The Maoists played serious brinkmanship on Tuesday by walking out of government and calling for street protests to obstruct polls. This could be a two-track tactic: to either play the role of a political opposition against a status quo state by projecting itself as a party of change, or to escalate protests to get elections postponed. The self-absorption of the Maoists with their internal pressures and the resignation drama in Kathmandu distracted attention from the enormous loss of life and property in Kapilbastu and the continuing violence in the eastern tarai.

In Kapilbastu it was the failure of the state to prevent the riots, and it continues four days after. In the eastern tarai, criminalised militants are rampaging because of the political and administrative vacuum. The Maoist resignations made an unstable government even more insecure, and emboldened royalists who also don’t want elections.

Baburam Bhattarai’s vicious speech on Tuesday was meant to appease hardliners within his party from whom he has come under attack. Backroom negotiations were going on till late Thursday at Baluwatar to work out a compromise on a republic declaration to satisfy both the Maoists and the seven parties.

The resignation crisis, Kapilbastu and the eastern tarai all add up to a loud wake-up call for the prime minister to urgently show the people that he leads a government that is in charge and can deliver peace and development.
Peace hiccup

The Maoist move on Tuesday to quit government did not come as a surprise. But it did come as a disappointment. It reflected growing tension between the Maoists and the seven parties alliance, strains within the Maoists between the moderate leadership and hardliners and the fear of the ex-guerrillas that they would be sidelined in November elections.

Until now, the main chairman, Prachanda, was thought to be both: Pushpa Kamal Dahal a statesman from a mainstream political party and Prachanda the leader of a rebel group who want to finish the revolution. Prime Minister Girija Koirala and Dahal failed to agree on the Maoists’ two main demands: declaration of a republic before or after elections and holding the polls through full proportion representation. But the real bottom line is that the Maoists fear they won’t fare all that well in polls and want to either postpone the polls or scuttle it altogether. In this case, they have common ground with the rivalists.

By quitting the government, Dahal has taken a clever risk and tried to kill three birds with one stone: outflank ethnic groups that have recently become more radical than his party’s appeased hardliners within his own party, and tried to play the role of the opposition in the run-up to November. The Maoists will try to present the government as a change in contrast to the traditional parties, which are seen to be status quo and reap in an anti-incumbency effect. All this now seems to be an elaborate ruse to postpone elections to next year at which time the Maoists probably feel they will be better prepared. But even this is doubtful.

Dahal may understand it, but his hands in party don’t: the main reason they don’t have support from the people is because of the continued unpreparedness of the VCP to be a party. A political party that doesn’t care about public opinion and believes its own slogans will never do well in free voting.

The hope now is on behind-the-scenes negotiations to forge a compromise so that the first meeting of the constituent assembly will declare Nepal a republic. There is still the likelihood of a rapprochement because neither Dahal nor Koirala wants to be seen as a spoiler of the peace process, and both have more serious issues like the madhesis that they need to grapple with. Besides, both agree on most things and the only debate is about sequencing: whether we should go republic before or after elections.

Nepal’s peace process is not in jeopardy, and the Maoists are not about to go back to war. But it shows just how difficult it is for Dahal to straddle his dual avatar of revolutionary and statesman.

NO SAFETY: Following the violence in Kapilbastu, triggered by the murder of Abdul Moid Khan, families fled to Belahia, Sunauli via India looking for safe refuge.

STATE OF THE STATE

C K Lal

Backroom negotiations began immediately to patch things up. If Krishna Bahadur Mahara and his comrades return to Singh Darbar soon, this drama will have served its purpose. But all this only distracted us from the crisis in Kapilbastu, Rupandehi and Nawalparasi.

The violence that erupted in the aftermath of murder of Abdul Moid Khan has already claimed 12 lives, the whereabouts of hundreds are unknown, thousands are taking shelter at temporary camps in Gorusinghe. While all this was happening, the party leaders in Kathmandu were playing musical chairs. Until Thursday afternoon, no prominent politician of the UML has deigned to visit the riot-affected region and offer sympathy and relief to victims of violence.

Khan was related to the alleged anti-Maoist vigilante group, which was associated with the NC and was active in the MJF. He may have been eliminated by criminal gangs operating from across the border. It could have been the Maoists. Or maybe it was the Tarai.

Whoever killed Khan, it wouldn’t have been a cause for a communal flare-up had the local administration responded quickly. The victims of Rupandehi could have been avoided by a little foresight and preparation. Local administrations in Nepal have never been known for their capacity for emergency response. But the utter failure of the law and order machinery in the country over last few months, through Lahani, Nepalgar, Gaur, and now Kapilbastu, is a national disgrace.

Propped up with multiple crises, the prime minister is unlikely to pay attention to details. Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula lacks stature to inspire a bureaucratised police force. His ministry is rife to more frequent violent eruptions than mere failure of policing. It somehow seems that violence has become the method ofarticulating grievances against the state.

Part of the blame for making violence respectable must be laid at the doors of the Maoist leadership. When ends justify means, anything goes and morality is the last thing to be considered. Maoists argue that they had no choice but to unleash violence, communal breaches, and instability. The only thing surprising about last week’s events was that it happened in central and not eastern tarai. Or maybe it was surprising because some of us mistakenly thought of Birganj as the dividing point and barely looked west from there.

There will be more Kapilbastus, unless the parties act swiftly and strongly.

While Butwal burned

There will be more Kapilbastus unless the parties act swiftly and strongly.

Kapilbastu shows the fragile nature of tari politics. All it takes is a minor trigger to unleash violence, communal breaches, and instability.

Well, the NC has taken a minor trigger and turned it into a storm.

The thing only surprising about last week’s events was that it happened in central and not eastern tarai. Or maybe it was surprising because some of us mistakenly thought of Birganj as the dividing point and barely looked west from there.

