniably brought intangibles in disguise for cabbies who don't own their vehicles. But for the rest, owning and driving ageing two-wheelers with bank-loans has become a frustrating occupation.

But the fuel crisis masks the food crisis. The price of dal has shot up to Rs 80 per kg. Onions have hit the Rs 40 per kg mark. Even potatoes are beginning to get away. Those who worry about unavailability of petrol and those disturbed by the runaway price of potatoes belong to the tuity waiting in the fuel queues. A journalist can admit without prejudice that he pushed his motorcycle through the queue for four hours only to be told at the end of his ordeal that the petrol was finished. However, nobody likes to raise the point that we never see politicians, bankers, media moghuls or other holy-laity waiting in the fuel queues. A passenger on the Lagankalin bus the other day pointed out another very visible incongruity: other than two-wheelers, most of the vehicles queuing up for petrol are taxis. This adds one more mystery to the as yet unexposed fuel supply arrangements of vehicles belonging to international agencies.

The mono identity of daura jurmarmi was the invisible wall that kept Nepalis blissfully unaware of each other's cultural histories. Problems about being assigned a certain caste identity and bluntly being told not to vent out our perennial frustrations because there are not as static as the monastic caste politics would want them to be. Assigned identities and values constantly change as individuals adapt to new circumstances. Any discussion on cultural identity must be further divided and discussed on culture at large that our societies have undergone over the past centuries. Because Nepal's cultural identities in political debate is to ignore the elephant in the room. Equally, to disregard the dynamic character of our cultural identities has already undergone to imprison a twenty-first century human being into a medieval iron age.

India offers an excellent example in clarifying how culture is not static but a dynamic concept. It is true that the idea of Indian independence started out with resistance to the English culture, which initially entailed digging deeper roots of Hinduism. But as early as in 1828, the Kolkata elites had already launched the Brahmo movement, or the worship of one universal god, aiming to do away with sectarian divisions and caste hierarchies within Hinduism while keeping the ancient spirituality intact. While the elite Brahmo movement attracted wide attention, one that remains little acknowledged to date is the cultural movement of the non-castes, which is best captured in the Bollywood expression. It is all too easy to make fun of Bollywood, but it has uniquely touched the lives of many ordinary Indians. Unlike film industries elsewhere, Bollywood has not been funded by the state. Raj Kapoor’s ‘moo jeta hoi japali’ was a smash to the ‘be Indian, buy Indian’ variety of nationalism perpetrated by the government in the 1950s. As the country reeled under the sendimentalising of Hindu-Muslim violence, songs like ‘na tu hindu bane ga na musulman bane ga’ went on to become the theme songs of the 1950s.

In a newspaper ending intellectuals across the world, India is often closely associated with excruciating communal riots and the popular expression ‘be Hindu, be Muslim, be Sikhs’. However, in the minds of ordinary people, most of whom have never seen a Bollywood movie-goers, India is a place where an incredibly large spectrum of diverse cultures coexist, bound by a deep affection and making a respectful space for each other’s unique cultural and religious identity. Films after films has obsessively emphasized the quintessential oneness of people of diverse faiths.

Almost everybody at the top of Nepal's professional pyramid has reached there by making unprofessional compromises with past regimes. There is no way to invent equals for personal expectations that our peers and parliamentarians have already done so? Perhaps the best we could get was what we have got. Let's not make an unseemly fuss out of it.

Reportedly, leaving members of the legislative parliament have been most quiet in voting for other's nomination as top cabinets. The problem about being assigned a certain caste identity and bluntly being told not to vent out our perennial frustrations because there are not as static as the monastic caste politics would want them to be. Assigned identities and values constantly change as individuals adapt to new circumstances. Any discussion on cultural identity must be further divided and discussed on culture at large that our societies have undergone over the past centuries. Because Nepal's cultural identities in political debate is to ignore the elephant in the room. Equally, to disregard the dynamic character of our cultural identities has already undergone to imprison a twenty-first century human being into a medieval iron age.

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LETTERS

JOGIMARA
It is such a sad and terrible thing to hear about the bereaved people of Jogimara ‘I weep at night’ (#364). I felt so moved after going through the column and hearing that the government, instead of compensating the bereaved families, have tagged them as terrorists. Don’t they feel sorry for the families of the dead? Are those who were killed not Nepali citizens? Can’t the dead rest in peace? Thanks to Mohan Mainali and Nepali Times for a great job in covering the plight of these innocents.
Ravi Lama, email

YOGI IS RIGHT
Yogi Adityanath is right (‘Nepal should be a Hindu rastra again’, #365). Only then will there be peace there. Hindus are naturally secular, and as long as there was King Birendra there was peace in the Himalayan kingdom. Secularism is unsuitable, because we know the kind of sham secularism being practised in India for vested interests.
G V, email

MADHES
The articles and interviews by Prashant Jha (‘The Gorakhpur Connection’, #365) are brilliant, with well woven analysis and insights. Great work.
Ruhit Tewari, email

