



Times

Weekly Internet Poll # 379

Q. Integration of the Maoist PLA with the Nepal Army is a:

Total votes: 3,690

Great idea 15.4%

Horrible idea 74.8%

No idea 1.9%

Weekly Internet Poll # 380. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

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KIRAN PANDAY

Not quite there

More doubts about whether leaders are serious about polls

As marathon negotiations to fix elections get into the final lap, new doubts have emerged about whether the leaders of the NC and Maoists are actually serious about polls at all. The NC is under tremendous pressure from royalists in the ranks who have rejected declaring a republic before elections, and have even threatened to mutiny if the prime minister goes ahead. This group consists mainly of

conservative trans-Karnali politicians. The Maoist leadership, on the other hand, is still paralysed by an existential crisis over polls. Radicals there, too, have put pressure on the bosses to push for either a roundtable conference or a full proportional election. NC leader Shekhar Koirala rejects a roundtable outright. “Where in the world do you have a roundtable when parliament is

in session? This just proves the Maoists have no intention to go for elections,” he told himalkhabar.com on Thursday. However, the issue of a new government with the NC, UML and Maoists dividing up three main ministries has been set aside as too contentious for now. The three parties are under increasing pressure from India to resolve their differences and get serious about polls. Contrary to the flexibility they showed last week, the Maoists have also become rigid again. “If there is no full proportional elections then let’s have a roundtable conference, that is our bottomline,” says Maoist

leader CP Gajurel. But analysts say ‘roundtable conference’ is a euphemism for postponing elections again. Meanwhile, the United Madhesi Front made up of Upendra Yadav’s MJF and a group of politicians led by Rajendra Mahato have announced a month of protests to commemorate last year’s madhes uprising with demands that include a new census and a new caretaker government. ● Subhas Devkota

Editorial	
The last year	p2
State of the State	CK Lal
Voices in the echo chamber	p2



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Designer politics

Lessons for Nepali politics from mechanism design

This week, the Nobel Prize in economics was awarded to Leonid Hurwicz, Eric Maskin and Roger Myerson for their contributions to 'mechanism design theory'. This is a field that even for many trained economists is so esoteric that some are still surprised by the committee's decision. Mechanism design advances an



GUEST COLUMN
Avidit Acharya

important philosophical agenda, and a novel, yet seemingly obvious way of thinking about the world that may be relevant to the current crisis in Nepali politics.

In lay terms, mechanism is a set of rules that produce desirable outcomes. Auctions are

mechanisms intended to allocate goods to those who value them most. Similarly, constitutions are mechanisms that produce outcomes in politics. The agenda of economic theory before the advent of mechanism design was to take the rules as given—for example, to take the constitution as unchangeable—and then to predict how people will behave within the framework of those rules, and what the outcomes will be.

Mechanism design asks the opposite question: Given a certain desirable outcome, what kinds of institutions would one develop—what kind of constitution or political apparatus would one create—in order to achieve that outcome?

To be more concrete, suppose we agreed that economic development, democracy and rule of law were all noble goals, but we also accepted that rulers and politicians are the usual self-interested thugs that we are now familiar with. Suppose we also knew that the public was largely uneducated, and the civil society was weak and ineffective (or partisan) so that holding these leaders accountable was difficult. And finally—and this is important—suppose we accepted that the behavior of the politicians, and the unawareness of the citizens was not something that we could change in the short term. Then what is the best constitution, the best political apparatus, and the best structure of the state acceptable to all parties that would come closest to implementing these goals?

This is an extremely difficult and frustrating question to which many may fear there is no answer. After all, if things are as dismal

as we know them to be, it may seem that there is no hope unless we can change people's desires and beliefs. Can we, for now, convince ourselves that there is no use in searching for an answer when we are not sure that we have ruled out all the possibilities? Have we worked through all of the possible proposals (all of the possible mechanisms)?

We have not. A part of the reason is because we have focused too heavily on a dialogue that has taken a very different approach to dealing with these issues. Pick up any recent op-ed and, in all likelihood, its content will be primarily concerned with pouring grievances at the fact that things are so gloomy. In some instances, it may reflect the kind of activism needed to influence people's behavior, to either instill guilt in the leaders by holding them accountable, or to bring citizens to the streets to demand their rights.

But very rarely do we see interesting new proposals for how democratic stability and order can be restored. At best, we talk about things that should happen but fail to be self-critical as to whether our proposal is realistic and acceptable to the factions that must be satisfied for it to be adopted.

By no means does mechanism design theory have solutions to all of the complicated problems that we are dealing with today. But what we can gain from it is its very useful and interesting way of thinking about the world and its problems. ●

Avidit Acharya is a PhD student in political economy at Princeton University in the United States.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

THE LOST YEAR

Once more we have a make-or-break week at Baluwatar. It's another cliff-hanger. Till presstime Thursday morning it looked like the three main parties had nearly hammered out a compromise deal on an electoral formula and on declaring Nepal a Federal Democratic Republic. But, predictably, there was a last minute hitch and the Maoists failed to show up for their meeting on Wednesday.

The people are getting tired of this. Many have tuned out. "Let us know when you've reached a deal," is the vox pop. They have more pressing everyday concerns. In the cities it is the endless fuel shortage, the crippling power cuts, the water crisis. Crime has got so bad that businessmen have hired bodyguards. In the eastern tarai we see the beginnings of what looks like ethnic cleansing and disgruntled madhesi politicians are now openly talking of secession. In the districts, Nepalis have given up waiting for Kathmandu to get its act together and are pushing development through their own initiative.

This is a collective failure of the six-plus-one party governing alliance, but someone must take responsibility for the lost year since the signing of the comprehensive peace accord. Last November, we knew the peace process wouldn't be easy, but we grossly underestimated the incompetence, narrow-mindedness and self-centeredness of our top leaders.

One casualty of the lost year has been development. This is a state machinery that is paralysed by political uncertainty and hasn't taken any major decisions on development investment. Large water projects are on hold, health and education are languishing and there has been no major investment drive to create jobs.

What has happened, has happened by default. Tourism is booming through no official effort, in fact visitor arrivals are up despite every effort to kill it by grounding the national airline, failing to upgrade shoddy infrastructure and extorting tourists who do show up.

New hydropower projects are stuck, so don't expect an easing of the power crisis for the next seven years. There is donor fatigue with the leadership and Nepal now has nuisance value in many world capitals.

In Manila next month the ADB will discuss what to do with Melamchi. Nepali experts have proposed a bold new plan to turn it into a multi-purpose project to not just put water in Kathmandu taps but generate power in a unique public-private partnership as well. (See p 4). This is the kind of creative thinking we need to leapfrog and make up for lost time.

