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Weekly Internet Poll # 366

Q. Who is most against elections happening?

Total votes: 4,650

Expend 34.1%

Expend 19.4%

Political parties 12%

Expend 8.7%

All of the above 37.4%

Weekly Internet Poll # 367. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

Q. How should we settle the fate of monarchy?

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FLOOD OF TEARS: The ill-fated microbus is pulled out of the flooded Dhansar river in Rautahat the morning after five people perished.

UPENDRA LAMICHHANE/KANTIPUR

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.

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. Makeshift repairs allowed it to keep functioning while wheeling dealing 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 Jwala 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

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GLASS HOUSES

It's hard even for die-hard democrats to see a silver lining in the way the current interim executive is conducting itself. The country has been steered back on to the path of freedom and peace, but it looks like governance and development are not on the agenda. Not even during the worst days of dictatorship have we seen such a paralysis in decision-making. Never have we had such a severe fuel shortage. Although it is due to past mismanagement, not much has been done to avert a 14-hour power cut each week this winter. At the start of what could be a record tourist season, no one can get seats in and out of Kathmandu because the national airline is in a shambles.

We may be free, but only to complain about how much more miserable things are. And all we seem to be interested in are the trappings of democracy, not in actually using it to get results.

Case in point is the Parliamentary Special Hearing Committee which is unnecessarily adding more delays to important appointments by staging a constitutional charade. Chief Justice designate Kedar Prasad Giri was "interrogated" by the committee, and a similar fate awaits all the judges of the Supreme Court, ambassadors and heads of constitutional organs.

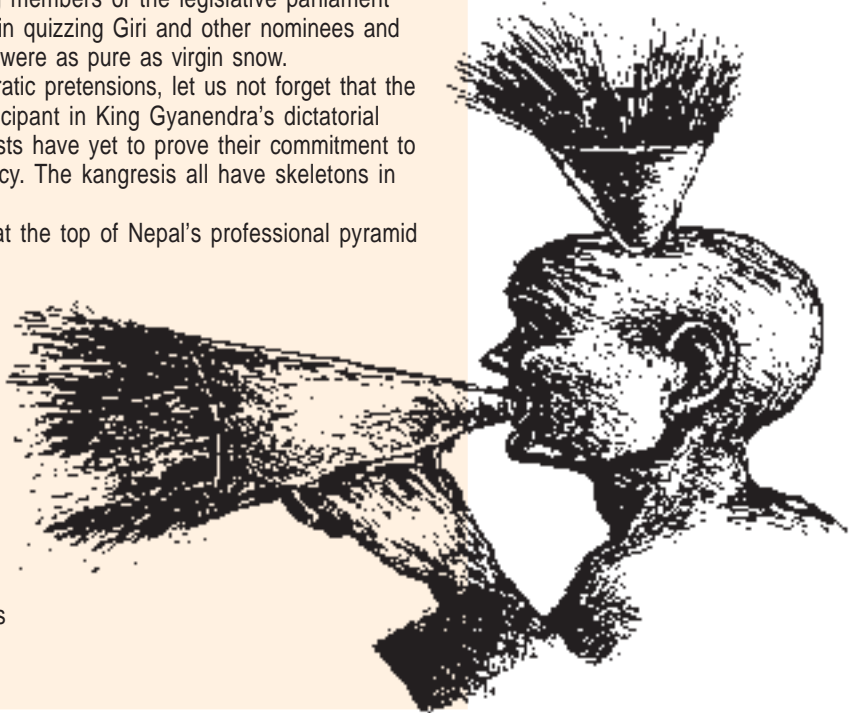
These hearings hinge on the assumption that lawmakers are best suited to prevent the elevation of unworthy characters to positions of authority and responsibility. But let he who has not sinned cast the first stone.

Everyone knows the ambassadorial candidates are political appointees who did not emerge from a talent search among career diplomats but from a process of wheeling-dealing. Some of these names are ill-suited for their new posts, but why are nominated members of a transitional parliament going through the whole rigmarole all over again after the parent parties of the honourable members have already done so? Perhaps the best we could get was what we have got. Let's not make an unseemly fuss over it all.

Reportedly, leftwing members of the legislative parliament have been most vocal in quizzing Giri and other nominees and holding forth as if they were as pure as virgin snow.