There was a sense of the situation: the Maoists’ two main demands declaration of a republic before or after elections and holding the polls through full proportion representation. But the real bottom line is that the Maoists fear they won’t fare all that well in polls and want to either postpone the polls or scuttle it altogether. In this case, they have common ground with the rivalists.

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The entire tari will have armed groups, and both sides might consider the state as a stalemate, doing nothing to either tackle the core causes or maintain basic law and order.

Ethnicity is becoming the sole determinant of political choice. The social distance between communities has grown and linkages have weakened. Many madhesis do not know how to cope with power shifts in their hands. Others have become insecure, resulting in migration or belligerence, as manifested by the Chhaupadi. While most madhesis don’t want inter-community strife, there are some who are pleased with the idea of being put back in their place. The thought of ‘teaching pahadis a lesson.’

The ingredients for communal riots, though not a full-scale conflict, are present. There will more Kapilbastus, both in the east and west of the plains.
NO ACCIDENT
There is more to the assessment of the accident in Rupandehi (‘No accident’, #365) than ineptitude, corruption and the war. There is the human side: the side which both the government and the Maoists profoundly lack. One lets its own power be wielded and the other abets by murdering innocent Nepalis. One can’t put its own house in order and the other destroys the house both are trying to build. Questions: What if the contractor started to build without any pressure? What if they were not extorted? What if there were guards at the damaged portion of the bridge? What if daylight travel was safer? What if there were no bandits? What if my dear friend Narottam Rajbhandari, his wife Sami along with three others had not come out of the mudslide to push the vans? This accident could have been prevented, the volatile political situation was the reason. If it happened now, you can add three more to the orphaned children of the Maoist conflict. There are many who die daily on our roads. But, this hurts.

Tirtha Mali, email

MODERATE MADHESIAN
I don’t know what solution Prashant Jha is trying to suggest, and to whom (‘Tari Eye, ‘Calling all moderates’, #366). He doesn’t define who these moderates are in the first place. I assume he refers to people not associated with or supporters of MJF or JTMN (both) or MMM or Tarai Army. If so, these moderates have to first answer to the people, why they failed to save 40 plus madhesi sons in January, February 2007. What do these moderates feel about the madhesi people’s view that they have been discriminated against by pahadi. If they have the same view as most people, how to stand instead of standing with these people, what are they doing in air conditioned rooms in Kathmandu? If they can’t save their own dignity, what will they do for others? A moderate is one who says ‘one on fire, the other on ice, and on average I am ok’, it will be wrong to think that the fight is for ‘identity and representation’ because it doesn’t explain why Maoist were able to sustain decade long fight. Identity and representation may give us a few more seats in parliament, but will not solve real problem of the towns.

Ram Manohar, email

DONOR FATIGUE
Nepali Times deserves thanks for publishing Binod Bhattrai’s ‘Papu without dividend’ (#366) where he raises concerns about donor fatigue. But he missed an important point regarding the Vision New Nepal (VNN) initiative in an otherwise well articulated piece. The World Bank did start the visioning exercise by inviting Professor Asraf Ghani to blow it. Whatever the dreams of the various parties in the government, they will fail with the economy. All economies run on energy. Unless the present petrol crisis is resolved soon in an economically viable manner, all of the hopes and dreams of the parties from monarchist to Maoist will blow away in the winds of an economic crash. Sadly of course the ordinary citizen will suffer the most. There is nothing more important in real terms to my friends in Nepal than fixing the energy crisis. Pete Downie, email

● Thanks to CK Lal for his encyclopaedic yet penetrating pick-up (‘The coming potato riots’, #365) into the common problems nagging the general people in the towns. I have always admired his down-to-earth observation and gut-wrenching analysis. I salute his street savviness in putting concern in pressing problems. I think our highbrow planners and policy makers, practitioners and donor agencies and NGOs should read between the lines of his State of the State column and meditate on them.

Subash Pokharel, email

HAMRO JALJALA
You have done fair by publishing what the Maoist Hamro Jalya wrote about the Editors’ Alliance (‘Editors Alliance’, #366). As an Editor, you gave play to their side as well. But it is not necessary to translate every ‘bakwas’ written in the weeklies. We were all shocked by the abuse hurled at Kunda Dixit and the other editors. It just exposes the Maoists’ own insecurity. I urge them to go and learn something about journalism from the respected editors. We salute Himal and its publications and the role you played in fighting for press freedom. Keep going, let the dogs bark.

N G Tamu

● Civilised society must have been deeply affronted by the inveighed attack on the editors of Nepali independent press by the Maoist magazine Hamro Jalya. Besmirching Kunda Dixit as a ‘venal royalist (’joker’)? is itself a joke. All editors named are ones who renounced against the autocratic royal regime and fought for freedom. Inveighing these pioneers of free press as a menace to the civilized society. There’s no doubt that Maoists are the killers drawn against those who expose their fobles and atrocities. How long will they go on with their ill fated vested totalitarian fake idealism?

Prabin Jung Thapa
Institute of Engineering, Pokhara

I burst out laughing when I read the description of Kunda Dixit as a ‘joker’. I never thought I could laugh that hard. I now look at Dixit in new light. Here is to a Democratic Nepal: Kunda for President!

J Tenzing, email

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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Wake up, prime minister
A look at Kathmandu’s antics from Kapilbastu

ANALYSIS by KANAK MANI DIXIT

KAPILBASTU — Seen from this troubled corner of Nepal, where there has been a massive loss of life and property since Sunday, the resignation drama being played out in Kathmandu is scandalous. The irresponsibility and self-absorption of the Maoist organisation is astounding.

Nepal is now a hotbed of a score of mutinies, and the Maoist attitude is bound to embolden radicals and opportunists everywhere. It will sideline the moderates trying their best to fight the tide of populist mobilisation and inter-community strife. The state administration is quite absent and civil society is just navel-gazing as the country burns.

By resigning from an unstable interim government, Pushpa Kamal Dahal has actually emboldened the king. The Nepal Army, unreformed for having carried on a dirty war on behalf of Gyanendra, is eagerly waiting for another opportunity to ‘serve’. We can thank Mr Dahal for this renewed ambition.

