

ON THE TOUR

A PEOPLE WAR

Images of the Tamil conflict 1996-1999

மேலதிக அமைதி கருத்துக்களை புகழினை விருந்தினர்

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ONE STEP FORWARD TWO STEPS BACK: Baburam Bhataraï standing in for Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal delivers a fiery speech at Tundikhel on Tuesday saying his party would not abide by the Election Commission's rules.

The resignation crisis, Kapilbastu and the eastern tarai all add up to a loud wakeup 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. ●

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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.

The Maoist chairman is finding it difficult 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 elections and holding the polls through full proportional 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, they have common purpose with the royalists.

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 even more radical than his party, 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 project themselves as a force for change in contrast to the traditional parties, which are seen to be status quoists and reap 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 hotheads in his party don't: the main reason they don't have support from the people is because of the continued highhandedness of the YCL & Co. A dogmatic 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 madhes 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 Belahiya, Sunauli via India looking for safe refuge.



MUKESH POKHREL

While Butwal burned

There will be more Kapilbastus unless the parties act

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

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



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

Abdul Moid Khan was an influential leader in Kapilbastu and bordering districts. Viscerally anti-Maoist, he headed a vigilante group and had links with politicians and criminals in the tarai and Uttar Pradesh.

His killing may have stemmed from political rivalry or a personal feud, or perhaps groups who knew there would be a backlash and wanted to create instability carried it out. His supporters, Muslims but also some madhesi Hindus, suspected the Maoists, vandalised pahadi houses, attacked both security

forces and Maoist camps and torched vehicles. Some people came from across the border to add to the unrest. There was retaliation in Butwal where madhesi were attacked and a mosque vandalised.

In the polarised atmosphere of the tarai, it was inevitable that the situation would take a communal turn. But what is striking is that there were several layers to this confrontation. There was a tussle between Khan's supporters and Maoists because of past antagonism and for political space, between pahadis and madhesi, and there was potential that this would turn into a Hindu-Muslim riot. Other extremist groups on both sides also jumped into the fray.

The Kapilbastu turmoil should not surprise us because, while there were underlying local dynamics involved, it is a reflection of the major systemic problems that exist in the tarai: the absence of the state, the political vacuum, the rise of violence, and a political context where ethnicity and identity have come to be the defining feature and inter-community relations have deteriorated.

The state has abdicated its responsibility and there is not even a rudimentary level of governance. Instead of being pro-active, warning the political leadership about brewing tensions and maintaining basic administration, most Home Ministry bureaucrats are busy seeking postings out of the tarai or acting as intelligence agents. Others are reluctant to take any action because it might invite the wrath of seniors.

Local district-level party units, which can

serve as a potential moderating force, are dormant. In a way, the NC is both at the root of the problem and a possible solution. Its national leadership retains the same prejudices about madhesi and doesn't want to share power. The party's madhesi politicians are struggling within the party, looking up to Girija Koirala for direction, or exploring other prospects.

This means a strong network with deep pahadi-madhesi political and civic linkages has become inert, leaving the political space open for extremists, criminals, and fringe groups. Unless mainstream parties like the NC reform themselves, promote madhesi faces, become active and engage, this vacuum will be filled by others.

Kapilbastu is symptomatic. The entire tarai will have armed groups fighting each other with the state as a silent onlooker, 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 pahadis do not know how to cope with power slipping out of their hands. Others have become insecure, resulting in migration or belligerence, as manifested by the Chure Bhawar. While most madhesi don't want inter-community strife, there are some who are pleased with the discourse of hate and relish the thought of 'teaching pahadis a lesson'. All the ingredients for communal riots, though not a full-scale ethnic conflict, are present.

There will more Kapilbastus, both in the east and west of the plains. ●

Violence in a vacuum

Weak government is leading to an acceptance of violence

It was only when the Maoists walked out of the coalition cabinet on Tuesday that the seven party alliance woke up from its collective reverie. The NC swiftly remembered the Maoists weren't just another junior partner in the ruling alliance. The UML was jolted out of its apathy and inaction. Other parties realised the fragility of the peace process.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Backroom negotiations began immediately to patch things up. If Krishna Bahadur Mahara and his comrades return to Singha 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 morning, no prominent politician has deemed it fit to visit the riot-affected region and offer sympathy and relief to victims of violence.