JAI NEPAL
I am in total agreement with Maura Moynihan (‘Jai Nepal’, #365). Compulsive optimism like this is in short supply. We need more reminders like this to infuse ourselves with well-deserved pride that our history, heritage, and uniqueness rightfully affords us. In contrast to nations around the world, patience and tolerance is still plentiful in our Nepalese society. And these characters will ultimately help us through the process of re-inventing Nepal. Let the bounds of disenfranchisement only cripple those Kathmandu cocktail circuiters who dampen our optimism.
JAI NEPAL

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

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Peace without dividend

Donors talk the talk but don’t yet walk the walk

BINOD BHATTAIRAI

nearly deflated an autocratic monarch and convinced the Maoists to rest their weapons. Nepal had hoped for an aid windfall. This has not happened. Election day is 69 days away and aid is unlikely to increase before then – or immediately after.

Nepal needs extra cash but it is unlikely to come for two reasons. The donors remain divided on how to ‘do’ aid, and the government – as always – is factious and divisive.

True, donors have forked out about Rs1.3 billion ($20 million) for the Nepal Peace Trust Fund (where the government put Rs1 billion) and its twin, the UN Peace Trust Fund. And they have spent several billion rupees on weapon stores, vehicles, tents, ballot boxes and computers, as well as funding peace seminars and organising ‘get to meet a real Maoist visits to European capitals. But such aid means very little where it matters most – in the lives of ordinary Nepalis.

“We have not seen a real peace dividend yet,” said Jagadish Chandra Pokharel, vice-chairman of the National Planning Commission (NPC). “Some donors have added a few million dollars to their existing commitments but that cannot be called a peace dividend.” The NPC’s three-year interim plan for carrying out reconstruction and development has a tab of Rs162.5 billion ($2.5 billion), but not all donors are satisfied with the outcome.

“Donors need to understand the urgency of stepping up the support to the peace process and the peace dividend,” said Bella Bird, head of DFID Nepal, the British government’s development agency. DFID increased aid to $79 million (Rs 5.2 billion) in 2006/07 from $60.7 million (Rs 3.9 billion), and expects a rise to $95.2 million (Rs 6.2 billion) in 2007/08. Some top DFID officials are visiting Kathmandu next week, which could be a good opportunity for the government to better acquaint them with national priorities.

Donors have issued a torrent of statements supporting political developments in Nepal since April 2006, but government data indicate that bilateral aid actually declined in the first eight months of fiscal year 2006/07. Multilateral aid tripled in the same period, but this largely reflected old spending commitments rather than fresh grants and loans.

The situation is unlikely to change soon, especially as individual Nepali ministries continue to function as mini-governments and a unified Nepal voice on development priorities is still missing.

Most conspicuous among those reluctant to pay out is the European Union, whose member countries are divided between those who believe peace itself is the priority and those who see development as a way to encourage the peace.

An eerily similar donor divide paralleled king Gyanendra when he took direct control in February 2005. Then the European bilateral donors wanted democracy first while the multilaterals and the United States advocated keeping development aid flowing.

Recent top-level personnel changes at major funding agencies like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank are also a problem.

“It is like having a new minister coming to a ministry, when everything from the past tends to be pushed aside and new ideas are put on the table,” said a donor source. “It’s a situation where those coming in want to try out something new that has their signature.”

In early 2006 the World Bank tried to steer the development process by asking the government and civil society to agree on what they wanted for Nepal. No one talks about this anymore.

Donors now have the Peace and Development Framework (PDF), which they proposed to the government some months ago, hoping it could guide the implementation of the three-year interim plan. The framework represents recognition – finally – among more than two dozen of Nepal’s ‘development partners’ that peace and development are not mutually exclusive and that basic services must reach the villagers in order to enhance peace.

But they are still waiting for the government to set out the detailed costs of the peace process and the implementation arrangements. And some, nervous of giving too much to a government which includes a former rebel force, have preferred to fall back on a traditional project-funding approach. This week, German development agency GTZ put $7 million into its own peace-building project rather than into the government fund.

“The weak government is a part of the problem,” said Sudhindra Sharma, an aid analyst who feels the government should get firm with donors. “The next step should be telling donors what Nepal wants, and not taking what they want to give.”

That, however, is unlikely to happen before a new constitution is approved. For Nepal, where the process to elect the constituent assembly still looks shaky, that’s looking far into the future. ●
Sanima in Damak
Sanima Bikas Bank has opened its first branch in Damak. The bank offers evening banking services, lockers, and foreign currency accounts. Sanima Bank is the first bank to be promoted by non-residential Nepalis.

Baniyja ATM
Nepal Baniyja Bank has started ATM services from its branch at Teku. The bank offers Any Branch Banking, locker services, remittances and now, ATM services. The ATM services will soon be available at the bank's Lalitpur, New Road, Jorpati, New Baneshwor, Maharajgunj, and Pokhara branches in the near future.