For all their democratic pretensions, let us not forget that the UML was a direct participant in King Gyanendra's dictatorial experiments. The Maoists have yet to prove their commitment to pluralism and democracy. The kangresis all have skeletons in their closets.

Almost everybody at the top of Nepal's professional pyramid has reached there by making some unprofessional compromises with past regimes. There is no way to invent squeaky clean personalities that match the high expectations of our peerless parliamentarians. People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.



Caste mongering

Identity politics is compartmentalizing Nepalis without their consent

Thanks to the past few decades of democracy and rebellion, the ghost of the Panchayati daura suruwal identity is finally fading away. Sadly, however, a new monster fast raising its head is one that mechanically forces each Nepali into compartments of castes and ethnicities. This new caste politics is taking us away from social inclusion and multicultural coexistence.



GUEST COLUMN
Mallika Shakya

The mono identity of daura suruwal was the invisible wall that kept Nepalis blissfully unaware of each other's cultural histories. The problem about being assigned a certain caste ethnicity and bluntly being told not to venture outside its perimeters is that these are not as static as the mongers of 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 qualified by a further discussion on counterculture that our societies have undergone over the past centuries.

To deny Nepal's cultural identities in political debate is to ignore the elephant in the room. Equally, to disregard the dynamic changes cultural identities have already undergone is to imprison a twenty-first century human being into a medieval iron cage.

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 has gained wide attention, one that remains little acknowledged to date is the cultural movement of the non-elites, 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 never been funded by the state. Raj Kapoor's 'mera juta hai japani' was a snub to the 'be Indian, buy Indian' variety of nationalism promoted by the government in the 1950s. As the country reeled under the fanaticism of Hindu-Muslim violence, songs like 'na tu hindu

banega na musalmana banega' went on to become the theme songs of the 1950s.

For newspaper-reading intellectuals across the world, India is often closely associated with recurring communal riots and ethnic strife between Hindus and Muslims, Christians and Sikhs. However, in the minds of ordinary people, most of whom happened to be the Bollywood movie-goers, India is a place where an incredibly large spectrum of diverse cultures coexist, bonded by a deep affection and making a respectful space for each other's unique cultural and religious identities. Film after film has obsessively emphasized the quintessential oneness of people of diverse faiths.

Somewhat belatedly in the winding road to democracy and pluralism, Nepal has finally come to realise that any political change must have deeper social and cultural roots for the common people to be able to relate to it. Thanks to the Maoist rebellion and the popular uprisings that followed in Kathmandu and in the tarai, Nepal has finally set out to open the old portmanteau of culture. This is an incredible achievement in itself.

Without addressing the centuries-old institutions, both good and bad, nurtured by our culture and our history, one cannot lay foundations of a New Nepal. But this won't be a panacea. Resolving the deep-seated prejudices of castes and ethnicities is undoubtedly a priority but making sure that the treatments truly echo people's spirits and not those engaged in identity politics is no less daunting. ●

Mallika Shakya is a PhD candidate at the London School of Economics.

The coming potato riots

The fuel crisis masks a coming food crisis

The Kathmandu high society is preoccupied with preparations for constituent assembly elections. A parliamentary committee is investigating nominees for influential positions. Fund-raising for Prime Minister's Relief Fund has turned into a fashion parade. Paras'



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

coronary artery has been unblocked. The Maoists are threatening an imminent urban uprising. Extension of UNMIN contracts is a foregone conclusion. But no one is concerned about everyday matters like the shortages and the cost of living. Because these things don't affect the rich. The more high-rise apartments are built, higher goes the rent for the poor. This improbable relationship between burgeoning supply and escalating cost is never discussed by economists. Speculation is rife instead that

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 hoity-toity waiting in the fuel queues. A passenger on the Lagankhel 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 come as a blessing in disguise for cabbies who don't own their vehicles. But for the rest, owning and driving ageing Marutis bought 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, the line beyond which they become unaffordable to the poor. But the most astonishing is the price of potatoes: it is now Rs 30 a kg. Apparently, those who worry about unavailability of petrol and those disturbed by the runaway price of potatoes belong to two different universes despite sharing the same city.

The Asian Development Bank calculates that the top 20 percent of

income earners in this country consumed 9.4 times more than the poorest 20 percent. Disturbing as they are, even these statistics of inequality fail to capture the frustrations of the bottom rung. An average day-labourer in agriculture earns at most Rs 10,000 per year, calculated on the basis of Rs 50 per day for 200 days of work. It costs at least Rs 200,000 per year to be able to lead a lifestyle that includes entry-level motorised vehicle—a scooter or a motorcycle.