Khan was related to the alleged gangster and late parliamentarian Mirza Dilsad Beg, and had been used by almost all political parties. He headed the anti-Maoist vigilante group, 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 Hindutva elements.

Whoever killed Khan, it wouldn't have been a cause for a communal flare-up had the local administration responded quickly. The backlash in Rupandehi could have been avoided with 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

Lahan, Nepalganj, Gaur, and now Kapilbastu, is a national disgrace.

Preoccupied with multiple crises, the prime minister is unable to pay attention to details. Home Minister Krishna Prasad Sitaula lacks stature to inspire a demoralised police force. But there is more to frequent violent eruptions than mere failure of policing. It somehow seems that violence has become the normal method of articulating 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 first casualty. Maoists argue that they had the right to raise arms against the state because it was not to their liking. Since revolution isn't a tea-party, victimisation of innocents was unavoidable. Jaikrishna Goit and Jwala Singh are speaking the same language that was once taught to them by Mohan Baidya. Violence is also more likely when there is a widespread belief that state institutions with a legal monopoly over coercive force are weak or

partisan. When a government is perceived to be both, risks of lawlessness are much higher. Unfortunately, most Nepalis don't identify themselves with the machinery of the government that supposedly exists to protect, support and serve the people. There never was much faith in the impartiality of officers. Now even their competence has come under a cloud.

So, everybody is taking the law into their own hands. Fragile inter-community relations in the tarai show that donor-inspired NGOs have failed to function as forums of social aggregation. In times of crisis, DINGOs are no match even to much-maligned bourgeois initiatives such as Rotary, Lions, Jaycees and Chambers of Commerce and Industry. The role must be filled by genuine civil society, trade unions, community-based organisations and voluntary groups to counter the culture of violence.

The best respect we can pay to the victims of last week's violence is to help create a culture of tolerance, empathy and peace. Pious words, but then what are the heavens for? ●

LETTERS

NO ACCIDENT

There is more to the assessment of the accident in Rautahat ('No accident', #366) 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 people get killed and the other abets it 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 bandas? What if my dear friend Narottam Rajbhandari, his wife Sami along with three others had not come out of the microbus to push the van? This accident could have been prevented, the volatile political situation was the reason 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 time, it hit home hard, and it hurts.

Tirtha Mali, email

MODERATE MADHESIS

I don't know what solution Prashant Jha is trying to suggest, and to whom (Tarai 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 JTMM (both) or MMT 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 pahadis. If they have the same view as most people, then 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 leg 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 tarai people.

Ram Manohar, email

DONOR FATIGUE

Nepali Times deserves thanks for publishing Binod Bhattarai's 'Peace 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



identify relevant themes and strategies after understanding the situation of the country. This was taken seriously by a group of Nepali women and men who have been working since March 2007 to give this visioning initiative a concrete but 'non-projectised' shape. This citizens' initiative for Visioning New Nepal (VNN) is currently gaining momentum with its own steering committee, core group and secretariat and has conducted workshops in various districts. With the support of the concerned citizens at district and Kathmandu levels, corporate sponsors and donor agencies, the initiative will be going to all the districts of the country. We have started consultations with NPC on how the final vision document published at the end of this citizen-led visioning exercise and hope to influence deliberations on the constituent assembly as well as the 11th five year plan.

Anup Tiwari,
www.hamronayanepal.com

CK LAL

I found CK Lal's 'The coming potato riots' (State of the State, #366) a stunningly astute article. I am an ex-pat British now a US citizen for 31 years. I travelled extensively throughout the so-called Third World in the 70s. After recently retiring I finally visited Nepal achieving a lifetime dream. As do many westerners, I fell in love with the country, the people more than the wonderful geography. Despite all the modern strains and stresses Nepal still sets an example of diverse peoples, cultures, and religions coexisting. Please (to the people who really try to run Nepal) don't