Blood for NIC
NIC Bank’s blood donation campaign concluded successfully with 180 participants. The campaign was held at NIC’s corporate office in Kamaladi with support from the Nepal Red Cross Society. NIC is the only bank to set aside a fixed proportion of profit for charity. As part of its corporate social responsibility, it provides scholarships to students, broadcasts anti-smoking messages on radio and sponsors sports.

Baleno
The Baleno apparel store has opened in Darbar Marg. Launched in 1996 in Hong Kong, the Baleno chain has 3700 stores in China, Taiwan, Singapore and the Middle East. The brand opened in Darbar Marg. Launched

Choco
Sujal Foods, manufacturers of Chocofun, have launched a new ad campaign to promote their flagship brand. The ‘Oh! My Chocolate’ campaign is expected to boost sales for the Rs 5 chocolate.

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Ceremonial monarchy

Interview with NC leader Sujata Koilal in Ghatana Ra Bichar, 12-18 September

Nepali Congress leader Sujata Koilal shocked everyone by her pro views of a ceremonial monarchy. At a time when senior leaders are keeping quiet due to fear of wrath of India and the Maoists, Sujata bravely came out and said: “NC should not accept the Maoist proposal of moving towards a republic, the party should consider the ‘baby king’ option for now.” Since her public statement, Maoists and other pro-republic supporters have started criticising her, while some have commended her for being so frank. Some have even compared her to a young GP Koilal who was known for his bluntness.

You are not amongst king Gyanendra’s favourites, so why are you supporting him?

I am not supporting the king, I have always been against autocratic monarchy. However, I believe that the end of a monarch’s tyranny should not be the opportunity for the rise of some other despot.

So you think making Nepal into a republic will open the doors for other despots?

Yes, the Maoists. They are neither for republican nor democracy. They want a new people’s republic. The Maoists do not have good intentions, which is why people like us fear that when a republic is established, it will give birth to another autocracy.

If a ceremonial monarchy is the way to go, why not keep king Gyanendra?

He betrayed the people by taking democracy away from them and he should be punished for his mistakes. But king Gyanendra and monarchy are two different things. Just because the king is bad does not mean the entire system of monarchy is bad.

Your father and Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is advocating republicanism while you are supporting the monarchy?

First of all, I haven’t heard Girijababu say he will only support the proposal of turning Nepal into a republic and is against the idea of a ceremonial monarch. He has made big contributions to Nepal’s democratic process, and his greatest concern now is to save democracy. I am a staunch democrat. I believe that if saving democracy means going for a republic, I will absolutely support that. Having said that, I believe that if a republic is established under the leadership of NC it will work, but if the NC leaders take the lead of establishing the republic. Supporting republic now means supporting Maoist autocracy.

So is it fair to say that your party, NC is assisting the Maoists?

No. I will raise this issue in the general elections when the whole party has decided to go for a republic.

Does this mean that NC is merely trying to trick Prachanda with false promises of supporting a republic?

Not if the Maoists take the lead of establishing the republic. Supporting republic now means supporting Maoist autocracy.

Forgotten hero

Dristi, 11 September

There was a time when rulers used to get nervous on BP Koirala’s memorial day and Nepali Congress workers were filled with enthusiasm and emotion. But not anymore. There is really no one in Nepal today who would do more than just garland his photo frame and speak a few words of praise. Such is the way we commemorate someone as great as BP.

His real ethos has already been separated from NC’s mainstream politics. His brother Girija is the reason why his party is in bad shape and clueless. The party members have neither dignity nor ideals. The party is trying hard to survive. This is the state of the party.

The main reason is the frequent fickleness of NC’s ideals and principles. At a time when the country is going through a political transition, it would be destructive for the party to stand at the crossroads. It is unfortunate for the nation to see the deteriorating state of the party. It is not really an ordinary matter for prime minister Koilal’s daughter Sujata to sound pro-king at a time when the whole party has decided to go for a republic.

We can easily gauge the mood of NC from the forthright statement made by its founding president, Krishna Prasad Bhattarai. Despite the mixed reactions to his statement (against a republic) from some NC members, the central committee leaders kept mum and it seems like they quietly agreed with it. Does this mean that NC is merely trying to trick Prachanda with false promises of supporting a republic? Only time can tell. This must be the reason why...
Bhattarai, Monika, and the corrupt

Kishor KC in Gorkhapatra, 12 September

It is said that Indian brotels have a separate wall for the patrons to spit on. These walls are never cleaned. Even the looashes vulture, that rips the meat from dead carcasses and the hyena that sucks the marrow from bones, would be revolted by this wall. It would be hard to imagine anything more repulsive than this, but there is something worse: Nepal’s corrupt.

While we are focussed on building a new Nepal, the pollution that is the corrupt have escaped our gaze. Instead of taking them to the courts and persecuting them, we’re working arm in arm with them.