The Maoists had little thought for the rest of the country as they sought to tackle their internal contradictions, the push of hardliners within, and an expected humiliation in November polls. Having failed to train the cadre for pluralistic politics over the previous 18 months, the Maoists seemed willing to reverse their journey into open politics as defined by the 12-point agreement. But despite the harsh words from the Khula Manch on Tuesday, the Maoists do not in fact have a Plan B. After all, the ‘people’s war’ was abandoned because it was not working, and a return to the jungle will not be sustainable. The world community would turn quite unsympathetic, all powerful India would not be amused, but most importantly an alert populace would not take to renewed rebellion as meekly as in the past.

For a while, it seemed the Maoists were willing to abandon their entire future because of momentary panic over expected election results. But the moderates at the helm know that in that direction lie fragmentation, dissipation and oblivion. All sensible citizens hope the Maoists will remain united, the party that will fight (peacefully) for the underclass as the political spectrum evolves.

Fortunately, the word out of Baluwatar is that the comrades might have pulled back from the brink. Forced to the wall by hardliners during the recent plenum, accused of having given up on the revolution, Mr Dahal needed to roar convincingly and threaten all manner of dire visitations.

Even as the Maoists sent in their papers, however, they didn’t reject the comprehensive peace accord or the Interim Constitution. They remain in the interim parliament and their fighters are in the cantonments. As we went to press on Thursday afternoon, Girija Prasad Koirala had not accepted the resignations.

Much of what’s in the Maoist 22-point demands is the result of governmental apathy and must be addressed urgently. But with the Maoists shifting goalposts, the UML and NC were not in a position to trust the two main political demands for ‘full proportional’ elections and immediate declaration of a republic. The Maoists could have called off the polls after parliament adopted a republican resolution.

The Maoists may be satisfied with a declaration on a republic to be passed by the interim legislature. That would be the compromise acceptable to all and could in fact reflect the overall evolved stance regarding kingship. On the other hand, the formal goodbye to Nepal’s historical monarchy would be left to a sovereign, elected, Constituent Assembly.

Tuesday’s Maoist shock treatment may have some side benefits. Koirala could wake up to the call for a more process-oriented peace where decisions are less ad hoc and personalised with delegation of authority and better communication partners in government, especially Madhav Kumar Nepal.

Koirala will be a failure as statesman if he cannot control the country’s drift. It takes gross negligence for a country such as this to be so fragmented. The Maoists can take part of the blame, but so must the prime minister. He must wake up to immediately to restore law and order, provide services to the people and give all of us the sense that there is a government.

Vacancy Announcement

Terra des hommes (Tdh), an international NGO established in Nepal for the last 22 years is seeking a highly qualified and experienced Nepali citizen to join its team in its delegation in Kathmandu. Position Title: Senior Programme Coordinator Main Responsibilities: Responsible for relations with national partners and providing technical support; Participate in administrative, financial, programme supervision and monitoring of the projects funded by Terra des hommes (Tdh) in Nepal; Responsible for relations with authorities and legal matters arising such as Project Agreements; General Agreement, visas; Act as a focal point for all matters relating to the Child Protection Policy for partners; Assist the Country Representative in developing new project proposals; Acting as Country Representative in the absence of the Delegate; Represent Terra des hommes (Tdh) at coordination meetings, whenever required.

Minimum Required Qualification and Skills:

Education: University degree, preferably in social development or related area with a demonstrated interest in children’s issues. Masters degree and above will be considered an asset.

Experience: A minimum of five years of experience in the NGO development world with a demonstrable record of successful and progressive more senior responsibilities. Experience in programme coordination is a great asset. Extensive field experience necessary.

Skills/Qualities: Strong knowledge of programme cycle management; Familiarity with child protection issues; Experience in health and nutrition; Experience in programme management; Experience in fundraising; Experience in dealing with various funding partners; a plus; ability to work independently or on a team basis; above average experience; computer literate; excellent oral and written English; ability to work well with others and maintain positive work relationships. Ability to travel extensively both within Nepal and overseas.

Date of Joining: 1 November 2007

Please send us your CV and a cover letter to: Country Representative, Terra des hommes; PO Box 2430, Kathmandu, Nepal. Email: vacancy.tdh.nepal@gmail.com

This Vacancy Announcement will not incorporate the anti-discrimination and child protection policies of Terra des hommes. The recruitment and selection procedures of Terra des hommes are in keeping with our commitment towards child protection and related issues.

Deadline to receive application no later than October 5, 2007. Applications received after the submission date will not be considered. Only shortlisted candidates will be invited for interview.
Living in the past

Too many of our ageing politicians are out of touch

S
omeone recently asked me not to laugh at the suggestion that Nepal was basking in a post-conflict glow. My answer was: “We have too few post-conflict resolution activities, we need more.”

The present crop of Nepal’s retro-patriots and post-war trust to move ahead towards a shared future is facing an unacceptably high cost of insecurity. The older politicians’ inability to inspire trust has two roots: sociological and legal.

In rural Nepal, people of different ethnic groups and castes have long lived side by side. That is to say, they do it by globalisation’s credit that a villager raised in Nepal passports – can today dream of a prosperous future not in Nepal or in Qatar or in Malaysia. Likewise, only 30 years ago in urban Nepal, not many ventured to cross the uncomfortable circle of their ethnic group, clan or caste for marriage, business deals, and political alliances. It is only in the last 20 years that people are now under 40 have met, befriended, or worked and formed relationships with large numbers of Nepalis from different ethnic groups at schools, at work and in society at large.

Their repeated interactions with one another have made today’s youth comfortable with their ethnic group, clan or caste. It has become good, but it has become too formulaic that it is often ineffective. Given the persistent lack of trust among older politicians who can replace for there are no effective mechanisms to do so, it’s time we focused on binding up younger politicians so that they work together with all eyes toward our common future.