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', #366) 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 to the pressing problems. I think our highbrow politicians, policy makers, planners 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 Jaljala* 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 are 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
All Nepalese Group, Malaysia
Now in Malaysia

● Civilised society must have been deeply affronted by the inveighed attack on the editors of Nepali independent press by the Maoist magazine *Hamro Jaljala*. Besmirching Kunda Dixit as a venal royalist ('joker') is itself a joke. All editors named are ones who remonstrated against the autocratic royal regime with indomitable courage and fought for democracy. Inveighing these pioneers of free press is a menace to the civilized society. There's no doubt that Maoists are at daggers drawn against those who expose their foibles 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

CORRECTION

The picture accompanying 'Demolition derby' (#365) about houses that violated zoning laws in Pokhara said 3,000 houses were torn down. The number was closer to 350 in the city area and another 400, including roadside stalls and huts, on the highway to Lekhnath.

- Ed

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



MIN BAJRACHARYA

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 republic 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 would 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 Madhab 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

Terre 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 the Delegation office 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 Terre 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 Tdh 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 Terre 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 demonstrated successful record and progressively more senior responsibilities. Experience in programme coordination a strong asset. Extensive field experience necessary.

Skills/Qualities: Sound knowledge of programme cycle management; Familiarity with child protection issues required; Experience in health programmes, mother and child health issues and psychosocial work will be considered strong assets; experience dealing with various funding partners a plus; ability to work independently on several tasks with minimal supervision; computer literate; excellent oral and written English skills; ability to work well with others and maintain positive working relationships; ability to travel extensively within Nepal and abroad.

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Please send or email your CV/resume and a cover letter to:

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PO Box: 2430

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This Vacancy Announcement will not be incorporated into the employment contract. It is intended as a guide and should not be viewed as an exhaustive list of responsibilities.

Deadline to receive application no later than October 5, 2007. Applications received after the submission date will not be considered. Only short-listed candidates will be invited for interview.



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India's Infrastructure Development Finance Company, along with the Asian Development Bank, DEG-KfW, and the International Finance Corporation signed a Memorandum of Understanding with a private equity group in Nepal, and a consortium of all the leading Nepali banks and financial institutions to jointly incorporate an Infrastructure Development Bank in the country. The IDB will develop and provide a comprehensive range of financial products and services.



Pokhara's Shangri-la


.....

Shangri-la Bank opened its central office in Pokhara. Established with permission from Nepal Rastra Bank, the central office is located in Pokhara's New Road. Kaski, Baglung, Tanahu, Nawalparasi, Rupandehi, Chitwan, Makwanpur, Parsa, Kabhrepalanchok and Sindhuli are all under its operating network.

Blue blood

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To celebrate the first anniversary of Bluebird Mall and the 45th anniversary of Red Cross, Bluebird organised a blood donation campaign. A total of 112 people participated. The Bluebird Mall is opened in September 2006 and has over 50 brands and outlets.



Certified

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Podrej Steel & Iron Industry (PSII) has become Nepal's first company to be certified with the ISO 9001:2000 for design, manufacture and supply of bank security equipment and office equipment. The certificate was awarded by certification body Det Norske Veritas, Netherlands.

NEW PRODUCTS

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CHEESY: Cheese Light is the new offering from Kwaliti Diet and Food Products. Priced at Rs 10, this biscuit promises high energy, low sugar and low salt. Kwaliti is also the producer of Butter Cracker, Tasty Tasty, and Bon Bon brand biscuits.



WAXY: Waxco Fuel System Cleaner is newly launched fuel cleaner. When added to a tankful of fuel, Waxco cleans all deposits from fuel injectors, carburettors, ports, valves and combustion chambers.

"We want to get young people talking across cultures"

Martin Davidson, chief executive of the British Council, spoke to Nepali Times about English language, the organisation's evolving role, its work with young leaders, and future projects.

Nepali Times: What are some of the projects of the British Council in Nepal at present?

Martin Davidson: In the past we used to work on a country-by-country basis. That has changed with regionalisation because we recognise that right across the region people are concerned about similar issues, and the solutions they are trying to find are often similar as well.