The letter by Jawalakhel’s Monika Thapa, published in Gorkhapatra’s 7 September issue, thanking Baburam Bhattarai goes to show how some people are dedicated to kicking out the corrupt. According to Monika, Maoist Bhattarai’s recent television interview where he vowed to persecute all those corrupt is on the right track. When Bhattarai berates the corrupt, why would anyone feel sorry for them? He didn’t say anything against the good and honest. It is one thing to imagine a new Nepal but to make that a reality and put smiles on the faces of all Nepalis is quite another. To achieve this, all politicians need to separate themselves from their greed.

Even countries like Japan and England have their share of corruption but in no other country does the court set free a corrupt person that the CIAA has just apprehended. Those who were deemed to be corrupt by the people, have been set free by the courts as we have so seen. This is a grave insult to the people and we will not tolerate such actions. Himal Cement, Harisiddhi Brick and Tiles, the transport corporation and dozens of other such corporations have been sold for peanuts and has left hundreds of workers jobless. There must be an accounting for such actions.

Tomorrow, the government formed after the elections to the constituent assembly will also have to face the same problems of corruption. That is why we must bring them to the field now, and set them right. We must uproot these corrupt people and with proof of their crimes, grill them like pigs on a stick.

It seems like the government has yet to get serious, and if it fails to take firm action it is possible the elections will be successfully disrupted. In addition, there is every possibility that a civil war may start—especially now that tension in the tani has been intensifying. Abductions, assassinations, extortion, armed robbery, violence, strikes and other forms of anarchy have been incessant.

For the record, the Madhesi Janadhi Forum splinter group wants by protesting against the agreement signed between the forum and the government. People must now endorse another phase of armed conflict at the hands of disgruntled groups. If this goes on, who in his or her right mind would go to the booth to vote?

The violence and terror would not be only in the tani but would spread also to the hills and the capital. It is high time that the eight-party government started taking full responsibility for establishing strong security. The bombing incident in the capital has not only questioned the accountability of the government, but also got people doubting whether these parties can be trusted at all. The failure to maintain peace and protection in the capital will only lead to civil war in the near future.
What a gas

But the petrol shortage is

We’ve been here before. Endless lines of stationary cars sit nose to tail for mile after mile along the roadside. Massed ranks of motorcycles, in places five deep, spill out onto the highway, their hot and weary owners looking for a shady tree to rest beneath.

Once more the Kathmandu valley is in the grip of a crippling fuel crisis. The Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) had already slashed Nepal’s fuel supply because of unpaid bills, but a tanker drivers’ strike that started nearly two weeks ago made things far worse.

The drivers’ association wanted the reinstatement of several drivers sacked seven months ago, and blocked tankers from bringing fuel in from depots at Raxaul, Sunauli and Amlekhganj. In the end they agreed to a deal, and the strike came to an end. But the bigger problem of unpaid bills remains.

Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) loses Rs 310 million each month on the heavily subsidised fuel, and also needs to pay Rs 250 million a month to settle past debts to Indian refineries, which now amount to Rs 4.2 billion.

As the petrol queues grow ever longer, the government continues to fidget. The Ministry of Finance turned down a Rs 2 billion loan request from NOC, leaving the corporation in a fix. It paid IOC Rs 768 million and will now receive 2,200-2,500kl of petrol daily throughout September. But ultimately, there is no alternative to raising fuel prices. The subsidy also makes them cheaper in Nepal than India, which is why much of the kerosene is actually smuggled back into India.

Analysts have suggested increasing the price of petrol, aviation fuel and LPG while keeping diesel prices down, but there is no political will in the eight-party government to push these plans through.

The queues may shorten in the next few days, and NOC has announced boldly that its Indian counterpart will soon increase supplies further. But don’t hold your breath.
A weary taxi driver pushes his vehicle forward in the line, unwilling to waste any more precious fuel in the slow motion picture. A deck of cards comes in handy as drivers at the Pulchok petrol pump find a cool spot to pass the time while their car engines idly turn. Opportunists find novel ways to capitalise on the fuel crisis by selling old petrol in new whisky bottles at a premium; and a man finds time to groom his moustache, maybe after a night spent in the company of his vehicle.
Reform rumble
Lack of debate over security sector reform may spell trouble ahead

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

T he verification process to determine who qualifies as a Maoist fighter, delayed for nearly a month by a spat between the Maoists and UNMIN, is well under way once more. But the hiccup in July, caused mainly by what the Maoists see as a lack of progress in reforming the security sector and by pressure from their combatants languishing in the cantonments, has not been fully resolved. The Maoists want to integrate their fighters into the Nepal Army (NA) as soon as possible, but the severe-party coalition is not yet ready to discuss this. Analyst Shyam Shrestha warns that while the politicians are quite happy to see the Maoist combatants worn down over time by the miserable living conditions in their cantonments, they seem unaware that the growing pressure on the fighters could derail the peace process.

Maoist leadership from the restive fighters could detail the peace process.