In a classic class society, rewards are related to power rather than need or contribution. With extremely limited opportunities for advancement in life, the privileged are perhaps correct in assessing that Nepal is ripe for endless cycles of revolution. They have managed to get a law that will allow them to take their money elsewhere. Worse times are in store for societies oblivious to structural injustices. The Maoists are planning an urban uprising, but can they control it from descending into nationwide potato riots? ●

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 weaved-in 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 bouts of dysentery only cripple those Kathmandu cocktail circuiters who dampen our optimism.

Arun Neupane



- Looking at the events of recent weeks (beating up UML cadres, coming up with absurd preconditions) makes it clear that Maoists are the

major obstacles to the election. How absurd that they blame the king as the numero uno problem when they are creating havoc. What mechanisms are there to punish those who derail elections? UNMIN, these things are more important than your innocent sounding adverts on the FM. Somebody needs to discipline the Maoists or anyone for that matter, or else it will be ganglords running the election instead of the election commission.

Name withheld, email

- Someone should do an audit of how much cash and valuables were looted by the Maoists from the banks during the decade long insurgency. Nepal Telecom should tell us how much they lost when telephone towers were bombed. How many teachers were murdered? If the Maoists think they will have easy passage in future, they are dead wrong. Nepalis will never support terrorism. The root cause of political instability in Nepal is not poverty, illiteracy, or corruption, but rather an utter lack of a democratic mindset among Nepal's politicians. Who gave Prachanda, Girija Koirala or Madhab Nepal the right to decide whether the country should be a republic? Who gave Upendra Yadav the right to sign a deal regarding an autonomous state for the tarai? Don't we need to ask these questions to the Nepali people and find out what that they think? Isn't that what democracy is about? The elections are an opportunity for the people to speak up. *Nepal Times* hasn't written enough on how to make the constituent assembly free and fair.

Anand Jha, by email

GOBAR

Naresh Newar's article 'GOBAR' (#364) mentions that it will benefit Nepal if forest-protection is included in carbon-credit mechanism as a COP-13 outcome of Bali-December 2007. Getting benefit is good but caution is needed. We should not leave any room for too much excuse by industrialised nations in the name of preserving forest in developing countries and shying away from reducing actual in-country emissions. Less emphasis on cutting in-house emissions but zeroing on carbon sequestration (which is uncertain and controversial) is cheating. Remember, the key goal is to reduce carbon concentration in air.

Shobhakar Dhakal, Tsukuba, Japan

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 BHATTARAI

Having defanged 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 factitious 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).

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 Nepali 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 paralysed 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 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 villages 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. ●



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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.

Banijya ATM

Nepal Banijya 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



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 offers a full range of casual wear.



Choco

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

NEW PRODUCTS



Apache: TVS has launched the new Apache RTR 160 in Nepal. The Racing Throttle Response bike is the most powerful and fastest bike in its class with 15.2 bhp, a top speed of 118kph,

and can reach 60kph in 4.8 seconds. Electric start and disc brakes are standard features on the Apache. The bike will be priced at Rs 1,59,900.

Time to wake up

Are the security agencies still sleeping?

The blasts that rocked Bangkok on New Year's Eve left that city scarred. This Beed has never missed an opportunity to complement the swelling Thai metropolis, but political uncertainty seemed inevitable. With the current military government taking its



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

authority from a constitutional referendum, we need to wait for the general elections at the end of the year. Meanwhile, the Thai tourist industry is suffering from fewer visitors, and the baht's strength against the weakening dollar has left exporters unhappy. Foreign investors are taking a wait-and-see approach and it is only matter of time before the political stalemate starts to damage the economy.

Nepal can surely learn from the Thai experience. After nearly 10 years, Nepali tourism has been heading for a high once more. It has been getting difficult to book an airline seat out of Kathmandu and hoteliers have got their smiles back. However, the 2/9 blasts have brought a new element of uncertainty. As a fellow traveller put it, repeating the worries of many, are we heading into a war of identity? The wars of Kashmir, Nagaland, and the Tamils in the region have shown what such a conflict can develop into, and surely Nepal does not want to be grouped with these South Asian hotbeds of violence.