One of the advantages we have as a global organisation is that we can create links between communities that have similar problems, and find similar solutions. English language is always going to be an area we want to work on because we recognise the demand. Social change and the development of young leaders are also areas the British Council is involved in.

We particularly want to work on developing links between young people of this region and the young people of the UK. We call it cultural dialogue but what we really mean is how do we get young people talking across cultures. We believe dialogues between cultures are very powerful in dispelling some of the misconceptions within the region, between regions, and in the UK.

Areas like active citizenship and leadership programs for young people are areas which provide an opportunity to develop cultural links between the UK and Nepal, and also provide really important new skills to young Nepalis.

Tell us a bit more about the British Council's work on climate change.

I don't think we should involve ourselves very much in the science of climate change. What I think we can do is provide opportunities to people to learn more about the subject so they are able to engage in a way which

enables them to become leaders in encouraging people to take climate change seriously.

I see climate change from the aspect of leadership. It isn't simply 'let's tell everybody that climate change is going to be damaging', but actually thinking about solutions. For now we are focussing on water, and we think that this program will be a great opportunity for the young people to



MIN BAJRACHARYA

Living in the past

Too many of our ageing politicians are out of touch

Someone recently asked me what I thought was holding Nepal back. My answer was not: "lack of peace, and here's why we need more peace-building efforts". Nor was it: "we have too few conflict resolution activities, we need more".



STRICTLY BUSINESS

Ashutosh Tiwari

The answer was much simpler. What's holding Nepal back is the incapability of our politicians, who are above the age of 45, to inspire trust. Sure, they speak beautiful Nepali. They give fiery speeches. On television, they are seen intently locked in one *barta* after another. But their words, spoken or written, have stopped inspiring trust.

They purport to represent the multi-faced entity called the Nepali janata. But they do not respect it enough to act on its laments and aspirations. What's more, they do not trust themselves to take any one incomplete national task to completion so that everyone can focus on the next task.

As a result, Nepal continues to swing between promise (tourism and infrastructure development, untapped potential of its youth) and peril (ethnic violence, long drawn-out uncertainties over the country's future, sickening political blame games). And the

present crop of netas' repeated failure to exercise and sustain trust to move ahead towards a shared future is getting unbearably costly for many Nepalis under 40, who are leaving the country in droves as students, professionals and labourers.

The older politicians' inability to inspire trust has two roots: sociological and legal. In rural Nepal, people of different ethnic groups have long lived close to one another – harmoniously, yes, but akin to items in a salad bowl: distinct and separate. It's to globalisation's credit that a villager raised in the caste of blacksmith or as an ethnic minority or as a pundit – sharing as they do with one another only levels of poverty and Nepali passports – can today dream of a prosperous future not in Nepal but in Qatar or Malaysia.

Likewise, only 30 years ago in urban Nepal, not many ventured outside the comfortable circle of their ethnic group, clan or caste for marriage, business deals and social alliances. It is only in the last 20 years that people who 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 Nepal's ethnic diversity. The old,

however, are still stuck with seeing the nation as a divided land. So the only way they know how to buy complaining groups' loyalty is to sign a few lines of hastily crafted agreements without ever bothering to understand, let alone be sensitive to, the grievances and their larger implications.

Compounding this problem of trust is the sheer unpredictability of Nepal's legal system. It has been abused to such a degree that laws do not mean anything anymore. And when legal outcomes are always uncertain or drawn out, one can get away with committing just about any crime – protest programs that curtail others' freedom, murder, fighting, rape, arson and bandas – until some international agency shouts: "Enough is enough, we are coming in," which basically means: "No matter what you say, we do not trust you to solve your problems yourselves."

Training in peace-building and conflict resolution activities on a piecemeal basis is all well and good, but it has become so formulaic that it is often ineffective. Given the persistent lack of trust among old politicians (who we cannot replace for there are no effective mechanisms to do so), it's time we focussed on building up trust among politicians so that they work together with all eyes toward our common future. ●

become spokespeople for water-related issues.

Why is English language important today?

Right across the world English is seen as a skill which is important to provide for young people because it is needed in international business and communication. We don't see English as somehow substituting for people's own language, and one of the greatest problems is when societies allow their own indigenous language to become secondary to English.