Whoever comes to power after elections, no matter who is president, it won't be politics that will determine their longevity. Unless present rulers start thinking of development today, it won't matter who is in power. It won't matter whether we are a republic or a monarchy. Nothing will really matter.

It's time to fix the economy first.

Voices in the echo chamber

Talking is easier than actually doing something

Nepal's power elite is a small, closed and incestuous circle. The size of intelligentsia is even smaller. Like in any other exclusive community, when intellectuals gather, they talk more about each other than anything else.

Conformism rules, agreement is sacred and dissent sacrilegious. That may be one of the reasons our scholars are seldom original. We repeat the received wisdom of the day in the name of exchange of ideas



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

and applaud each other. Nepali academics don't aspire for the ivory tower, they'd rather live in an echo chamber.

In the early fifties, we imported academics from Assam, Banaras, Calcutta and Darjeeling. The state tried out the Soviet-model of a five-year-plan economy. King Mahendra had other plans, he wanted Narayanhi to be Nepal's main temple. A land-and-climate theory of political economy was developed at the social

science laboratories of US think-tanks. The Centre for Development and Administration at Tribhuvan University was where ideologues like Mohammad Mohsin and Pashupati Shamsheer debated grassroots democracy. Maoism was bound to emerge as the alternative discourse.

After the oil shock of the 1970s, all these development plans went out the window. The 1980s were the years of post-modernity. Ethnic entrepreneurs came to the fore with the help of donor agencies. Gender emerged as the main challenge. Environmental concerns acquired respectability. In the 1990s, the agenda was democracy. Political reforms, human rights and social justice became the new buzzwords.

Had those concerns been genuinely pursued, probably Nepal would have been spared the trauma of violent and painful transition. Some influential donors had other plans. They gave us the slogan of 'Liberalisation, Privatisation, Globalisation' and 'Good Governance', which ended up de-legitimising popular politics. Peaceful politics and the mess of democracy were ridiculed beyond redemption. Spread of

violent insurgency, ruthless counter-insurgency and eventual collapse of the state was then inevitable.

The intellectual enterprise of this decade had to then revolve around conflict resolution and peace building. Democracy was added to the list as an afterthought. Some Nepalis were fooled for some of the time with these manufactured agendas. But they soon realised that nobody was going to solve their problem. So they rose as one during April Uprising in 2006 and sidelined the monarchy, mainstreamed Maoists and chastised mainstream parties. One of the reasons behind severe criticism of the New Delhi pact between mainstream parties and Maoists was the fact that influential lenders, donors and expatriates had been kept out of the picture. It's now their turn to strike back.

Conflict resolution experts now masquerade as state restructuring specialists. Political leaders and civil society bigwigs are seldom taken to Nordic countries, Switzerland and South Africa for guided tours these days. The traffic is inbound. Political analysts, governance gurus and defence experts are back here to

teach the Maoists and mainstream parties the nitty-gritty of managing our political transition.

The UN system in Kathmandu has a Constitutional Advisory Support Unit. Early this week, it invited a galaxy of political worthies for a midweek retreat at Godavari. With legislative parliament in forced recesses and the fate of alliance in suspense, even influential leaders had little to do in the capital.

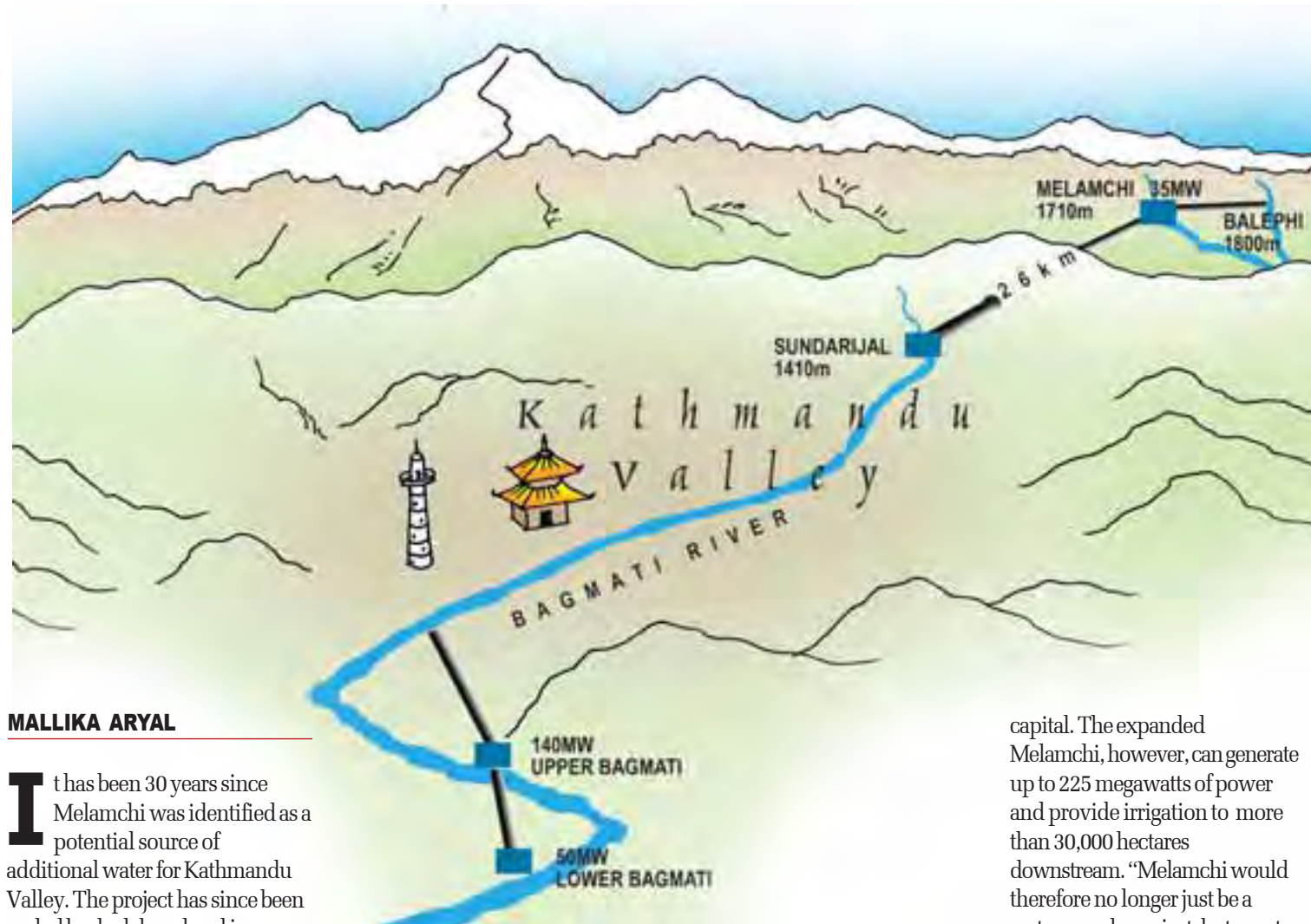
Everyone from Bimalendra Nidhi, Chakra Banstola, Minendra Rijal and Shekhar Koirala of NC to Jhalanath Khanal of the UML and Om Gurung of the janjati movement were all there to listen to gratuitous advice of rank novices from abroad. It's the trend rather than content of the meet that deserves closer attention.