The eight-party government has left too much resting on the outcome of the constituent assembly elections. The intelligence machinery has been



KIRAN PANDAY

left to hibernate and the security situation in the streets has been appalling. When one observes the arguments between the new breed of 'irritant white cabs' and traffic policemen, most of the time it seems the cab driver is about to book the cop! More than 17 months since the April Uprising, the security agencies appear not to have returned from their holiday leave.

Security on the ground and security in people's perception are two different things. Perhaps we have not understood that it takes time to restore the 'safe' image of a country. The global media – both print and electronic – still give the impression that Nepal is not safe. 'Thursday columnists' who translate the muckraking tabloids of the Nepali vernacular press make it hard for good news to hit the global headlines. Apart from stories of primitive world heritage conservation activities like the sacrificing of goats in front of electronically wired aircraft, or Badi women protesters going virtually topless, it's just the security

scare stories that make it to the world outside.

Nepal as a nation has suffered a decade of insecurity that has clogged the wheels of development. We have been seen as a country where security-related firms can do good business. Until April 2006, it was the arms dealers and conflict resolution specialists, and then came the peace specialists. As the better half of this Beed continually laments, Nepal has become a country where individuals from countries with the highest divorce rates come to lecture us on co-existence! We have become just another experiment for the peacemakers, and the longer they stay, the worse for Nepal.

Thailand's experience has shown that a few months of political uncertainty and a couple of bomb blasts can sully a country's image. We are still trying to build an image. A major responsibility for our citizens is to ensure that we can be seen as a country that is safe, and show that 2/9 was an exception. Otherwise, we will all be finding jobs in the permanent UN Mission in Nepal. ●



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Ceremonial monarchy

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

Nepali Congress leader Sujata Koirala 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 Koirala 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 republic nor democracy. They want a new people's republic, meaning rule where there's a dominance of communist ideologies. They have not joined the peace process after changing ideologically or spiritually. 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.



KIRAN PANDAY

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 is how 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, if a republic is established under the leadership of NC it will work, but not if the Maoists 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 committee meeting. NC leaders are worried about the future of democracy, not the Maoists' republic.

Editors' Alliance

Maoist magazine, *Hamro Jaljala*, September 2007

There is a joker named *Kundan Dixit* (sic) who brings out an English paper named *Nepali Times*. He is a royalist in kangresi colours who gets fat stashes of cash from the American Embassy for his anti-Maoist campaigns. Under his royalist leadership, CIA agents and lackeys of Indian expansionists have set up something called the Editors' Alliance. Among other members of the alliance are the editor of *Samaya*, Yubaraj Ghimire who is on an anti-Maoist and anti-Chinese campaign, Prateek Pradhan from *The Kathmandu Post*, Sudheer Sharma of *Nepal*, Pushkar Lal Shresthja of *Samacharpatra*, the so-called editor of *Annapurna Post*, Shree Acharya and others.

It was Bhakta Bahadur Balayar from the American lobby in the Nepali Congress who initiated this alliance. It's main aim is to undermine the Maoists and China, says one independent analyst.

Forgotten hero

Dristi, 11 September

There was a time when rulers used to get nervous on BP Koirala 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 BP's 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 this party. It is not really an ordinary matter for prime minister Koirala's daughter Sujata to sound pro-king at a time when the whole party has decided to go for a republic. We can say frankly that GP himself is in a dilemma.

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

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Bhattarai, Monika, and the corrupt

Kishor KC in *Gorkhapatra*, 12 September २००७

It is said that Indian brothels have a separate wall for the patrons to spit on. These walls are never cleaned. Even the loathsome 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.

Prachanda recently announced that his party will now opt for a decisive people's agitation if NC fails to declare itself for republic in parliament. Sounding threatening, Prachanda has asked his cadres to be ready for this.

Civil war

Editorial in *Arpan*, 7 September २००७

Even weeks after the bomb explosions in the heart of the capital, there has been no arrest of the bombers who have managed to escape easily. This is really a challenge given that the parties and government are all prepared to hold the elections at any cost. We should not treat the bomb incident lightly when party workers are all set to go to the villages to campaign for their elections.

It appears clear that this incident was an organised crime and we can not rule out the repetition of such a violent incident endangering the lives of innocent people. It is a mystery why three groups – Tarai Army, Tarai Utthan Sangat and People's Army – admitted to the crime even before the government started its investigation. Was this done to imply that some powerful force was behind such fearful incidents and to scare the people and spread terror among them?