That is not our purpose. We recognise international personal and business communication is more and more in English. You need English to engage in the world, and part of our role is to help provide that service. Our job is to help people meet their personal social aspirations, and English is a key component in helping build their aspirations. It is not enough for us to teach English to a small number of people in classrooms in Kathmandu. The next stage really is to start thinking about how to provide more support to teachers of English in the public sector here in Nepal and also in other countries.

What achievements is the British Council proud of in Nepal?

We are really proud of the relationships we create. I have met people who have had long-term relationships with the UK started by their contact with the British Council. Also, the British Council is working with people who have ambitions for the country, who are keen on providing opportunities to Nepalis 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 project is small but very important because for the first time volunteering is not about people from the rich countries coming to poor countries. It actually recognises that volunteering is about people going back and forth between each other's countries, that there are people in 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 young leaders on active citizenship is also very important. We are beginning to have discussions on vocational education, and that is important because ultimately the development and success of Nepal will be based upon its ability to provide employment to young people.

Jumbo mission

Nepal, 20 September

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, Biratnagar, Nepalganj and Dhangadi.

The full recruitment has still not been completed. By this month, UNMIN had hired nearly 772 staff related to arms-monitoring and elections,



MIN BAJRACHARYA

of whom 65 are international. There are still a lot to be recruited as district election advisors, of which 75 will be international posts.

UNMIN chief Ian Martin said they would need more than 1,000 workers to run the operation at full capacity. According to the UN, the mission will have 1,080 workers in total. Around 133 will be international posts while 947 will be Nepalis. However, the level of benefits will not be the same for the local and international staff.

Besides the monthly salary, international staff

will get a daily allowance of \$108 per day for the first month, after which they will get \$80 every day. The international workers will get a daily allowance of about 12 percent of their monthly salary.

The professional Nepali staff will get nearly Rs 19,000 for one child's annual education while the international staff at the same level will get around \$12,000 for the education of up to two children.

There was also inequality in the field allowance until recently, when Nepali staff refused to go to the field if they were not paid the same as the foreigners. Nepalis used to get a daily field allowance of \$22 while the international staff received \$81.

There has been a constant question over the quality of international staff who were hired as Nepal experts because they were from the west and spoke English.

Usually, the UN assigns two kinds of missions in conflict-ridden countries: peacekeeping and political. UNMIN's mission is political. It has already signed a 'States of Mission Agreement' with the Nepal government but even now there is no clarity about the nature of the work.

It seems UNMIN will stay longer than four months more. The Maoists do not want UNMIN to extend its stay. "Billions of rupees have come in the name of UNMIN, their cars have been left unused while our PLA don't even have one ambulance," said Maoist deputy commander Janardhan Sharma.

Maoist walkout

Editorial in Kantipur, 19 September

राजधानी

CPN-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 discarded even by Tuesday morning at the prime minister's residence.

It is surprising that the Maoist 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 harsh 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 Rajdhani, 19 September

राजधानी

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

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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.



Republic
Ladder: Constituent assembly elections

Abin Shrestha in *Samaya*, 20 September

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“We would lose a historic opportunity and there is the danger of losing a whole generation of political leadership if we are unable to hold CA elections.”

Minister for Peace and Reconstruction Ram Chandra Poudel in *Naya Patrika*, 19 September

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Nepal’s environmental movement is just beginning to recover from last year’s

“Conservation can’t



KIRAN PANDAY

SUCCESS STORY: Chitwan National Park, home to some of the most endangered wildlife species, owes its success to the veteran conservationists who died in the Ghunsa crash last year.

PRANAYA SJB RANA

It will be one year on 23 September since a helicopter crash in Ghunsa took the lives of 24 of Nepal’s leading conservationists, diplomats, officials and journalists (pictured above). The environmentalists were do-ers 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 Sagarnatha. The Langtang project will be managed by locals and tourism income will lift living standards.

The deaths of so many high-



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t year's helicopter tragedy 't wait'



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." ●

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

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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.

The 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 doling 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 otherwise.