Predictions for 2008: the debate over parliamentary versus presidential system of governance is going to be the focus of intellectual exchanges, civil-military relations will be scrutinised closely by international researchers, and next year's mantra will be "systems of governance". With such weighty issues to *talk* about, there is no time to actually *do* anything. ●

MAKE it LARGE

Revisiting a multi-purpose Melamchi

The only way to save the project may be to expand it to include hydropower and irrigation



MALLIKA ARYAL

It has been 30 years since Melamchi was identified as a potential source of additional water for Kathmandu Valley. The project has since been scaled back, delayed and is now stuck.

By the time it is completed, if ever, Kathmandu will probably need more water than it is designed for. Some experts are therefore proposing an even more ambitious Melamchi project that will add hydropower and irrigation component.

As it stands today, Melamchi will bring pure Himalayan glacial melt through a 26km tunnel to Sundarijal on the outskirts of Kathmandu. The lead agency pushing this \$500 million project is the Manila-based Asian Development Bank (ADB) and its board meets to discuss Melamchi in late January.

Experts say the present Melamchi will not meet future

water demands of the Valley. The project should add an irrigation component so that the tarai can also benefit, and hydropower generation to not just meet Nepal's energy needs but also offset the cost by bringing in private investment.

"There is so much investment in Melamchi, it is imperative that the project be made sustainable and viable so that areas other than Kathmandu can also benefit," says Padam Sunder Joshi of the NGO Forum for Urban Water and Sanitation.

The new proposal calls for collecting water also from the Balephi River in Sindhupalchok, a larger diameter tunnel to

Sundarijal so that the water can also used to generate electricity in a cascade.

The tunnel is currently designed to bring water from Melamchi, Yangri and Larke rivers. Demand estimates show that water from these rivers will meet the needs of Kathmandu only till 2022.

"By the time the project is ready, there will be water scarcity once again," argues economist Ratna Sansar Shrestha, "if Balephi is added, the project can meet Kathmandu's demand beyond 2050."

One of the main arguments against Melamchi in its present form is that it only benefits the

capital. The expanded Melamchi, however, can generate up to 225 megawatts of power and provide irrigation to more than 30,000 hectares downstream. "Melamchi would therefore no longer just be a water supply project, but a water resource management scheme with benefits beyond Kathmandu to the tarai," says Bhushan Tuladhar of the Environment and Public Health Organisation (ENPHO).

Hydropower was included in the early designs of Melamchi but was later abandoned. Studies show a 35 megawatt plant could be sited just before the water enters the tunnel in Melamchi and another 190 megawatts generated below Chobar.

Adding a hydropower component could also turn this into a private-public partnership. Private companies would develop the upstream hydropower, with the penstock

pipes and tunnels doubling as water supply conveyance to deliver clean desilted water to the city. The same company can then be involved in using the water as it leaves Kathmandu Valley and drops to the tarai to generate electricity again on the Bagmati River.

"A multi-purpose Melamchi would be the perfect model for water supply, irrigation and power generation," says Tuladhar of ENPHO.

All this would be possible by increasing the diameter of the proposed tunnel from 3.7m to 5m. "The cost of construction per metre of tunnel does not go up significantly up to a maximum diameter of 5.6m," explains Shrestha. A larger tunnel can be constructed faster as heavy duty wheeled transport can be used to remove the rock.

Although this proposal hasn't been publicly debated, those who have sounded out the politicians say that there has been a positive response. "The prime minister, finance minister, the Maoists, other opposition parties and members of National Planning Commission, the ADB are all convinced," says Shrestha.

The only aspect worrying the experts lobbying for an expanded multi-purpose Melamchi is criticism that Kathmandu's water supply augmentation is going to be further delayed. "It's a good plan, but it was drawn up at the eleventh hour," admits Rama Kant Gauro at the National Planning Commission.

But Joshi thinks the delays may not be that significant. "After all, construction hasn't begun yet, the changes we propose are only in the design phase which may take a few extra months," he says. "Besides, the hydropower part can come later and will not interfere with the water supply component." ●

23 for Everest

Everest Bank has opened a new branch at Gwarko. This branch offers a scheme where accounts can be opened with a minimum deposit of Rs 500 and get a free debit card. There is also a 50 percent discount on lockers. This is Everest's 23rd branch in the country.

2 Much

The LG 2 Good 2 Much scheme offers buyers a 5kg pack of Henko Stain Champion washing powder free on every purchase of LG Fully Automatic washing machine and a 3kg pack of the same with every Semi Automatic. Buyers will also get an LG Microwave cooking kit free with every LG microwave oven. LG is distributed by Chaudhary Group.

Nokia partnership

Nokia has added operators and independent software vendors (ISVs) to its Nokia for Business partner ecosystem. The Nokia for Business Operator Program is designed to help operators drive engagement and sell-through with business customers by jointly developing value added mobility solutions.

United for blood

United Finance organised its first blood donation program with 33 people present. United Finance has promised to organise such a program every year.

NEW PRODUCTS

CIG: Brown is the latest cigarette brand to hit the market. Manufactured by Gorkha Lahari, it is Nepal's first brown-coloured cigarette. Gorkha Lahari also manufactures Yeti Filter Kings, Gorkha, Sahara, Nepal Gold Flake and Bahar brands of cigarettes.



PROJECT: The Boxlight Phoenix S25 DLP Projector is being marketed by CAS Trading House. The projector comes with DLP display technology, 2500 ANSI lumens, 800X600 native aspect ratio and is HDTV compatible.



Coming home

Pitfalls and opportunities of returning to Nepal

A few weeks ago, I had lunch with a friend who is a successful professional in the US. Having made his money, and apparently bored with the humdrum of suburban living, he wants to return to Nepal "to do something here".



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

He asked me whether I had advice for him. I had none, for what one works for one individual may not work for another, and it's not easy to come up with a formula that works for all. But thinking of a way to help him and his wife think through their possible career plans in Nepal, I shared these three observations.

Mindset: Returning to work in Nepal after many years abroad is a function of mindset. There are those who get their kicks from removing obstacles to design systems for others to work productively, and there are others who are happier being productive in systems that others have put in place. Either mindset is fine, though those with the latter mindset might find most Nepali workplaces maddeningly chaotic and unmanageable.