What are some of the future projects of the British Council?

Training in peace-building and conflict resolution activities on a piece-meal basis is all well and good, but it cannot do anything unless there are effective mechanisms to do so, which is the time we focused on binding up younger politicians so that they work together with all eyes toward our common future.

What achievements is the British Council proud of in Nepal?

The British Council is working with people who have ambitions for the country, who are keen on providing opportunities to Nepal to drive their own future. As an organisation we are constantly changing and adapting ourselves and we are proud of that. For many people the library has been very important, but the library wasn’t the same 10 years ago and it will not be the same 10 years from now.

What are some of the future projects of the British Council?

The global student exchange program is small but very important because for the first time volunteering is not about helping them get a visa to travel. The global student exchange program is small but very important because for the first time volunteering is not about helping them get a visa to travel. The British Council is working with people who have ambitions for the country, who are keen on providing opportunities to Nepal, who are able to provide support and assistance to the people in the UK. Shared volunteering is a program that we would like to see grow. Our work with older leaders on active citizenship is also very important. We are beginning to have discussions on educational, and that is an important because it is not just about the common future, it’s about the future of Nepal and also in other countries.
Nearly eight months have passed since UNMIN was established but even now it has not been able to complete the logistics to establish its office. It has finally managed to establish a desk and five regional offices in houses provided by the government in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Birinagay, Nepalgunj and Dhangadi.

The full recruitment has still not been completed. By this month, UNMIN had hired nearly 722 staff related to arms-monitoring and elections, of whom 65 are international. There are still a lot to do. Recently, the government has finally managed to establish a desk and five regional offices in houses provided by the government but even now it has not been able to complete the logistics to establish its office. It seems clear that they wanted to quit the government so that they wouldn’t have to act responsibly and could conduct their political activities in their own style and create an inappropriate environment.

Maoist walkout

Editorial in Kantipur, 19 September

CFN-M ministers have quit the government but the Maoists as a whole still haven’t separated themselves from the eight-party alliance. They are still a powerful force in the caretaker parliament. As a significant player in the historic peace agreement, they are an indispensable part of the mainstream politics.

Although the government is in a mess with the decision of the Maoists, the interim constitution of 2007 still remains intact. But the problem is over the uncertainty of the constituent assembly elections. The historic peace process is now at high risk of being jeopardised. Now that the Maoists have officially declared that they will disrupt the elections, this paves the way for a new political consensus and understanding between the alliance parties.

This means that the political leaders have to prove that they are committed to steering the country along the right political path. The Maoist ministers justified their walkout on the grounds that their allies in the government proved directionless, and had not done enough to prepare for elections.

However, the Maoists have not yet abandoned the coalition and this shows there is still hope for renewing the political alliance. The Maoists may have their own reasons for leaving the government but a decision on announcing a republic was not discussed even by Tuesday morning at the prime minister’s residence.

It is surprising that the Maoists leaders even refused to accept the suggestion from other parties who tried to convince them that the republic could be declared immediately after the CA is formed, and that all parties will abide by the commitment to do so. Nepali Congress was also, in principle, in favour of a republic and ending the constitutional monarchy after the elections.

But the Maoists didn’t want to wait for the much-needed technicalities and procedure to make that happen. Instead they chose to make their own bush and rash decision.

It is undeniable that while in government the Maoist leaders had themselves failed to satisfy their own cadres and live up to the expectations of most Nepalis. It seems clear that they wanted to quit the government so that they wouldn’t have to act responsibly but could conduct their political activities in their own style and create an inappropriate environment.

All in limbo

Editorial in Rajbati, 19 September

After a lot of confusion and doubt, the Maoists have formally resigned from the government.

SELECTED MATERIAL TRANSLATED EVERY WEEK FROM THE NEPALI PRESS
Their decision to go back to their old ways of revolution and protest has once again set back the peace process. This decision has the public worried and the constituent assembly elections seem unlikely to happen.

If we look at the bigger picture, forgetting a few grievances and the declaration of Nepal as a republic, the country has been running according to the Maoists’ whims. Almost two years ago, when they signed the 12-point accord with the government, the deal was that everything go according to their roadmap. They have also played a huge role in invoking the people’s right that they elect their own government through constituent assembly elections.

Nevertheless, they have made a few grave political mistakes. Despite the elections being announced and delayed twice, they were not able to take a stand on Nepal as a republic and proportional representation. When madhesi and janajati demands started to grow, the Maoists settled for a less than satisfactory agreement, on an issue that they themselves had raised. This shows the Maoist nature of going through with things without properly understanding them.

The other seven parties saw a weakness, and their attempt to use it to their advantage, combined with the Maoists’ inability to read the future correctly, led to the present situation where the Maoists had to resign from government.

The Maoists have left the alliance and declared revolution again. The current ceasefire and peace process, along with the constituent assembly polls, are in limbo now until their intentions become clear. In this situation, the seven parties also need to accept their own weak position and start a dialogue as soon as possible. If they see the Maoist reversal as an opening for themselves, this will invite another disaster.

Not only do they have to make the Maoists responsible for their actions but also the prime minister and the seven parties need to be responsible and take responsibility. Without this, the country and the people could face a grave crisis.

Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel in Naya Patrika, 19 September
Nepal’s environmental movement is just beginning to recover from last year’s helicopter crash in Ghunsa that took the lives of 24 of Nepal’s leading conservationists, diplomats, officials and journalists (pictured above). The environmentalists were doers who had shown that tourism and conservation could go hand-in-hand.

Among those killed were Chandra Gurung and Mingma Norbu Sherpa of WWF, Tritha Man Maskey, Harka Gurung, Yeshi Lama, and Minister for Forests and Soil Conservation Gopal Rai. In one single blow, almost everyone from Nepal’s conservation scene was wiped out. They weren’t just armchair environmentalists. They lived and worked alongside the people and were loved by them. Chandra Gurung’s work to set up the unique Annapurna Conservation Area Project proved eco-tourism could lift living standards at the grassroots. The model has been replicated around the world.