Faced with reports of growing desertions from the camps, the Maoist leaders want to see tangible progress on security sector reforms before the elections.

There has been some progress. Parliamentary oversight of the NA is now in place and Britain is helping to restructure the Ministry of Defence. Reform of the National Security Council is under discussion, with Washington and New Delhi proposing a new national security adviser post.

But the Maoists want a complete overhaul of the security sector to “institutionalize the gains of the April uprising”. Most importantly, they want the full integration of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) into the new national army, with their fighters keeping their current military ranks. The Maoist deputy commander, Narendra Kishore Prasad (Passang), says integration into the police forces is unacceptable.

Maoist leader Pushupa Kamal Dahal has also proposed deploying the Young Communist League to provide security during the elections. Some Congress and UML leaders scoff at the idea. Others flitily rule out the possibility of any integration of any of the Maoist soldiers. But there has been little discussion about such proposals among the new governing parties.

Analysts say a sensitive issue like security sector reform cannot be based purely on political compromise and there must be a national debate. The army says it will offer suggestions on reform if asked, but insists it is the government’s responsibility.

The Maoists have already confirmed the new strategy of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). They want a wider approach, to include the judiciary within the reform.

“We understand that everything cannot be done before the election, but at least what we can do is begin the process and let the new government after the CA elections finish it,” Pram said. Besides overhauling the other security agencies, the Maoists plan to downsize the army to the pre-war level of about 40,000 personnel, including their integrated fighters. The army wants to call it ‘right-sizing’ and is unhappy about talk of downsizing and wholesale integration.

“We will accept any decision that comes as a political package, but the idea of politically-indoctrinated fighters in a professional and neutral national army is a non-starter,” said one army official.

He questioned what would happen if other armed groups like the Nepal Defence Army, the Tani Tigers or those led by Ivida Singh and Gol and also demanded the right to be integrated into the army. “A national army cannot operate like a militia,” said an army watcher.

But the Maoists see it differently and they believe their experience in South Africa make them the experts. “To say that PLA won the battle, so the vanished government forces should be subject to their standards, not vice-versa. ‘How can you compare NA and PLA?’ said Maoist leader CP Gajurel. “The April Uprising was the first time PLA’s 10-year-old people’s war.”

“Don’t parachute”

Nepali Times: These days there are lots of peace-building organisations, both local and international. Are you doing anything different from other international missions in Nepal? What are you expecting from your mission?

John Marks: We would like to support the transition and we would like Nepal to have an outcome that is positive.

Susan Collier Marks: The transition is a very special time and when it happens it needs a lot of attention. In my own experience during our transition in South Africa, we had ups and downs. What you are doing is that you are moving from the way a society was structured and the way people behaved at one time to a new dispensation. In South Africa, we didn’t know what it was going to be like. We used to talk about a new South Africa. What happens in a transition is that the old age is dying but a new one is born. What we are trying to do here is to particularly empower youth to make a difference in this fluid state between the old and new and to inspire people to know that it is possible to reach a new Nepal in the way we were reaching a new South Africa.

You had long experience of South Africa during its transition period. What advice can you draw from that for Nepal?

SCM: The transition was for four years and it was important we had that time. The transition is needed for a lot of healing. When you come out of the conflict, there is a lot of pain, fear and anger. There needs to be healing so people can begin to see themselves as Nepalis rather than from different sides of the conflict. For us citizens of South Africa, it was important for us to become ourselves as South Africans. We had been divided for so long, and I don’t want to say that Nepal is the same as South Africa, but there are principles that can be useful. A big job for people working in peace-building is to engender hope, and a large part of our work is around that.

Is the peace process too slow in Nepal?

JM: Every country needs to find its own pace. People wish it was quicker but we have never seen a peace process which happens that way. It goes up and down. It is like a roller-coaster. In terms of speed, it is frustrating. You wish it was more efficient, you wish people did things better but they never do.

Does Nepal really need international experts to tell us what to do?

JM: Let’s just say we can’t tell anyone what to do. Expertise in one country is not usually the same in another country. It doesn’t usually transfer. Maybe 25 or 50 percent of the knowledge is applicable. There are no answers to all questions. There could be some answers from South Africa applicable here. But the people who need to do what is considered crucial are Nepalis and it is not going to be us foreigners. But there could be answers, ideas and resources that are useful.

SCM: In a conflict, there is often a need for a mediating force. For two sides who have been in deep conflict, often there isn’t an ability in the initial phase to be able to really work with each other constructively. There is an understanding of the power of a mediating force as a mechanism for dealing with conflict. What we are trying to do is shift our mechanism through mediation so that people will be able to engage in a conflict and deal with it in a more reconciliatory manner.

What lessons have you learnt from working in countries going through transition?

JM: Don’t parachute. We believe strongly in not trying to bring in our methodology from outside. We are going to do a soap opera, the writers are going to be Nepalising as they understand what is going on here. We maybe able to bring in a methodology from outside but we let the local partner do the production.