But for those who relish the challenges of persisting to design their own systems of how work

should be done, most senior-level jobs in Nepal tend to offer many such opportunities. Sure, compared to what's available elsewhere globally, the scale of such designs can be small here. But once the systems get up and running, it's not difficult to scale up, depending on which industry one is part of. Like in everything else, focus on and patience for results matter.

Mentors: Most, not all, senior Nepali professionals do not know how to be effective mentors to younger professionals. Ignorance is not their fault. Many of them became who they are by joining an industry early on, and then slowly climbing up the rungs over the years. Often, they were the first members of their clans or districts ever to start or join private sector firms.

As such, they may know their industries well, but that knowledge does not extend to their explaining what kinds of career opportunities are available. Indeed, meetings with most of them to discuss career-related matters can be a waste of time, filled with vacuous, if emotionally stirring, paeans about Nepal's unlimited potential for, well, just about everything. So, yes, getting a job by knowing someone senior can be easy. But the task of making a fulfilling career out of that job or a string of related jobs must remain an

intensely personal work.

One solution is to start one's own formal and informal professional network. This is something that many career-savvy young to mid-level professionals are already doing in Nepal via email lists and regular get-togethers.

Minding the fame: One downside of a having 'successful' career in Nepal is that becoming famous quickly is not difficult. Not everyone has the self-awareness of Magsaysay winner Mahabir Pun, who had the humility to declare that the award was given to him too early.

But once you start giving interviews about the state of the nation, appearing on magazine covers and reports, and filling in as judges and patrons at various charity events, often with the same set of friends, it's hard not to take yourself seriously as one of Nepal's pillars. The result is that you start believing your own press clippings, using them as evidence for the results your produce. And it's fair to say that many former good professionals have stagnated in their careers because they did not know how to graciously handle the easy fame that comes from being a big person in a small, friendly and comparatively easy-going town.

I am eager to see what my friend and his wife do in 2008. ●

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Gajurel's Europe yatra

CP Gajurel in Samaya, 14-20 December

Even after we came into the peace process, there have been international misconceptions about the Maoists. It was to set the record straight that I took a Europe tour last month. That is why every moment was extremely important for me. When I had to spend hours at a hotel in Bahrain, I felt uneasy and impatient. I travelled through France, England, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany and returned via Paris.

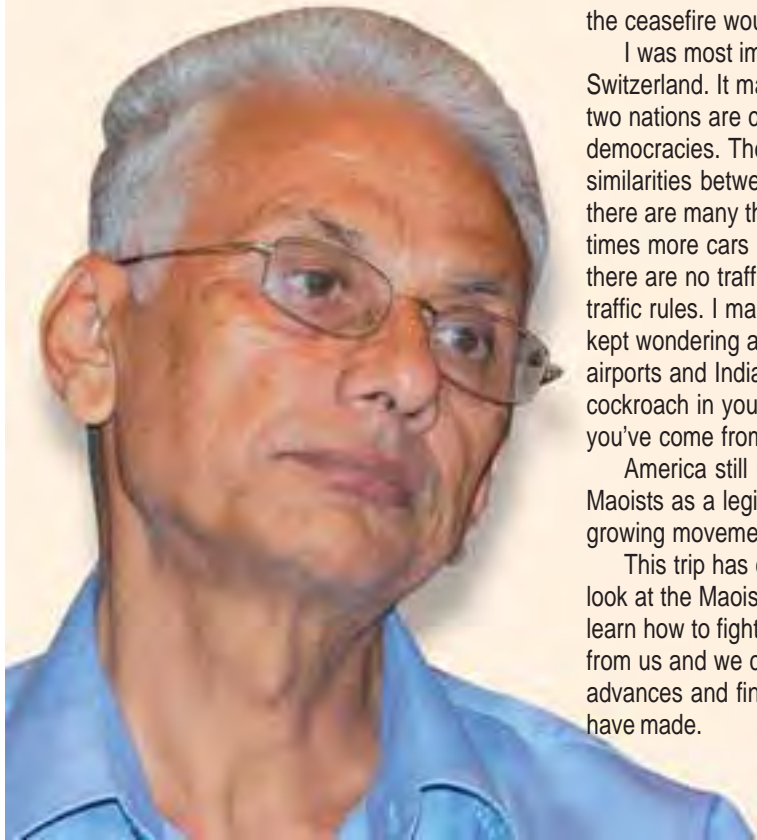
During the armed insurgency, more than 120 countries had labelled the Maoists terrorists with Red Corner Notices. Even after we came into the mainstream and joined the government, many countries still view us with suspicion and fear because of media disinformation. I found the European countries I visited to be very positive towards the Maoists, but the purpose of my trip was to clear any remaining suspicions.

I met South Asian experts in England and Germany, I explained to them the country's politics and the Maoist ideology. What everyone wanted to know was how the peace process was going, and if the ceasefire would hold.

I was most impressed by the Netherlands and Switzerland. It makes no difference to me if these two nations are considered examples of bourgeois democracies. There are many geographic similarities between Nepal and Switzerland. But there are many things we can learn. There are 20 times more cars in Switzerland than in Nepal, yet there are no traffic jams because everyone follows traffic rules. I marvelled at their clean roads and kept wondering about our chaotic bus parks and airports and India's train stations. If you find cockroach in your hotel room, they ask you if you've come from the Third World.

America still refuses to acknowledge the Maoists as a legitimate political power. There is a growing movement in Europe against America

This trip has changed the way a lot of countries look at the Maoists. European countries want to learn how to fight a revolution in the 21st century from us and we can learn about the scientific advances and financial and social progress they have made.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Sihanoukists

Himal Khabarpatrika,16-30 December

Why is the story of the prince of Cambodia Narodom Sihanouk considered so relevant for Nepal's Maoists? Because his story is about the collaboration between extremist communism and a reinstated monarchy. Sihanouk built his image by fighting French colonialism, gained a reputation of being a nationalist, and became the head of state with the help of the communists. Nepali Maoists often use him as an example, and respect his book *My War with the CIA* to expose 'American imperialism'.

Although born to a royal family, Sihanouk was actually put in power by the French. However, in 1953, his fight to liberate Cambodia put him in the centre of Cambodia's politics. He is commended for maintaining peace and stability in Cambodia in 1950s and 60s, but is criticised for the crisis Cambodia went through during the 1970s.

But he became progressively weaker and was unseated by General Lon Nol while visiting the Soviet Union in 1970. While exiled in China, he met Mao, who advised the king to accept himself as a communist.