More worryingly, specific categories in the quota system (madhesi, dalit, indigenous groups) have not been specifically defined in the cited law nor in the interim constitution. This gap is a fatal flaw and could lead to controversial nominations especially in the Madhesi category. Though this quota was ascertained on the basis of the 2001 census, there is no official definition of the 'madhesi'.

Given the time constraints, if these gaps could delay the polls as the Election Commission doesn't have a strong legal enforcement basis to resolve these of issues within the stipulated seven days. Therefore, these structural flaws could snare the process in legal wrangles and actually undermine the credibility of the elections itself.

More dangerously, it could give legitimate cause for other minority communities who have no representation at all to also All this could throw the credibility of the elections in doubt and, ironically, sow the seeds for further instability. ●



KUNDA DIXIT in SARLAHI

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

Buses, trucks 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 weeks in the past two months by various madhesi groups.

"If you ask me, I'm fed up," says Chandralal 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 madhes, the feeling that politicians are playing games in Kathmandu and criminalised extremists have hijacked a movement that tried for the first time to give genuine respect to the people of the tarai.

Paradoxically, all along the belt from Bara to Sunsari visitors

Only memories

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 Tripureswor 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, had to organise the funeral and other other ceremonies at their house in Naikap. Sangita kept asking us: "What did my daughter do that she was taken from us so cruelly?"

Anisha, just 18 years old, was on her way home from Biswo Niketan Science Campus, waiting for the bus, when the bombs 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.

Sandhya Khadka was waiting with Anisha at the bus stop for a bus to Thankot. When the bomb exploded, Sandhya 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, Sandhya's family (pictured) is also devastated. Her father, Narendra Kumar Khadka, 56, and mother, Pushpa Khadka, 48, have still not been able to deal with the fact 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 Sandhya's picture.

According to Puspha, 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 till 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 Sandhya was in surgery, and her uncle donated his blood because it matched her blood type.



STUCK FAST: A bullock cart moving from Nepal to India gets bogged down in a swollen border river in Sarlahi on Monday. A two-day shutdown forced many Nepali villagers to cross over to shop and travel.

ARPAN SHARMA

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 tarai. The anti-Maoist feeling here is intense, and most here

Building bridges in the madhes

“All we want here is peace and development so we can get on with our lives.”

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 ravaged Kabilbastu last week.

Two weeks ago, madhesi pilgrims were allegedly harassed by Chure Bhabar 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 Chandra 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 tarai for generations say they face

targeted extortion from tarai 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 Bhabar, an organization set up in Sarlahi to defend pahadi interests, because of retaliation by madhesi. Other pahadis say the fear of Chure Bhabar reprisals is the only deterrence against madhesi attacks on pahadis. 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 Upendra Yadav 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 Aftab Alam 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 tarai 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 Suresh K Sah. “The challenge is to make madhesi 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. ●

remain

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 Dev’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, but someone told him that those who were seriously injured were taken to Bir Hospital, so he went there too. At Bir Hospital he was told that a women whose description sounded like his wife, had been taken to the Teaching

Hospital at Maharajganj. 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 went somewhere alone, I would miss her so much that I would call her,” remembers Pancha. Kamala had to undergo many operations in the last few years because she suffered from kidney and gynaecological problems.

“She survived four major operations, she was a fighter. Who thought she would have to die this way?” asks Pancha. The Shahis had recently moved to their Balaju house from Banasthali. She was a devout Buddhist who would visit Swoyambhu 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,”



DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA

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. ●

The real Asian drama

How Malaysia overcame all odds to be an economic tiger

Malaysia's peaceful, non-violent struggle may not have received the attention that Mahatma Gandhi's did in India, but what Malaysia has accomplished since independence 50 years ago is impressive. It has much to teach the world, both about economics, and about how to construct a vibrant multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society.



WORLD IN WORDS
Joseph E Stiglitz

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 7.8 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, multi-cultural 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.

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. ●

Project Syndicate

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

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Smoking is Injurious to Health

Dancing queen

Call 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



CRITICAL CINEMA
Diwas KC

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 heftier mother, Edna, a shy laundress who is over-protective 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.