SCM: What we have learnt is that peace is a process and not an event, and there is need for a sense of longevity of the process as it is something that doesn’t happen overnight. Conflict is normal and natural. It is always going to be there. It needs to be handled constructively so it becomes part of the dynamics of society.
Madhesi extremists must not be given free rein

Calling all moderates

Madhesi moderates need to wake up and confront some difficult choices. Mainstream politicians, civil society activists, academics, journalists and other opinion-makers are right when they blame the state’s policies for fuelling alienation in madhes, which in turn has weakened their bargaining position. They appear to be emulating the Kathmandu intellectuals who welcomed the Maoist rebellion and lazily ascribed it solely to the ‘root causes theory’.

Of course, the anger in madhes is due to the crisis of identity and exclusion. But there are several other aspects that have contributed to the drift. The madhesi mainstream must tackle some of these issues if they want to steer future politics.

For one, they need to take a stand on violence and help revive the primacy of public order. While publicly maintaining a commitment to peaceful means, quite a few madhesis are ambivalent in private. It is not uncommon to hear voices which justify violence on the grounds that it helps keep the madhesi cause alive and the ground and legitimises criminal groups using a political cover.

Madhesi analyst Tula Naryan Shah has noted how most instances of violence have a long personal history of property feuds, caste rivalry, extortion money not paid and or revenge for earlier killings, especially in the case of attacks on Maoists. Madhesi are suffering the most, and all in the name of their liberation.

What madhesi moderates need to do is connect politics in the plains to the larger national picture. As Chandrakishore, among the sharpest tarai journalists, points out: “If April 2006 had not happened, January 2007 would not have taken place.” Responsible madhesi recognise the elections as a national priority. Like the Jana Andolan, they will open up the platform for madhesi to win more concessions even then, madhesis would be within their rights to take to the streets again and head for confrontation.

But this message is not being communicated effectively on the ground, leaving room for the extremists to make the most of the vacuum and sense of alienation. This can have long-term implications.

ARMED: JTMM-J militants brandish their guns while training in Saptari.

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Fun, mischief and pranks.

CHANDRANIGAPUR – College students thronged the opening of the ‘A People War’ photo exhibition here on Thursday at the start of a tour that will take it to 10 venues across eastern and central Nepal. The exhibition at Chandranigapur on the East-West Highway was opened by Bhakta Bahadur Regmi, whose wife was killed during a Maoist firebomb attack on a passenger bus four years ago. His daughter and son, Rabina and Rabin, were badly burned in the attack. (See: ‘Why the children?’ #121).


“I am still struck with terror when I remember the suffering my wife and children went through,” Regmi said at the opening, “I hope Nepalis will never have to endure such pain again.”

Media reports of Rabin and Rabina’s plight in 2002 brought enormous response from readers within and outside Nepal. The Sushma Koirala Memorial Hospital in Sankhu offered free plastic surgery and the two children were enrolled for free by Bright Horizon School at Matatirtha.

The photo exhibition tour is supported by local branches of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) and will be travelling through Malangwa, Itahari, Dhankuta, Birtamod, Damak, Brangnagar, Gairhat, Birganj and Palung till 11 October.

“The eastern tarai is a part of Nepal where the war never ended, and there is a danger the violence will take on an ethno-separatist character,” said exhibition curator Kunda Dixit at the opening on Thursday. “There is a lesson from these pictures, that violence doesn’t resolve problems, it makes them worse.”

Recalling the suffering, the photo exhibition brought back tragic memories for many.

PHOTO: SHIVA PURI
Boys behaving badly

Hilarity ensues when plans for a booze-soaked party go awry in Superbad

Superbad is another comedy about immature males in pursuit of sex with loads of substance abuse and questionable acts of stupidity in between. But what makes the man-child template so intolerable in the spate of gross-out comedies of recent times—so intolerable in the spate of gross-man-child template—is the palpable sense of children, or at least not quite adults? The loss of loneliness and the loss of nostalgia and the loss of adults? The palpable sense of children, or at least not quite being that the characters are actually children, or at least not quite.

Critical Cinema
A. Angelo D'Silva

Superbad is another comedy about immature males in pursuit of sex with loads of substance abuse and questionable acts of stupidity in between. But what makes the man-child template so intolerable in the spate of gross-out comedies of recent times—so intolerable in the spate of gross-man-child template—is the palpable sense of children, or at least not quite adults? The loss of loneliness and the loss of nostalgia and the loss of adults? The palpable sense of children, or at least not quite being that the characters are actually children, or at least not quite.

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Director: Greg Mottola.

Cast: Jonah Hill, Michael Cera, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, Bill Hader, Seth Rogen

2007. R. 114 min.

Fogel. These adult characters are more in line with the hearty humour we’ve become used to. In that regard, Superbad hedges its bets. Perhaps a little unsure of its drier, smarter humour, it provides us with plenty of dependable lowbrow high jinks.