It was while Sihanouk was in China that Pol Pot wanted to form an alliance so Sihanouk joined hands with the Khmer Rouge to topple Gen Lon Nol's US-backed government. In 1975, the Khmer

Rouge came to power and Pol Pot asked Sihanouk to join him. It is understood that Mao played an important role in convincing Sihanouk to return to Cambodia.

Sihanouk returned to Cambodia and was made the president. He resigned later, was put under house arrest and seven members of his family murdered by the Khmer Rouge. After the defeat of the Khmer Rouge, Sihanouk once more returned to Cambodia, and worked with the army to find a solution to the conflict. In 1993 a UN-supervised election was held and Sihanouk was reinstated as the king. But he decided to abdicate in 2004 and his son was made the new king.

Strong madhes

Hridayesh Tripathi in Nepal, 23 December

It is not because of a lack of political opportunities that we are forming these regional parties. We already hold positions in political parties, as MPs and as members of the government. But the political parties were unable to address the concerns of the madhesi people. I resigned from my post as minister during the madhes uprising. It was only after 54 MPs and ministers took out a press release that the concerns of the madhes started to be addressed. But there hasn't been as much progress even after the sacrifices we made.

The madhes uprising put forward three arguments. One, the

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Basama Chaina	Rajan Ishan	N2044
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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

madhes is united in its fight for self-respect. Two, the madhes is a part of Nepal. And third, even if madhesi ministers may not take part in the struggle the people are ready to fight. The people are leading the politicians.

Our madhes uprising stopped parliamentary sessions for a month and four days. It was then that the need for a strong political pressure group was realised. Also, it was then that the presence of armed military groups in the tarai was felt. Some had a political agenda while some did not. This made the problem worse, but even in a situation like this, the three big political parties were unwilling to address it jointly.

After we planned to start up a

new party, the prime minister, just like every other South Asian politician, labelled us ‘foreign instigated’. Prachanda shocked us by threatening to deploy both the Nepal Army and the Maoists fighters against us because there are no madhesis in both the armies. We want to solve everything through political means but are in no position to trust the state or parties.

This country is ours, but the nation isn’t. This feeling permeates all the madhesis, janajatis, indigenous people and women. That is why they are asking to be included in the government. What we want is for the entire madhes to be made autonomous.

We are clear on the issue of a republic. We have fought for a democracy but we believe in peaceful politics. We will soon make clear our expectations from the armed groups, seven political parties and the Maoists. It is not our intention to weaken any political party, rather we just want to make the madhes strong.



Chair: Mandale nationalism
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People: Janajati, madhesi, dalit
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हिमाल Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 16-30 December

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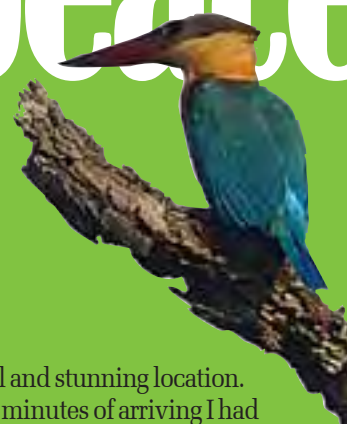


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Bardiya's peace

Safari tourism in western Nepal bounces back



WANDA VIVEQUIN
in BARDIYA

After several years of hosting just a handful of hardy visitors, improving political stability is allowing western Nepal's isolated Bardiya National Park to bounce back.

With the size of almost 1,000 sq km, Bardiya is the largest and least disturbed of the tarai's wilderness areas and is the place where you are more likely to spot the tiger than in Chitwan. A herd of wild Asiatic elephants, including the biggest specimen ever recorded in the wild (*see box*), also lives in the park along with rhinos, hundreds of bird species, plus an assortment of deer, reptiles, insects, fish and even Gangetic fresh-water dolphin.

Mentioned in guidebooks as a remote alternative to Chitwan, tourism in Bardiya has suffered because of its location. In 2001 almost 9,000 people visited the national park, but by 2005 the number was down to zero. However poachers have been active in the uncertainty of the interim period. The remains of a poached tiger and a rhinoceros were found last month in Bardiya. There are only 30 rhinos that remain in Bardiya, many of them translocated from Chitwan.

The drive from Nepalgunj airport to Bardiya revealed once again what is so beautiful about

the tarai. Yellow fields of tori are reminiscent of the Canadian prairies, beautiful women in red saris are elegantly perched on bicycles, bullock carts laden with dried grass lumber along the highway, and there is a tangibly more gentle pace of life. The park entrance is reached after an hour and a half along a smooth and almost carless road. The park headquarters at Thakurdwara and most of the accommodation is located another half-hour away.

Initially a hunting reserve, the 386 sq km Royal Karnali Wildlife Reserve was gazetted in 1976 to increase the amount of protected lowland forest ecosystem in Nepal. Bardiya was expanded to almost 1,000 sq km in 1984 and upgraded to national park.

The Tiger Tops tented camp here re-opened in October and is a

tranquil and stunning location. Within minutes of arriving I had binoculars glued to my eyes as I watched two wild elephants drink and take a sand bath on the opposite side of the river.

There are seven other places to stay at Bardiya, most of which saw a noticeable increase in visitors this season. Walkers and their guides are becoming common again in the jungle trails. In just over an hour of looking a racquet tailed drongo, brown fish owl, stork billed kingfisher, giant stork and a few others were ticked off the birding list.

Bardiya has 400 bird species. The list of reptiles is also impressive and a three metre Indian python was spotted sunning itself just five minutes drive from the lodge. The 'wildlife spotted' column in the





e dividend



visitor's book at the lodge is an indication what is on offer in Bardiya. Regular entries include: black buck, rhinoceros, spotted deer, gharial, marsh mugger, wild pigs, hog deer, herds of spotted deer, tiger and wild elephants. This month, visitors could potentially spot nearly all the animals, except the tigets which may have been scared off by the annual free-for-all elephant grass collecting season for the villagers

in the buffer zone. For Rs 15 villagers are allowed to cut all the grass they can carry for three days. Some people joke that there are now more tourists than animals in Chitwan, making a trip to Bardiya well worth the effort it takes to get there. ● *Wanda Vivequin is a Canada-based guide and regular visitor to Nepal.*

Where is Rajagaj?

Bardiya's biggest attraction for wildlife spotters used to be Rajagaj, the biggest Asiatic wild elephant ever recorded. The majestic 70-year-old beast which was 3.1 metres tall and had long tusks would often be seen grazing with his herd by one of the branches of the Karnali at the national park. But Rajagaj hasn't been spotted for two years and no one knows whether he is dead or alive. "We haven't seen him at all," admits Bardiya ranger Ramesh Thapa, "but that could be because there are no tourists looking for him, he may still be alive." The last sighting was in August 2005. Bardiya's bull elephants are the largest Asian elephants, and are almost as big as African elephants. They also have unique mammoth-like domed heads, which is unlike other Asian elephants.