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 tarai has been intensifying. Abductions, assassinations, extortion, armed robbery, violence, strikes and other forms of anarchy have been incessant.

So far there is no clue as to what the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum splinter group wants by protesting against the agreement signed between the forum and the government. People must now endure 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 tarai 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.



BOOM!
People: Help! Help!
Home Administration: All of this is just a conspiracy to delay polls.

अभिनव Abin Shrestha in *Samaya*, 13 September

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“I had typhoid so I couldn't take part in the April Uprising.”

NC leader Shailaja Acharya quoted in *Rajdhani*, 13 September

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A PEOPLE WAR
Images of the Nepal conflict 1996-2006

लडाईमा जनता मुस्ताकाबाट बुझिएका चित्रहरूको

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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 Amlekhgunj. 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.



KIRAN PANDAY



MIN BAJRACHARYA



DEALT A WEAK HAND: (clockwise) cars crawl towards the Bhadrakali pump; cars mark their place in the queue; Bhaktapur; cars rest bumper to bumper



KIRAN PANDAY

really no laughing matter



NAYANTARA GURUNG KAKSHAPATI

(l-r) A weary taxi driver pushes his vehicle forward in the line, unwilling to waste any more precious fuel in the slow
o; a deck of cards comes in handy as drivers at the Pulchok petrol pump find a cool spot to pass the time while their
opportunists find novel ways to capitalise on the fuel crisis by selling old petrol in new whisky bottles at
mper; and a man finds time to groom his moustache, maybe after a night spent in the company of his vehicle.



NAYANTARA GURUNG KAKSHAPATI



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Reform rumble

Lack of debate over security sector reform may spell trouble ahead



UNMIN

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

The 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 saw 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 seven-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

VERIFICATION: UNMIN monitors interview a Maoist ex-combatant at Chulchule cantonment in Ilam.

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

Faced with reports of growing desertions from the camps, the Maoist leaders want to see tangible progress on security sector reform 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 advisor 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, Nanda Kishore Pun (Pasang), says integration into the police forces is not acceptable.

Maoist leader Pushpa 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 flatly rule out the possibility of any integration of the Maoist soldiers. But there has been little discussion about such proposals among the eight 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 criticised the narrow strategy of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). They

want a wider approach, to include the judiciary within the reforms.

"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," Pun 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 integrating politically-indoctrinated fighters in a professional and neutral national army is a no-brainer," said one army official.

He questioned what would happen if other armed groups like the Nepal Defence Army, the Tarai Cobra or those led by Jwala Singh and Goit 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 own rhetoric. To them, the PLA won the battle, so the vanquished 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 succeeded only on the strength of PLA's 10-year-old people's war." ●



John Marks, founder and president of Search for Common Ground, an international NGO working on conflict transformation and resolution, has spent the past 25 years seeking to help countries in conflict across the world, cutting his teeth initially on US-USSR relations at the height of the cold war. His wife, Susan Collin Marks, who works with him, was involved in South Africa's post-apartheid transition to democracy and wrote a book on the subject. The couple talked to *Nepali Times* about Nepal's transition from civil war to peace.

"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 Collin 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 we had 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 stand back from the 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. If we are going to do a soap opera, the writers are going to be Nepalis as they understand what is going on here. We maybe able to bring in resources 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 position. But state insensitivity can only be a partial justification for their silence.



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

Many moderates seem secretly pleased with the growing radicalisation. Recent events have not only put the madhesi issue on the national stage, but have also strengthened 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 politics. 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 state has left them with no choice. But the January Madhes Uprising and subsequent heightened identity consciousness has ensured that the madhes issue will not disappear. This defence of violence by city-based intellectuals ignores the suffering on the



SHRAWAN DEV

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

ground and legitimises criminal groups using a political cover. Madhesi analyst Tula Narayan 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. Madhesis 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, organise themselves electorally instead of bickering, and make the most of the elections. As Chandrakishore, among the sharpest tarai journalists, points out: "If April 2006 had

not happened, January 2007 would not have taken place." Responsible madhesis recognise the elections as a national priority. Like the Jana Andolan, they will open up the democratic space further and provide a platform for madhesis to win more advantages. If the state is unwilling to give 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.