Chandra Gurung was from Sikles, spoke the language and was a son of the soil. Yeshi Lama used to be respected by the people of Dolpa and Langtang, who loved her for her open vibrant nature and her tireless work. Then there was Harka Gurung, geographer extraordinaire. His loss will perhaps be felt the most by all. Harka Gurung’s geography set the standard, and was perhaps the one who most understood Nepal’s cultural and natural diversity.

Rather than being setback, Nepal’s conservation scene has rebounded in the year since the tragedy. Ghana Gurung, conservation program director at WWF-Nepal, describes a new ecotourism project in Langtang, patterned after Chandra Gurung and Mingma Sherpa’s ACAP and Sagarmatha. The Langtang project will be managed by locals and tourism income will lift living standards.

The deaths of so many high-
achievers has in fact catalysed and energised those left behind to do more. Led by protégés of those that died in the crash, Nepal’s conservationists are now working to fill the void.

“Everyone thought that there was no hope for conservation,” says Ghana Gurung, “we’ve proved them wrong; conservation is stronger than ever with more funding, more projects and more partnerships.”

There are plans for a 10 hectare Ghunsa Memorial Park community forest in Gokarna. The government has allocated Rs 1 million for a masterplan and Chandra Gurung’s friends from abroad are chipping in. The park has become a rallying point for families to concentrate their energies.

A book on Chandra Gurung’s life and his conservation is also in the works. It is penned by Manjushree Thapa and will be released on 1 December, his birthday. Passion and commitment for one’s work were Chandra Gurung’s watchwords. He would say: “Conservation can’t wait.”

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 achievem
Fix this first

The quota system for polls is fraught with problems

ANALYSIS by SHRISHTI JHA

Despite social insecurity, ethnic turbulence and the troubles in the tarai, this country is headed for elections. The political parties are gearing up for the nomination process under which they have committed to proportional representation. But there are legal and procedural flaws in the quotas of the Proportional Representation (PR) system as stipulated by the Constituent Assembly Members Election Act, 2064 and their political, administrative, and legal fallout. Under the PR system, there is a provision for quotas to ensure fair representation madhesi (31.2 percent), dalit (13 percent), Indigenous groups (37.8 percent), disadvantaged regions (Achham, Kalikot, Jajarkot, Jumla, Dolpa, Bajhang, Bajura, Mugu and Humla districts 4 percent), and ‘Others’ (30.2 percent) which add up to an impossible 116.2 percent. Not only did someone get the arithmetic terribly wrong, but there are more problems with the ‘closed list’. Across all these reservations, half of the seats in the PR and a third in the overall CA are earmarked for women. The parties are supposed to finalise the closed list during the nomination process itself. The Election Commission has declared that it will strictly enforce the quotas hinting that non-compliance can amount to losing seats.

Political parties can freely pick and choose candidates to occupy the seats that the party has won. Foreseeing problems that this could entail, the Election Commission wanted a provision for a fixed closed list but the politicians decided otherwise. Post-election candidate selection is undemocratic and unfair because it gives undue supremacy to party bosses and would make MPs beholden to them and encourage corruption, nepotism and sycophancy.

Thus, the 240 seats of the PR plus 17 nominated seats in the constituent assembly would be appointed by a handful of elitist leaders who have no track record of being inclusive in the past. There is also a potential problem with the ‘Others’ category because it goes against the spirit of the Interim Constitution which states that this category should include minorities like Muslims and other communities who do not fall in the specified quotas. ‘Others’ also presumes that each candidate, therefore every Nepali citizen, should fit neatly into one or other category. Not only would this be impossible it would also splinter Nepali society. Essentially, this category goes beyond the ambit of affirmative action envisaged in the interim constitution.

Proportional representation was supposed to ensure representation of marginalised groups rather than doing out seats to political favourites. The present ruling castes already have guaranteed seats under the First Past The Post (FPTP) system. The inclusion of brahmin/chettris in the quota system is at the cost of minority community members who might not find representation. Not only did someone get the arithmetic terribly wrong, but there are more problems with the ‘closed list’. Across all these reservations, half of the seats in the PR and a third in the overall CA are earmarked for women. The parties are supposed to finalise the closed list during the nomination process itself. The Election Commission has declared that it will strictly enforce the quotas hinting that non-compliance can amount to losing seats.

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Life can never be normal again for the families of the Kathmandu bomb victims

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

Since the news came of Anisha KC’s death in a bomb blast in Birgunj on 2 September, her mother, Sangita KC, has not been able to get out of bed. Her father, Krishna Bahadur KC, was so shattered by the news that he could not even go to perform Anisha’s last rites. Her 67-year-old grandfather, Lila Bahadur KC, was so shattered by the news that he could not even go to perform Anisha’s last rites. Her 67-year-old grandfather, Lila Bahadur KC, was so shattered by the news that he could not even go to perform Anisha’s last rites. Her 67-year-old grandfather, Lila Bahadur KC, was so shattered by the news that he could not even go to perform Anisha’s last rites.

“When did my daughter die? Was she fallen from our cruel cruelty?”

Anisha, just 18 years old, was on her way home from Birgunj Vikram Science Campus, waiting for the bus, when the bomb exploded and she died on the spot. Friends and teachers remember her as hard-working and extremely smart. She topped her class every year and was committed to becoming a doctor, which is why she joined the science faculty as soon as she had finished SLC. She would spend her free time playing computer games and liked to help her parents around the house.

Sorumati Khadka was waiting with Anisha at the bus stop for a bus to Thankot. When the bomb exploded, Sorumati was severely injured. She was rushed to Bir Hospital, where she fought for her life for 53 hours before succumbing to her wounds. Like Anisha, Sorumati’s family is still shattered. Her father, Narendra Kumar Khadka, 56, and mother, Pushpa Khadka, 48, have still not been able to deal with the shock that their daughter is no more and that she will no longer walk in, dressed in school uniform, like she did when she was alive.