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Polo solo

How the silliness of humans causes the suffering of others

When I first heard there was such a sport as elephant polo I was taken aback. And when the annual deluge of coverage of this sport happens like it did last month, the questions that came to mind were: "why?" and "how?"



NEPALIPAN
Jigme Gaton

I played my fair share of hockey as a kid (which seems to be the cruder north American version of elephant polo) and I was confused. How do you get something the size of a TATA truck to play polo? I see lots of elephants here in Kathmandu, but it's always from the backside, stuck in some motorbike jam. So it was hard for me to conceive two teams of these slo-mo mammals zooming as if they were skaters trying to score a goal.

Of course I knew the answer to "how". Elephants are trained to play the sport just as they are trained to do any other task for humans, by being bullied and

manipulated, and in many cases tortured.

When I first visited Chitwan National Park, I was a guest at the well-known resort and was literally forced by the host to take an elephant ride. Not wanting to offend, I mounted Limbu, who was the same age as myself, 47, and born in September, so also a Virgo. I had never been that close to an elephant and would have been very content to just feed him some kibbles and stroke his proboscis, which reminded me of my own.

I apologized to Limbu for having to climb aboard the viewing contraption strapped to his back, but I did, squeezing into a wooden basket filled with a half-dozen tourists. The insanity of the situation would have made me laugh, but I got close enough to see Limbu's scars from repeated beatings from his trainer, and to note his battered feet and thighs from being made to crash through the jungle balancing a boatload of humans, and then being punished by his trainer for almost dumping us into a swamp when his leg gave out. At that

point he looked a lot older than 47, and his sad tired demeanor was very depressing.

That people would actually organise a sporting event (funded mostly by alcohol manufacturers, and like the sailing sport industry, hosted by a major watch manufacturer) are we really to get out and cheer for our favourite team of polo pachyderms chasing a ball, as in this year's Kings

Cup? Haven't we banned pit-bull and cock fights? Haven't we got rid of bull-fighting? Aren't rodeo and circus ticket sales way down? Well, sadly not. But all of these human activities do seem very old-school and from a generation past.

Today we seem to be more content watching the World's Stupidest Pet Tricks and The Most Fabulous Animal Rescues on Animal Planet, where our active participation is with the remote control instead of any kind of wicket or ball or out on a field of any kind. The creation of this sport has to do with a simple formula: Humans are urbanising and deforesting the wild habitat of these magnificent mammals faster than animal activists and environmentalists can scream alarm.

Civil unrest in rural areas (normally habituated by elephants) is on the rise worldwide, meaning that conservation areas are becoming disrupted, if not abandoned. In Nepal the conflict turned our parks into war zones, making for a very unhappy place for any being to live, yet they still are organising elephant polo as a last ditch effort to attract tourists. The pressures of human population

growth is also pushing animals like elephants to the brink of insanity. Consider the recent news reports from India and Nepal about the shooting of so-called wild killer bull elephants but mostly adolescent teens who were mad as hell and not gonna take it anymore.

So why elephant polo, and why now? Here is what I think: to give a new generation of elephants with no place to go and nothing to do a job: the age-old job of amusing human masters and spinning off advertising dollars. It's just another business to replace the lost ivory one. Instead of doing the right thing, preserving dwindling habitats, developing the elephant polo industry looks to be the winning and more profitable ticket for those owning the refugee-elephant population.

And next week, look out for the Elephant Festival in Sauraha where the animals will be forced to play football, take part in 100-metre dash races and the lot. Anything to make these magnificent animals anthropogenic. ●

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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Country Manager Jordan Ng of Canon Singapore was in Kathmandu last week. He spoke to *Nepali Times* about the boom in the South Asian market and his company's marketing campaign in Nepal.

***Nepali Times:* What is your assessment of the digital photography market in Nepal?**

Jordan Ng: Canon is going to market itself and achieve the share of number one position. We are not yet number one in all the categories. We look forward to at least 40 percent growth in 2008. We will carry out a lot of advertising, end user promotions and campaigns. We will provide free trainings for consumers, we will have an interactive Q&A section on our website for local customers.

What are the challenges?

For imaging products, we have a lot of inflow from neighbouring countries. It is difficult to stop inflow because Nepalis go to neighbouring countries and bring back Canon products. We have to provide support services and warranty. We cannot reject them because Canon is a global brand. Therefore, our biggest challenge will be to educate local customers to buy locally. The local market hasn't really touched Canon products yet. Therefore the initiative to create a Canon showroom, which will be a place where customers can touch, feel and learn about the products before they buy.

Is the analog technology dead? What is the industry assessment?

In terms of digital vs analog, the former has phased out. In global trends we are already moving on to high definition. There are high definition panels for video and tv. High definition video and image quality is what Canon is good at. Soon everything will be digital and analog will no longer be in market anymore.

In the next five years, how do you see the convergence of photography with mobile telephony?

Mobile phones today have 3 or 3.5 megapixels and some can also do video. However, in terms of quality they are not up to the mark. If you were to download whatever you have captured in your camera phone onto the computer and play it out big, you will see a lot of pixelation. Phones are used to make calls,

while imaging and video products have to have quality. Since the final output is going to be projected and high definition, why not use a camera, which will give you high quality images and videos? Canon has no plans of making camera phones. We are looking at quality. If you want a high-resolution image you have to use a semore sensor for cameras which current mobile phones can't sustain. We don't think you can turn a phone into an imaging device.

How do you see the growth of professional photography market in South Asia?

Our market share in South Asia has been growing every year. We are already exceeding our 30 percent market growth in the region. This means Canon has become the preferred choice for dealers and consumers. Our strength is that we are good at giving not just technical but also customer service.

What are some of your future plans in Nepal?

We want to target the young people, who go abroad to work and bring back money. We want to also tap into the corporate and business class who travel frequently. They have the opportunity to buy Canon products when they travel, but we want educate them that it is better to buy our products locally. We may negotiate tourism packages with some travel agencies. In terms of printing products, Canon will do more to build its image here in Nepal. We already have strong competition in printing products. Corporate offices, hotels and banks are used to using a specific brand and it may not be easy to penetrate, so we will have to do some brand convergence exercises.

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China's Market Leninism

Mao made history, and history is remaking Mao



ROSS TERRILL

Taxi drivers in south China hang a Mao portrait on their steering wheels to ward off accidents. Nightclub singers in Beijing throb to lyrics from Mao's Quotations. Urban youths relax in Cultural Revolution-style cafés at rough-hewn tables with Mao slogans on the wall, eating peasant dishes as they answer cell phones and chat about the stock market. Mao temples exist in some Buddhist villages, the altar adorned with a serene Mao image.