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रु. १,००,०००

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चौथो पुरस्कार


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साप्ताहिक समीक्षा बहानाले जित्ने छ


१ वटा निज्जुपी सुटकेस हरेक हप्ता

पहिला बहाना पठाउने १५० जनालाई अली बर्द स्वरुप निम्ते छडी पुरस्कार

पठाउनुोस् यस ठेगानामा हाजमोला खाने बहाना यदि माउच तपाईको जुरेमा पूरा हुनेछ उत्कृष्ट बहानाको पुरस्कार जित्ने चाहना ।

तपाईका रमाइला हाजमोला खाने बहाना कुनै पनि सादा कागजमा २५ शब्द सवनामा आउने जरी आफ्नो नाम, ठेगाना, उनेर, फोन नं. र फोटो (पठाउन चाहनेता) को साथमा हाजमोलाको ४ वटा साली स्यासे वा बोटलको लेबल सहित पो. ब. नं. १४३५५, काठमाडौं, नेपालमा पठाउनुहोस् । अनि जित्नुहोस् एक लाख नगद र अन्य थुप्रै पुरस्कारहरु पनि ।



हाजमोला
जे आउँछ मजाले पचाउँछ

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **photo.circle** with representatives of World Press Photo, 22 September, 9.45 PM at the Sundhara Bakery Cafe.
- ❖ **Digital art exhibition** by Bishnu Shrestha at New Orleans, Patan, until 30 September. 5522708

EVENTS

- ❖ **Yuva Chalfal Shrinkhala** with Pushkar Shah, 3-5PM on 21 September at Martin Chautari.
- ❖ **Hi Blue Sky** party at the Last Resort with JL Stiles and the Pax Armada, 22-23 September, buses leave on 22 September at 9PM from the sales office
- ❖ **Shastrartha** on peace building and conflict management with Purna Kant Adhikary and Bhasker Kafle, 4-6PM, 22 September at Martin Chautari.
- ❖ **Aaitabare Discussion Series** on ethnic diversity in the Nepal Army, 23 September at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **FSA '07 preview** and screening of Michael Moore's *Sicko* at Yala Maya Kendra, 23 September, 5PM. 5542544
- ❖ **CSGN monthly lecture** on mysterious remote Manang by Tripple Gurung, 26 September, 6PM at Shankar Hotel.
- ❖ **School Bullying** a workshop by Niti Rana, 29 and 30 September at The New Era, Battisputali. 9851023958
- ❖ **Geheime Wahlen** launching of the German translation of Manjushree Thapa's *The Tutor of History*, reading and discussion with the author and translator, on 10 October, 5:30 PM at Dhokaima Cafe. 9841226112
- ❖ **Regular pottery classes** at Artworks, Pulchok, opposite New Orleans Cafe, starting 12 noon. 9851101837
- ❖ **Toastmasters** a communication and leadership program, organised by Kathmandu Toastmasters Club every Wednesday 6PM at Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI) building, Tripureswor. 4288847



MUSIC

- ❖ **Gurukul sangeet pathshala** presents a solo performance by Gurudev Kamat, 4.30 PM, 21 September, at Exhibition Hall. 4212460
- ❖ **Live music** 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 Café 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 barbeque lunch** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Saturdays, 12.30-3.30PM, Rs 300 plus taxes. 4273999
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** with coffee, food, drinks, and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel, 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **BBQ, chilled beer, cocktails** and live music at the Kausi Restaurant and Bar, Darbar Marg, 6218490
- ❖ **BBQ Unlimited at Splash Bar & Grill** Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, every Friday 6.30 PM, Rs. 899 nett.
- ❖ **5th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival** 16 wines at Rs 150 a glass and Rs 600 a bottle, at Kilroy's of Kathmandu, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Monsoon Magic** live jazz by Inner Groove and a variety of cocktails from the summer special menu, every Wednesday, Rs 599 at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarika's. 4479488
- ❖ **Lajawaab** curry, kebab and biryani festival, every Friday, 7PM onwards at Café Horizon, Hotel Himalaya. 5523900
- ❖ **Shangri-La's pasta, pizza, pie, and pool** a special swimming package with a complimentary beer, Rs 650 nett per person, every Saturday and Sunday at Shangri-La Hotel. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Krishnarpan** Nepali specialty restaurant at Dwarika's Hotel, six to 22 course ceremonial lunch and dinner. 4479488
- ❖ **Weekend special** with sekuwa, bara, barbeque, Fridays at Ambassador Garden House, Lazimpat, 5.30 PM onwards. 4411706
- ❖ **Light nouvelle snacks** and elaborate cordon bleu meals at La'Soon, Pulchok, behind the Egyptian embassy. 5537166
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Rediscover fine Italian cuisine** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, all new exciting menu. 4700612
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