“Whoever killed our daughter may live a thousand years, but may they feel like death every moment they live,” says Pushpa, looking at Sandiya’s picture. According to Pushpa, her daughter wanted to be a nurse, was happiest while working with elderly people and shunned discrimination of any kind. Like Anisha she was extremely hard-working. “She would study until the small hours, then wake up early to perform puja every morning,” says Sandhya’s father, Narendra. “In fact she was up till late the night before she died, preparing for a class presentation.” Her parents tried their best to save their daughter. They bought expensive medicine when Sandiya was in surgery, and her uncle donated his blood because it matched her blood type.

Only memories

KUNDA DIXIT IN SARLAHI

The road leading from the East-West Highway down to the Sarlahi district capital of Malangawa is the only proof visitors need of the disregard in Kathmandu for the tarai.

Buses, tracks and bullock carts negotiate a road that looks like it is riddled with bomb craters. But most of the time there are no vehicles because it has been closed cumulatively for more than three months in the past two years by various madness groups.

“If you ask me, I’m fed up,” says Chandra Dalal Yadav who gets off his bicycle to negotiate a water-filled rut as wide as the road. “All we want here is peace and development so we can get on with our lives. But these politicians and criminals are not allowing it to happen.” It is the same story across the madhesi, the feeling that politicians are playing games in Kathmandu and criminalised extremists have hijacked a movement that tried for the first time to pk peg important respect to the people of the tarai. Paradoxically, all along the belt from Banu to Sunsari visitors
Building bridges in the madhes "All we want here is peace and development so we can get on with our lives."

Sandhya’s injuries were only from the waist down, but quite severe.

Also realise that things are not as bad as they are portrayed in the Kathmandu media. The situation is not out of control, the political space for negotiations still exists and all it needs is leadership and commitment from the government in Kathmandu.

Surprisingly, those saying this most vociferously are local leaders of the political parties themselves. “My party only sat up and took notice when Madhab Kumar Nepal’s house in Gaur was burnt down,” says a UML worker here who didn’t want his name revealed.

It is hard to explain why the madhes crisis is not registering in Kathmandu when most senior party leaders including Nepal and Prime Minister Koirala are from the tari. The anti-Maoist feeling here is intense, and most here believe the parties are allowing the madhes violence to simmer because it is keeping the Maoists out.

With Kathmandu distracted by its own power games, local civil society, party leaders and media groups have taken the lead in keeping communal tensions from flaring up. Every week there is a new incident that could potentially set off pogroms like the one that engulfed Kaptipattan last week.

Two weeks ago, madhesi pilgrims were allegedly harassed by Chure Bhabhar workers on the highway and false rumours spread that they had been raped.

“We immediately met with the administration, civic leaders and the media to calm things down,” recalls the UML’s district member Ram Chandran Chaudhary, “I was threatened by militants, my house was surrounded but luckily there was no retaliation.”

People of hill origin who have lived in the tari for generations say they face targeted extortion from tari militant groups and some have left. But many whose ancestors came here during the Rana days are determined to stay. Ironically, they fear the Chure Bhabhar, an organization set up in Sarlahi to defend pahadi interests, because of retaliation by madhesi. Other pahadi say the fear of Chure Bhabhar reprisals is the only deterrent against madhesi attacks on pahadi. The absence of the state and the apathy of the political parties have exacerbated this polarisation. It has allowed anyone with an axe to grind to become a madhesi or pahadi militant.

The hope is that elections will fill this political vacuum. On Wednesday, Pushpa Kamal Deb kicked off his MJF’s election campaign with a speech in Jaleswor. The NC held a mass meeting in Gaur last week, and even sent its popular senior leader Alla Alami to rally supporters. At a gathering of NC cadre in Malangwa on Monday, even the familiar bickering over party tickets seemed like a welcome sign of normalcy. The UML has also been mobilising support and is confident it will do well. All this despite a ban on election campaigning by various tari militant groups.

Most moderate madhesi say their only demand is respect and representation, and even symbolic measures to include madhesi in decision-making and launching show-case development schemes would help. The floods in August were an opportunity for Kathmandu to show it cared, but it squandered it.

“The feeling here is we haven’t got anything out of Nepal, so why should we call ourselves Nepalis,” explains the NC’s Surekha K. Sah. “The challenge is to make madhesis feel like Nepalis not just by political representation but by investing in communications and infrastructure.”

Repairing the road to Malangwa would be a good start.

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Sandhya’s injuries were only from the waist down, but quite severe. “All our efforts failed,” says Pushpa.

The same evening, Pancha Bahadur Shahi was near the micro-bus that exploded in Balaju. The area where the incident took place was crowded, and Shahi knew he could not face the sight of blood so he decided to go home. Little did he know that his beloved wife, Kamala Devi Shahi, 56, was one of the victims.

The couple had been shopping in the afternoon for their grandson’s rice feeding ceremony. They bought two tickets for Ram Devi’s yoga session and Kamala sent her husband home. When she did not come home in the evening, Pancha was worried so he rushed to Balaju police station. He did not see Kamala’s name there. At Bir Hospital he was taken to Bir Hospital, so he went there too. At Bir Hospital he was told that a woman whose description sounded like his wife, had been taken to the Teaching Hospital at Maharajgunj. When Pancha saw his wife’s body there, he fainted.

Pancha and Kamala were married 40 years ago. Neighbours say that they were inseparable. “We were always together. If she thought she would have to die this way?” asks Pancha.

Shahin had recently moved to their Balaju house from Banasthali. She was a devout Buddhist who would visit Swayambhunath every morning. She was excitedly planning her grandson’s feeding ceremony and the couple were planning to visit their children in Germany and the US in a few months’ time. “It is ironic that someone who believed in non-violence was a victim of such terrible violence,” says Pancha.

The families are asking that the victims be declared martyrs and necessary respects be paid. They are outraged by the government’s response to the explosion. Anisha’s father asks: “The explosions happened in three places. Why hasn’t the government found those responsible and punished them?”