The women are barely peripheral to the film, whose main interest is the impending death of the male friendship. Overtures and subtext of the latent eroticism of buddy flicks have been blasted and satirized by recent movies like Hot Fuzz and I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry. Yet in Superbad we are given such a tender and achingly picturesque depiction of fraternal love, you might have a tear accompanying the chuckle at the last scene as it closes with the ambiguous tune of Curtis Mayfield’s ‘I Love You’.

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2007. R. 114 min.

Father of Nepal’s gobar gas industry

John Finlay (3 October 1938 – 3 September 2007)

David McConkey

J ohn came to Nepal from Northern Ireland in 1973 to join the United Mission to Nepal (UMN). After some months of Nepali language study in Kathmandu, he was soon busy sharing his engineering skills with students at the Butwal Technical Institute (BTI). Another UMN staff member, a teacher from Scotland called Sheila Anderson, was working in the northern Gorkha village of Jaubari and as they got to know each other they decided to marry. After their wedding in Scotland in 1975, they returned to work in Butwal where they were also hostel parents to some of the BTI students.

At this time John got involved in the development of biogas as an alternative fuel and helped in the production of the very first commercial unit built in Nepal. His passion was always to use the skills he had to help those in need, and he saw biogas as a way to save many Nepali village women the daily chores of gathering wood for fuel from the country’s diminishing forests.

In 1979, UMN’s Development and Consulting Services built 95 gobar gas plants in Rupandehi, Nawalparasi and Kapilvastu districts. John later led a team to monitor how they were being used and how the designs could be improved.

In 1972, a company called Gobar Gaz and Agro Equipment Development Pvt Ltd was set up and this was the start of the wider use and promotion of this eco-friendly source of energy in Nepal. Now there are several Nepali biogas companies and about 170,000 units in use across the country.

John himself was a champion of this technology both within Nepal and beyond, and it was in recognition of this that the Nepal Biogas Promotion Group recently honoured John with a special plaque of appreciation at their 13th Annual Meeting on 5 September. Sadly this was just two days after John passed away in Scotland, but Jennie Colins, UMN’s Executive Director, was honoured to be able to receive it on his behalf.

John’s career in UMN later led him and his family to Jumla for several years, where the Karnali Technical School was being built. The Finlay family returned to Northern Ireland in 1990, but after his wife’s untimely death there in 1994, John returned to Kathmandu to again work with UMN, bringing with him his valuable skills, commitment and attention to detail.

John became seriously ill a few months ago and had to return to the UK. Despite radiotherapy, he died peacefully on 3 September in Glasgow, Scotland.

John will always be remembered for his fun-loving ways and his open and transparent nature. He has left a legacy in Nepal that will remain.
EXHIBITIONS

- photo.circle, with Anita Khemka, a Delhi based photographer. 15 September, 9-11AM at the Sundhara Bakery Cafe.
- Digital art exhibition by Bishnu Shrestha at New Orleans, Patan, until 30 September. 5522708.

EVENTS

- Merchant of Venice film showing at the Lazimpal Gallery Cafe, 6.45 PM on 14 September.
- School Bullying: a workshop by Nil Raiha, 29 and 30 September at The New Era, Battisputali. 9851023958.
- Regular pottery classes at Artworks, Pulchok, opposite New Orleans Cafe, starting 12 noon. 9851101827.
- 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. 3286847.

MUSIC

- Blues at Jatra with JL Silies and the Pac Armanda, 7PM on 14 September at Jatra Cafe and Bar, Thamel.
- Rumble in the jungle African night with DJ Sunny at La Soon, Pulchok, Rs. 850 PM on 14 September.
- 17th Yala Maya Classic with Hari Mohan Sharma, Ashok Chakraborthy, Hom Nath Upadhyaya and Raj Kishore Dalalbhera, 5PM, 19 September at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan, Dhokha.
- Jazz at Jatra every Saturday 7PM onwards, at Jatra Cafe and Bar, Thamel.
- Ciney Gurung every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 7PM. 5521408

DINING

- Middle eastern healthy food week, lunch and dinner at New Orleans Cafe, Patan. 5522708.
- Pear and berry etagere with coffee, food, drinks, and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Javalakhel, 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708.
- BBQ, chilled beer, cocktails and live music at the Kaus Restaurant and Bar, Darbar Marg, 6218490.
- BBQ Unlimited at Splash Bar & Grill Radisson Hotel, Lazimpal, every Friday 6.30 PM, Rs. 899 nett.
- 5th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival 16 wines at Rs 150 a glass and Rs 600 a bottle, at Kilroy’s of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250444.
- 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.
- Lajawab curry, kebab and biryani festival, every 7PM onwards at Café 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. 9841290619.
- Krishnarpan Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika’s Hotel, 6 to 22 course ceremonial lunch and dinner. 4479488.
- Weekend special with sekuwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpal, 5.30 PM onwards. 4411706.
- Light nouvelle snacks and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La'Soon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166.
- Calcutta’s rolls, biryani, kebabs Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741007035.
- Rediscover fine Italian cuisine at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, all new exciting menu. 4700812.
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519.