As President Hu Jintao tries to transcend communism forward to "market Leninism", Mao, now dead for 30 years, transcends communism backward to Chinese folk history. He floats into a nether zone as if he'd never been a political figure at all. Where is Mao the totalitarian?

Tens of millions of Chinese died in the forced collectivisation of the Great Leap Forward of 1958 and 1959: victims of Mao's utopianism and cruelty. Millions more died, and tens of millions

had their lives ruined during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

The cab drivers, farmers, pop singers and rural worshippers are really only echoing the Chinese Communist Party which does not quite know how to handle Mao's legacy. New history textbooks approved for initial use in Shanghai have largely brushed Mao out of China's story. Can a society that lived by Confucianism for two millennia, and later by Mao's leftist political faith, be content with amnesia about the Mao era and the absence of a believed public philosophy to replace communism?

Redeeming traits may help explain why Mao has been treated more gently than Stalin or Hitler. He wrote impressive essays and memorable poems. He was part monkey and part tiger, as he said of himself. The tiger knew how get from point A to point B, but the monkey felt doubt about the desirability of arriving at point B. Crucial, however, is the Chinese state's need for Mao. The CCP cannot simply denounce Mao as Nikita Khrushchev indicted Stalin in 1956. Mao, after all, was

not only China's Stalin, but also its Lenin and even its Marx. President Hu is heir to the power seized by Mao in 1949. Mao's gun is his legitimacy.

Mao made history; at the same time, history made Mao. Were the hundreds of millions of Chinese who wept at the sight of him out of their minds? In addition to looking at Mao's major failings as a human being, we must look at the structures that turned Mao's whim into CCP tyranny and the reasons for the evaporation of his youthful idealism and exactitude as well as the social engineering ideas he sprayed over China.

Young Mao was an ardent individualist. At teachers' training college his credo became the self-realisation of the individual. Mao's respect for individual freedom later collapsed. There were four reasons. One was the powerful current of nationalism in early-20th-century China. The cry to rescue the nation eclipsed individual self-realisation. A second was the large role of war in China from the 1920s to the 1940s. Pervasive violence made political debate a luxury and favored

repression. A third was Mao's embrace of Marxist ideas of class, economic planning and communist party organisation. Fourth was the hangover in Mao's mind and Chinese society generally of an emperor mentality.

In the end, Mao, facilitated by Stalin, built a party-state that neatly combined Leninism, the paternalism of early Chinese sage-rulers and Chinese-style fascism. But the soft landing for Mao is not the final word. Some say Deng reversed Mao's revolution, but it is an important distinction that Deng dismantled Mao's thought yet retained Mao's state. Deng-ism (continued by President Hu) was a retreat from as much as possible of Maoism without endangering Leninist political power.

We return to the 'solution' of having Mao float into folklore as a modern-day Yellow Emperor for an age of weapons in space and the WTO, a figure of dignity who can serve as a fashion model for green silk pajamas, as I recently noticed in a Shanghai department store. Such 'Maoism' is the twitching of a society whose post-Mao leaders have offered economic advancement but with political smoke and mirrors. It is easier and safer, of course, to domesticate Mao (the green silk pajamas), criticise him as an evil individual (as some do in private), or simply draw a veil over him (the CCP line), than to broach the problem of the political system he introduced to China.

Today, young pro-market Chinese who devour Hayek's Road to Serfdom and books on American business are embracing an anti-state Chinese tradition (best known in the West through Taoism). They would like—but will not get—a China without politics. A new public philosophy, when it comes, as it must, will come from gestation below, not as a diktat from a father-figure or a paternalistic Communist Party. Later, in a democratic era, it will be the voting public that chooses among clusters of policies devised by politicians allowed only the short term authority to lead. ●

Ross Terrill, a research associate at Harvard's Fairbank Center, is the author of The New Chinese Empire (Basic Books, 2004).



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DAMBER K SHRESTHA

Progressive demining

A rare success story in removing a dangerous legacy of the war

JASON MIKLIAN

Landmines and improvised explosive devices are notoriously prevalent in Nepal. Used primarily as strategic obstacles and tripwires, they continue to dot the countryside as remnants of war. Since the 2005 ceasefire alone, there have been over 350 casualties within 58 of Nepal's 75 districts.

Even more disturbing is that over half of today's victims are children, a higher percentage than anywhere else in the world. Mines kill indiscriminately, and can lie active for over 50 years as a cruel reminder of the elusiveness of true peace. Throughout Nepal, tens of thousands of these devices still wait to claim new victims.

Fortunately, the machinery of hope has begun. Identified as a priority issue in last year's peace agreement, momentum on clearing landmine-affected areas is increasing, and the first team of Nepal Army forces trained by UNMIN-contracted ArmorGroup has already demined several sites.

Most notably, last month's clearing of the 174 mines near the Khimti hydropower plant restored full functional capacity to a valuable local utility. The Maoists and the Nepal Army forces are now willingly providing sensitive military information to assist in mine cleanup efforts.

A lot of the credit goes to anti-mine activist Purna Shobha Chitrakar of the Nepal chapter of

the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (NCBL). Chitrakar has helped spread public awareness of the landmine issue among Nepali politicians despite years of apathy. Landmines and unexploded ordnance are now viewed as legitimate humanitarian concerns and a legacy of the war.

UNICEF and Handicap International are developing and expanding their victim assistance programs. Beneficiaries include those maimed by the 2005 Madi bus attack and orphans of mine victims. The program provides long-term integration solutions through education scholarships for children and resources for mine victims to start businesses. However, limited funding means that only a fraction of victims are assisted. This life-changing scheme can be expanded throughout Nepal if funding is increased.

After initial delays demining activities are now progressing through Maoist, Nepal Army, and UN joint activities. Nepal Army Brigadier General and head of mine operations Lok Thapa, UNMIN senior mine action adviser Grant Milthorpe and the Maoist leadership deserve recognition. Farms and strategic and military bases are being demined, one of the few directives of the peace agreement that are actually being implemented.

Now, Nepal needs to ratify the Ottawa Treaty and join the 156 states that have already

signed it pledging to eliminate landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) from combat use. Although all parties in Nepal have agreed in principle to the treaty, foot dragging in the interim assembly has delayed action. Mines and IEDs can comprise a key component of military strategy, but the fact that they do not distinguish between civilians, allies, and enemies illustrates that they have no place in any war fought on behalf of citizens.

Access to mined areas remains a primary hurdle due to military wariness and lack of infrastructure. Further, mapping of existing terrain is either incomplete (Nepal Army sites), or nonexistent (Maoist), rendering the true scope of the problem unclear. Also, devices occasionally explode in houses after being collected for their metal value. Although casualties have diminished substantially since 2005, all current deaths and injuries now are victim-activated.