Sadly, the families do not have very high hopes of the government. Pancha Shahi says the government needs to do more than just draw sketches of who they think may have been responsible. “If the victims had been children of ministers they would understand our pain. We don’t expect much from the government, after all this is a state of impunity,” says Sandhya’s father, Narendra.
How, then, does an economist account for Malaysia’s success? Economically, Malaysia learned from its neighbours. Too many of the ex-colonies, rejecting their colonial heritage, turned to Russia and communism. Malaysia wisely took an alternative course, looking instead to the highly successful countries of East Asia. It invested in education and technology, pushed a high savings rate, enacted a strong and effective affirmative action program, and adopted sound macroeconomic policies. Malaysia also recognised that success required an active role for government. It eschewed ideology, following or rejecting outsiders’ advice on a pragmatic basis. Most tellingly, during the financial crisis of 1997, it did not adopt IMF policies, and as a result had the shortest and shallowest downturn of any of the afflicted countries. When it re-emerged, it was not burdened with debt and bankrupt firms like so many of its neighbours.

This success was, of course, not only a matter of economics: had Malaysia followed the policies recommended by the IMF, it would have torn apart the social fabric created over the preceding four decades.

Malaysia’s success thus should be studied both by those looking for economic prosperity and those seeking to understand how our world can live together, not just with toleration, but also with respect, sharing their common humanity and working together to achieve common goals.

Joseph Stiglitz is a Nobel laureate in economics. His latest book is Making Globalization Work.

The numbers themselves say a lot. At independence, Malaysia was one of the poorest countries in the world. Its GDP was comparable to that of Egypt and some 5 percent below that of Ghana. Today, Malaysia’s income is 7.6 times that of Ghana and more than 2.5 times that of Egypt. In the global growth league tables, Malaysia is in the top tier, along with China, Taiwan, South Korea and Thailand.

Moreover, the benefits of the growth have been shared. Hard-core poverty is set to be eliminated by 2010, with the overall poverty rate falling to 2.8 percent. Malaysia has succeeded in markedly reducing the income divides that separated various ethnic groups, not by bringing the top down, but by bringing the bottom up.

Part of the country’s success in reducing poverty reflects strong job creation. While unemployment is a problem in most of the world, Malaysia has been importing labour. In the 50 years since independence, 7.24 million jobs have been created, an increase of 261 percent, which would be equivalent to the creation of 105 million jobs in the United States.

There were many reasons not to have expected Malaysia to be a success. Just as Malaysia was gaining its independence, the Nobel Prize winning economist Gunnar Myrdal wrote an influential book called Asian Drama, in which he predicted a bleak future for the region.

Moreover, Malaysia’s multiracial, multicultural society made it more vulnerable to civil strife. At independence, Malaysia faced a communist insurgency. And Malaysia had a third strike against it: for all the talk of the white man’s burden, the European powers did little to improve living standards in the countries they ruled.
REVIEW

all it corny, campy, or starry-eyed. Hairspray is all that. But if you are complaining about it, then you’re a serious sourpuss. Now on its third incarnation, Hairspray is all about having fun unconditionally and celebrating diversity in all shapes, sizes and colours.

Take a sparkling, plus-size girl with an unshakable passion for dancing and combine her with a bunch of black kids with the coolest moves. Add to it the queer chutzpah of original creator John Waters, and what you get is a big romp in the name of solidarity.

Adapted from a Broadway version of Waters’ 1988 film, this musical is about Tracy Turnblad (Blonsky), a Baltimorean high-schooler from the early 60s, who dreams of dancing in the city’s most popular teen-idol TV program ‘The Corny Collins Show’ and also of winning the heart of school hottie Link Larkin (Efron). A quick lesson from some black classmates at footing it gets her a chance to both feature in the show and befriend Link.

Racist TV executive and ex-beauty queen Velma Von Tussle (Pfeiffer), already riled by Tracy’s hefty presence, notices her affinity with the black folks and manages to cancel the show’s monthly Negro Day. This triggers Tracy to make a stand, put everything in jeopardy and cross the racial boundary to protest segregation.

Naturally, a film that treats something as weighty as the civil rights movement so giddily can’t be without glitches. Let’s not even get into the problems of reducing black criticism of white supremacy to that of simple difference and intolerance. But the African Americans in the film also appear too jaded, put out by their situation yet completely inert, as if waiting for the bubbly optimism of our heroine to rescue them. This is not only naïve but also dishonest.

Blonsky nevertheless sells it. Zestful, good-natured, and endearing, she is perfectly cast. Unlike most teen stars we’ve seen in recent years, she is relatable and takes to her role with the greatest authenticity. So naturally does she portray her character’s brazen romanticism that her dynamism itself feels like an indictment of the complicity of ‘decent’, law-abiding individuals maintaining the racist status quo.

And then there is John Travolta in a fat suit as Tracy’s feistier mother, Edna, a shy laundress who is overprotective of her daughter and hasn’t left home in over two decades. Camp tradition has had it that this role be played by female impersonators. Travolta, however, didn’t want to play a drag queen. He wanted to play a woman. Who knows how much this had to do with the Scientology hooey that he subscribes to. But Travolta does well, lending Edna a feminine grace and decorum, soon making us forget that it’s a man who’s playing the role.

There are other stars like Christopher Walken, Michelle Pfeiffer and Queen Latifah, and director Adam Shankman has handled them well enough to allow them a chance to shine. This is a truly upbeat summer movie. His version of camp may seem a bit moderated, but Hairspray is still an all-inclusive, celebratory shindig.

Director: Adam Shankman
Cast: Nikki Blonsky, John Travolta, Michelle Pfeiffer, Christopher Walken, Queen Latifah, Zac Efron.
2007. PG. 117 min.