WEEKEND WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Slowly over the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Expect hot weekend days with isolated afternoon thunderstorms. The northwesterly high pressure system, which usually emerges from the Tibetan Plateau to an end at the normal time in late September, more showers are likely this weekend. The monsoon cloud bursts of the past two weeks brought above-average rainfall to weather stations throughout the country. The Kathmandu valley received nearly 28-19 27-20 29-19 200mm, which is well above the norm (170mm) for this month. Although satellite pictures on Thursday morning indicate this year’s South Asian monsoon will come to an end at the normal time in late September, more showers are likely this weekend. The northwesterly high pressure system, which usually emerges from the western Himalayas to chase away the easternly monsoon, is emerging rather slowly over the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Expect hot weekend days with isolated showers towards evening or during the night.

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
GUESS WHO’S BACK: Nepal’s crown prince Paras waves to well-wishers as he is discharged from the Norvic hospital in Kathmandu on Wednesday.

MONKEY BUSINESS: A newborn siamang, born at the Central Zoo in Jawalakhel on 1 September, feeds from his 17-year-old Malaysian mother on Thursday.

BOMB SURPRISE: Nepal Army soldiers prepare a bomb disposal squad on Tuesday after reports of a bomb at the north gate of the Narayan Bhawan Royal Palace. The bomb turned out to be a fake.

GIRLS UNITE: Dalit lesbian couple Sabi Biswakarma,32, and Kalpana Parajy,21, tie the knot on Thursday at Nepal’s first known public lesbian marriage ceremony.

Beautiful at any Age
The current petroleum shortage is not going to go away because no one in government is willing to bell the cat.

Last week, energy experts came up with a workable plan to increase the price of av gas (rich people fly planes), petrol (yuppies drive motorcycles) and LPG (burned by middle class urban households and tempo riders) so that we can at least pay the Indians.

They managed to convince the supplies minister. He took it up with the finance minister, who said fine because he agrees with the Washington Consensus plus IOC that cutting fuel subsidies is the only way, and that people will ultimately be so frustrated with petrol queues they will welcome a price rise.

Next up the food chain was the peace minister who had to have a say because a fuel price increase would have an impact on law and order and breakdown thereof. But, surprisingly, even Poudel said do what you have to do.

Now, the only thing left to do was convince the Maoists. Info minister Maharaj said gungho, but he didn't reject it outright either. But since the party operates under the oxymoronic system of democratic centralism Maharaj said let's run this one past Comrade Awe-inspiring. So trundle off to Buddhanagar they did, and guess what the Fearsome One said? “The YCL will never agree to it.” So that was that.

The Bollywood film Aag is getting the axe from the Maoist member of the Board of Film Censors, who was so scandalised by the sight of pulsating pelvises and other anti-revolutionary movements that he warned that the 12-point agreement would be in jeopardy if the offending scenes were passed.

The comrades have been using this tactic quite a bit lately. Just the other day Comrade Lotus Flower (under medication now for hypertension) was speaking to over 1,000 followers at Danchhi near Kathmandu and once more did a TUAS (threat of use of armed struggle). The most interesting part of the speech was the Chairman’s assertion that his party had the “strong backing of China”. In classic triplespeak he went on: “Even if our 22 demands are met, we will not go for elections, we will put up a new demand, namely that we must be allowed to lead the government, since there is no chance of them agreeing to it we will begin our uprising.”

Obvious to all this are the kankresis who are busy doing what they are best at: stabbing each other in the back. We will believe there is NC unity when it happens, but in the meantime who is going to unite First Dotter Sujata with First Cousin Shekhar? The two are at loggerheads even when both know that Sitaui is pulling the rug from under both of them and probably secretly egging on the Maoists to put all his kangelri enemies on their list for Janakarbai. Which proves what the Ass has been saying all along, forget Congress unity, unite the Koirala clan first.

With Girjau now inclined to get on the democratic federal republic bandwagon, why is his own daughter gunning for the monarchy at this late stage? Or is the Cunning Old Fox using one of his two-pronged strategies? There is a paradoxical convergence between the Maoist and monarchist positions: neither of these arch rivals wants an election in November. So Girjau’s thinking must be: by removing the kingship before the election you automatically remove the only slogan the Maoists have. Smart.

Kingi and queenjii, meanwhile, paid daily visits to Norvic to see their son Paras who has proven the dynasty’s genetic proclivity to cardiovascular disease at an earlier-than-usual age. The Ass can’t confirm reports that the first thing the uncrowned prince wanted after regaining consciousness in the CCU was a smoke, but it wouldn’t be surprising if it was true. Anyway, the doctors have apparently told him no smoking, no booze, no bacon and no getting stoned.

But what surprised many at Norvic was to see KingG mixing with other relatives of patients at the hospital and making small talk. One gets the feeling such gestures are five years too late.