While recognising the difficult road ahead, all parties involved should be commended for their efforts thus far to eradicate a monstrous leftover of war. In a time when interim legislatures are adjourned almost as soon as they begin, and partisan political bickering continues, it is easy to overlook real progress. For once, there is enough credit to pass around. ●

Jason Miklian is a researcher with the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO).
jason(at)prio.no

Radio movie

When ambition collides with truth

Kasi Lemmons' *Talk to Me* is a film about radio personality Petey Greene, that shutters through three decades of his life, beginning in 1966 with his stint on the PA system of the prison he is incarcerated in to his rise to media prominence. *Talk to Me* has many of the trappings of a biopic and sadly frequently falls on being formulaic in many ways of films of this genre: the subject's heavy boozing and chronic infidelity, maudlin sentimentality, and the obligatory posthumous commemoration. But it also gives us a clue to its subject's appeal: his connection with his audience and community, his ability to speak brazenly and his compulsion to skewer convention.



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

The film isn't simply a story of Greene (Cheadle), however, it is just as much about his complicated relationship with Dewey Hughes (Ejifor), the producer that gives Greene his first break. At first Greene doggedly pursues Hughes in the hopes of landing a show on his radio station, and this first portion of the film relies on the levity of the old and familiar comic contrast between the hip Greene and the straight-laced Hughes. Cheadle embodies his role, bestowing it with a crackling electricity, while Ejifor, understanding the drive his character possesses, gives a charged performance that will not allow Cheadle's more flamboyant role to eclipse his.

When Greene's career skyrockets, Hughes sees his potential for reaching his own aspirations vicariously. That pursuit inevitably ensues into bitter divisions. Perhaps because the script is overworked, the tone of the film is inconsistent: the comic levity of its start sits uneasy with heaviness in the middle. But it succeeds in highlighting two divergent and insoluble ambitions: Hughes' desire for success epitomized by the mainstream and recognition, and Greene's impulse to speak the truth to his own community.



Spanning the tumultuous years of the 60s, 70s and into the 80s, Lemmons takes on the challenge of historical place. At its most successful is the segment studded in the film's center of Washington DC erupting with the hurting anguish of a community losing its leader after the assassination of Doctor Martin Luther King. It's that powerful and effecting achievement that suggests the film needed to keep its attention on that place, weaving Petey Greene's story into the story of DC. That it fails to do so, having communicated Greene's identification with his city as so essential is sadly ironic. Consequently, the narrative loses its sense of time and space, breezy costume changes notwithstanding. The rousing eulogy to the thousand of attendees at the film's end closes with Dewey Hughes declaration, 'This is Petey Greene's Washington!' If only Lemmons could project Petey Greene's Washington believably. ●

Director: Kasi Lemmons
Cast: Don Cheadle, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Taraji P. Henson, Cedric the Entertainer, Martin Sheen. 2007. 118 min





MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

LIKE FISH NEED BICYCLES: Famous feminist Gloria Steinem takes a break from the Equality Now-sponsored meeting on trafficking in Kathmandu last week to catch up with the Times.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

CATCHING UP WITH THE READING: Policepersons took a break to enjoy the afternoon sun before a protest by landless peasants from western Nepal arrived at Maitighar Mandala on Wednesday.



ANUP PRAKASH

GIVE CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE: Veteran composer and singer Manik Ratna Sthapit receives a lifetime achievement award from Kamran Bakr, managing director of Unilever at the Hits FM Music Awards 2007 last week.



KIRAN PANDAY

IT'S A ZOO OUT THERE: Passengers piled up at the departure area at TIA on Thursday afternoon because only two of the four luggage x-rays were working.





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Delighting the World

Red Label Revolution

Just how serious the parties are about elections can be gauged from the fact that they have already consulted the astrologers about auspicious planetary alignments for polls and have come up with two dates: **March 16** or **April 10**.

Let me get this right. GP is accused by kangresi hardliners that he is too republican and making friends with communists. Meanwhile, PKD is accused by baddie hardliners for being a closet royalist and making overtures to “nationalist monarchists”. Do you also get the sense something ain’t quite right here?

This can only mean one thing, in this Ass’ humble opinion, that if both are making the radicals angry both are the only sensible guys in their respective parties, and deserve our support.

Shame on **Outlook**, therefore, for belittling our awe-inspiring dear leader by doing that hatchet job on the Rolex Revolutionary and printing a rude cartoon showing him with a potbelly, wearing a Rado, riding a Pajero, with Set Wet gel in his hair, and standing dangerously close to a bottle of Red Label. Just for the record: our Comrade Chairman wears a TAGHeuer, not a Rado, and he rides a Bolero, not a Pajero, his gel is Gatsby not Set Wet and he’s put on 12 kg not 15 kg. Can’t these Indian mags get anything right?



Although the three summiteers at Baluwatar are now nearing a consensus, the meetings this week got off to a rocky start with Girjau getting so worked up he needed artificial supplemental oxygen during a particularly heated session in which Macoonay was reduced to yelling through his muffler. “Do what you want,” the prime minister is reported to have told his two leftie interlocutors after MKN had the temerity to insist that the prime minister resign if the elections can’t be held on **Chait 28**.

In a rare outburst, Comrade Macoonay is supposed to have retorted: “Of course you should resign and start taking some responsibility around here.” The prime minister is reported to have finally shown some flexibility on the Maoist proposal of a roundtable conference by saying he’d had no objections to a tea party.

At this point the Ass’s moles have a slightly different take on what happened next. Koirala family sources say it was actually the prime minister who got up and walked out, but UML sources say it was actually their supremo who did the stomping and this suddenly left His Fierceness thrust into the uncusomary role of mediator. It must be said here that Comrade Fearsome is under doctor’s orders not to get too worked up about the state of the nation lest his hypertension goes **high tension** again. In fact, party hardliners have been told to lay off the chairman for the time being and aim all their barbs at BB.



Which is probably why Comrade Red Flag has been bringing in reinforcements from India for moral support, big guns like fellow-traveller Ananda Swaroop Verma. Why do we have to troop off every now and then to Hotel Kamal to listen to these self-professed Nepal experts from the south of the border who want revolution in every country except their own? This is where the line between the **intelligentsia** and the **intelligence** community gets a bit blurred.

Anyway, meteorologists have detected a certain warmth in relations between the Injuns and the Maoists with Comrade Awesome possibly being invited soon on an official visit, which means the Chairman’s trick of spooking the Indians by going off on a nationalist tangent after talkin to the Chinese delegation worked like magic.

And now that Shailaja Auntie has failed her physicals for ambassadorship to Delhi, that leaves the field wide open for the Maoists to step in. Hey, how about sending BB?

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