Even if the elections happen, there may be a fairly sizeable constituency which is disenchanted with the process and will question the credibility of the constituent assembly from the outset. Will such an assembly be able to deliver a constitution sustainable for generations? The only way to counter this is by beginning political campaigning, activating party district units—especially of the NC—and by madhesi moderates asserting themselves. In the longer term, there are two other critical issues on which madhesis need to reflect honestly—their relationship with the Tharus and the federal structure of government. Madhesis claim Tharus to be their own. Indeed, many Tharus in the eastern tarai, like Bijay Gachhedar and Kishore Biswas, identify themselves as madhesis. But there are many others, especially in the west, who assert their distinct identity. Madhesi leaders may be right when they say that Mahendra's policies and ruling elite engineered this divide. But that is not the point. The madhesi insistence on a unitary identity is meaningless unless accompanied by a closer engagement with Tharu activists. The slogan 'one madhes, autonomous state' has become popular. Madhesis understandably do not want a federal state split by borders running north to south, which they fear would mean pahadi domination. But is one unit from east to west across the plains feasible? Does it take into account the diversities within the tarai? Will it not defeat the purpose of having smaller states by breeding alienation among people at one end, distant from the state capital? Would it make more sense to have sub-divisions within? What integrative mechanisms with the hills could be fair and mutually beneficial? Madhesi intellectuals need to start thinking hard about these questions if they want to get the best deal and guide later events. Once the moderates start to play a political role, they will ensure that irrespective of the state's insensitivity and the weakness of protesting groups, the essence of the madhesi cause—identity and representation—is not lost. ●

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A photo exhibition brings back tragic memories



"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."



PICS: SHIVA PURI



NARESH NEWAN — Editor

Bhima Bahadur Bhandari, his two children and three nieces sustained during a fire that badly damaged Mahara's Lakshmi Bhandar. The fire

"It kept them alive," is all I can say. But he is heartbroken, who has lost his wife, Angie, and two children in the hurricane hit. The last time among the 15 passengers the Marine showed great kindness to him. The two others who died in the storm, the three day Marine had been with, and another.

“We got four-year-old Rubina who has lost,” Marshall,” she says simply. Rubina looks at her hair fingers and even has her stomach which is a small but has stomach. Her six-year-old brother, Ruben, has lost all over his face, a push on his head and a sharp cut on his leg. The two horses’ parents told their three-month-old.

After a long, wearisome march, progress, she was halted in Malabar Hospital, where her baby was still born. She died three days later of exhaustion and burns.

Byron Bligh was on the scene, travelling with her family. He was kind and patient, spending whole groups of hours by the side of the mother, filled with words of love. But the fire barked through the window, and he too caught her down the stairs. At the end of the race, the mother squatted, the doctor jumped out, and the baby both and was born.

Spent that afternoon looking at the window. The hands and face were there, and the brother and wife on either side of the hands and face. That was

home for Tiber and was carrying \$400,000 in savings, all of which he lost. Three other Israeli residents were returning home after three years working in Saudi Arabia, and they lost upon the \$100,000 each in hard earned savings which the

It has been over a month now. But for the students of Somers who visit the Boggs, the story on the children is a picture of war-wounded nation. Four younger kids weaned on Hitler and Stalin and their ilk, they are the only

It was International Children's Day last week when Bhakar Kulkarni brought his 11 children out of hospital in Nagpur. The Nagpur people have been astonished by reports of violence over the past years, but the sight of the bare, injured on the children's shoulders and smeared with antiseptic made the hospital. "There can't be Nagalis like this in other Nagalis," they said. "New Nagalis" were where the injured Nagalis lived. Bhakar Kulkarni says, "I will always leave the children, but we will continue to help them get out of their homes."