GETAWAYS

- ❖ **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, Dhulikhel, 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

Quest Entertainment



'Dhol - Kiska Bajega' revolves around the lives of four friends - Sam (Tusshar Kapoor), Pakkya (Sharman Joshi), Maru (Rajpal Yadav) and Goti (Kunal Khemu), who're bound together by their child-like notoriety and aimlessness. Things get worse as the four decide to take some desperate measures to end their misery once and for all. According to them, the only way to get rich without working hard is to get married to a rich girl. Arrives the rich girl Kanchan (Tanushree Dutta), so all four set out with their individual plans to marry her but end up discovering an unexpected truth.

Call 4442220 for show timings at **Jai Nepal**
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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Although 23 September is the accepted date for the monsoon's end, the satellite picture on Thursday morning indicates its departure will be delayed at least a week. Both arms of the monsoon have been recharged and fresh cyclones are moving inland from the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea. A shallow low-pressure trough has paved the way for moisture-bearing clouds to reach the eastern Himalayas, so showers are possible in central and eastern Nepal from this weekend onward. The sky over Nepal has been steadily darkening this week as more clouds head our way. Since an hour-long downpour early on Tuesday morning, the Kathmandu valley has been steadily warming, reaching 30 degrees by midday. Expect warmer days till the weekend, then brief showers and breezy days next week.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

Fri
31-19

Sat
28-20

Sun
27-19

रेडियो सगरमाथा
एफएम १०२ थोप्लो ४ मेगाहर्ज

नेपाली रेडियो
नेपाली आवाज

हालचाल
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हालचाल
विद्युत: ८ खण्ड ११ खण्ड
अध्यापक: २ खण्ड ४ खण्ड
संसार: ६ खण्ड र रात्री: ८ खण्ड

अमेरिकी विमान सञ्चालन कार्यक्रम
Tuning In To Language and Culture
बजार हुने समय : हरेक शुक्रबार बिहान (८:१२-८:३०)
हरेक आइतबार बिहान (९:३०-१०:००)
+ विदेशी सञ्चारमाध्यम विभिन्न सुनी, अमेरिकी सुनारी-
(रेडियो सञ्चारमाध्यम र अमेरिकी सञ्चारमाध्यम, अमेरिकी
केन्द्रको सहकार्य)

सम्पर्क: ९८४१४१८५४८, ९८४१४१८५२६, ९११-४४००५५, ईमेल: radio@sagarmatha.org

हरेक विहान ८:०० देखि राती ११:०० बजे सम्म सुनमा सिला र सञ्चालनमा रहेको रेडियो सगरमाथा १०२ कोशी र मेघालय



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 Kabilbastu violence.



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.



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.





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संविधानसभा निर्वाचन, २०६४

नेपाल चौतारी

LIVE

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राष्ट्रिय बहसका लागि कार्यक्रम:
नेपाल चौतारी

दैनिक प्रत्यक्ष प्रसारण :
बिहान ८:१० देखि ९:०० बजेसम्म

सहभागिताका लागि फोन:
१६६० ०१ ३८५६७ । केचनादेखि कालापानी,
मुस्ताङदेखि मर्चावार, देशका जुनसुकै
ठाउँबाट यसमा फोन गर्दा पैसा लाग्दैन ।।

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Contest forms available at www.missnepal.com.np, leading dailies and the outlets below.

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 Nepal's 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 Girjau 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 statusquoists. 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 Girjau 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 tarai grapevine that the JTMM-Jwala has taken responsibility for the Nokia phone battery that exploded last week, injuring a user.



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