Dancing queen

Romantic schoolgirl battles racism when her moment of stardom beckons
ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS
- photo.circle with representatives of World Press Photo, 22-29 September, 9.45 PM at the Sundhara Bakery Cafe.
- Digital art exhibition by Binshu Shreshtha at New Orleans, Patan, until 30 September. 5522708

EVENTS
- Yuva Chalail Shrinkhala with Pushkhar Shah, 3-5PM on 21 September at Martin Chautari.
- Hi Blue Sky party at the Last Resort with JL Siles and the Pan Aminda, 22-23 September, buses leave on 22 September at 9PM from the sales office
- Shastrartha on peace building and conflict management with Purna Kunt Adhithiary and Dilshun Kaffe, 4-6PM, 22 September at Martin Chautari.
- Aatailare Discussion Series on ethic diversity in the Nepal Army, 23 September at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- FSA '07 preview and screening of Michael Moore's Dicke at Yama Maya Kendra, 23 September, 9PM, 5542544
- CSONG monthly lecture on mysterious remote Manang by Tripble Gurung, 26 September, 6PM at Shankar Hotel.
- School Bullying party at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- Geheime Wahlen by Yanki and brothers at Moksh, Pulchok, 8.30 PM onwards, on 21 September.
- Western classical music with flute, violin and cello at New Orleans, Patan, 22 September. 5522708
- 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
- High tea at the Hyatt Regency, taste pear and berry crepes at The Lounge, 4.30-6.30PM, 4491234
- Italian barbecue lunch at Alfreco, Soalte Crowne Plaza, Saturdays, 12.30-3.30PM, Rs 300 plus taxes. 4273999
- Jazz in Patan with coffee, food, drinks, and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 5522708
- BBQ, chilled beer, cocktails and live music at the Kashmir Restaurant and Bar, Darbar Marg, 6216490
- BBQ Unlimited at Splash Bar & Grill Radison Hotel, Laximpur, 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 Kings of Kathmandu, Ramshy, 4260440
- 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
- Experience Hyatt one night stay on double occupancy, full buffet breakfast at The Cafe and access to Club Oasis, Rs 5,000 plus taxes, valid only for Nepali and local residents. 4491234

GETAWAYS
- Star cruises vacation from Singapore, sailings on 2 September-11 November, bookings till 31 October, 50 percent discount for companions. 2012345
- Overnight package at Dwarika’s Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, Dhillthel, includes accomodation, snacks, dinner and breakfast. 4479488
- Experience Hyatt one night stay on double occupancy, full buffet breakfast at The Cafe and access to Club Oasis, Rs 5,000 plus taxes, valid only for Nepali and local residents. 4491234

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
GRIDLOCKED: The government’s decision to issue petrol only on the presentation of special coupons not available to taxi drivers sparks an impromptu blockade that stalled traffic all day Thursday from Pulchok to Kopundole.

SHAKE-UP: Maoist second-in-command Baburam Bhattarai is all smiles as he meets with British international development minister Shahid Malik on Wednesday.

SHALL WE DANCE: Hisila Yami, former Minister for Physical Planning and Works, grooves to revolutionary tunes after quitting government at a Maoist rally at Tundikhel on Tuesday.

JUSTICE AWAITS: Leaders from the National Muslim Forum Nepal meet Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala at Baluwatar on Thursday to demand swift action against those responsible for the Kapilbastu violence.
An ass’ guide to politics

Unless you have at least 12 points don’t even bother demanding anything from this government. That is the lesson we can glean from ongoing agitations across the country. It all started with the Maoists raising their 40 demands in 1996. The Deuba government at that time was willing to go along with almost all of those demands, including one that said “All Nepalis should be equal immediately.”

But that wasn’t enough to satisfy the comrades who took the country to war, and along the way we had the 12-point MoU in Delhi, the 9-point agreement between the eight parties, and then The Fierce One came up with his own 22-point demand on which there was major disagreement with Girijau and hence the present stalemate.

The Ass’ latest count is that various janajati groups cumulatively have a total of 108 demands. Tallying the ten-point demand of the Cobras, the 15-point demand of the Tigers, the seven-point demand of the Forum, and the 12 and 16 demands respectively of the Goit and Jwala factions we have a total of 60 demands. Add to that the demands of the Badis, Kamaiyas, Dalits, Muslims, Women, Maoist victims, Victims of Maoists, Petroleum tanker drivers, Gays and Lesbians and you have demands running in several thousands. The Ass’ main demand is that all these demands be consolidated into one demand. Only then is there some chance, slim though it may be, that it will be fulfilled.

As expected, the comrades decided to pull the plug on themselves at their Grand-Mass Meeting. Good for them. This shows maturity and quick learning of the ways of coalition politics. They must have learnt this from Italy, which after all is Gramsci territory, that if you don’t like the way preparations are going for elections you walk out of government and play the underdog against the status quoists. And you know what, this strategy may actually work.

The Ass reported last week about unusually reliable sources that His Fierceness was down with hypertension or spondilitis, or both. But that wasn’t the reason he was absent from Tundikhel, he was deep in negotiations with Girijau on when and how to declare a republic.

One of the proposals the prime minister has put out is to prevail upon Kingji to quietly slip out of the country on a health-related visit at least till elections. The Shah dynasty ancestral village in Rajasthan may be a perfect place to chew the cud.

Nepal’s national airline may be ailing but it has a claim to fame: it has taken Nepali aviation to the age before the Wright Brothers. It also made a major public relations coup by inviting international reporters to the hangar when they sacrificed a black goat on the nose landing gear of the 757 so it would not develop anymore snags. The news travelled around the world and was even printed in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and was much talked about. This is the kind of promotion for Nepal’s tourism that money can’t buy. The Ass hears that even Boeing has taken note of this supernatural method of aircraft maintenance and may include the procedure in its Operator’s Manual.

The Ass, being wise beyond his ears, has just heard through the tara grapevine that the JTMJ-Jwala has taken responsibility for the Nokia phone battery that exploded last week, injuring a user.

ass@nepalitimes.com