[illegible]

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बहानाले पुरस्कार
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**बम्पर
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रु. १,००,०००

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पठाउनेसु यस ठेगानामा
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यदि माउस तपाईंको जुरेमा
पूरा हुनेछ उत्कृष्ट बहानाको
पुरस्कार जित्ने चाहना ।

तपाईंका रमाइला हाजमोला खाने बहाना कुनै पनि सादा
कागजमा २५ शब्द सगलमा आउने गरी आफ्नो
नाम, ठेगाना, उमेर, फोन नं. र फोटो (पठाउन चाहना)
को साथमा हाजमोलाको ८ वटा साली स्यासे वा
बोटलको लेबल सहित पो. ब. नं. १४३५५, काठमाडौं,
नेपालमा पठाउनुहोस् । अनि जित्नुहोस् एक लाख
लाभ र अन्य थुप्रै पुरस्कारहरु पनि ।

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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 successful in this film? Could it be that the characters are actually children, or at least not quite

CRITICAL CINEMA
A. Angelo D'Silva

adults? The palpable sense of nostalgia and the loss of something precious, which honestly feel pathetic in films like *Old School* with its thirty-something characters aping kids, appears almost sublime when the actors are themselves young. Clearly producer Judd Apatow has his hands all over it, but there is something different with this project. Director Greg Mottola, with the critically popular TV series *Arrested Development*

under his belt, brings to *Superbad* a similar roster of quirky characters played to perfection by impressive comedic actors. Michel Cera as Evan plays a droll neurotic (think a young, less jittery Woody Allen). Jonah Hill plays his counterpart, the crass, portly, best friend who spouts a seemingly non-stop barrage of profanities and is particularly given to histrionics. The pair are rounded out by third-wheel Fogel (Mintz-Plasse), a geeky white kid perhaps a little too taken with hip-hop culture, and whose newly acquired fake ID could get them the liqueur that promises to impress the girls they hope to score with. The banter between the three, especially Cera and Hill, is pure gold. The opening dialogue has that charm reminiscent of early Tarantino, even if the content is more *American Pie* fare. But too much time is given to the juvenile clowning of the pair of cops (Hader and Rogan) who practically abduct, then befriend,

Fogel. These adult characters are more in line with the bawdy 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 purely 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 aching depiction of fraternal love, you might have a tear accompanying that chuckle at the last scene as it closes with the ambiguous tune of Curtis Mayfield's *PS I Love You*. ●
Director: Greg Mottola.
Cast: Jonah Hill, Michael Cera, Christopher Mintz-Plasse, Bill Hader, Seth Rogan
2007. R. 114 min.

Father of Nepal's gobar gas industry

John Finlay (3 October 1938 – 3 September 2007)

DAVID MCCONKEY

John 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 chore of gathering wood for fuel from the country's diminishing forests.

In 1975, 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 1977 a company called Gobar Gas 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 Collins, 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. ●





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KIRAN PANDAY

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.



KIRAN PANDAY

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.



KIRAN PANDAY

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



KIRAN PANDAY

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



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Battle royal for republic

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 Mahara was not exactly **gungho**, but he didn't reject it outright either. But since the party operates under the oxymoronic system of 'democratic centralism' Maharaji 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 Bored 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."



Oblivious to all this are the kangresis 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 Sitaula is pulling the rug from under both of them and probably secretly egging on the Maoists to put all his kangresi 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.



Kingji and queenji, 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.



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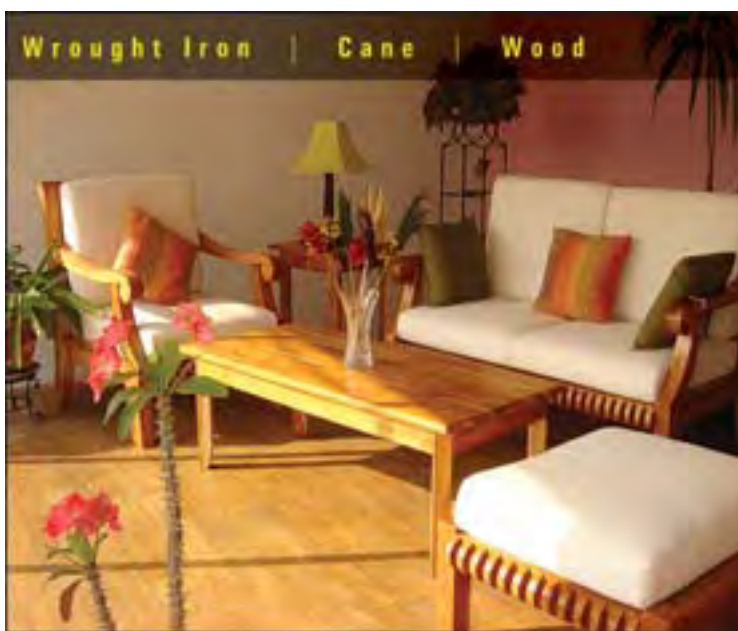


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