Weekly Internet Poll # 384. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Who is most to blame in the delay in setting an election date?

Total votes: 5,191

(Bar chart showing results)

KIRAN NEPAL

ow that it has the elections sorted out, the spendthrift governing alliance is finding it difficult to pay for all its promises.

There is a gaping shortfall of Rs 3 billion to pay for elections and requirements of the 23-point agreement. And at a time when money is so short, the seven parties have awarded themselves Rs 1 million per MP as pork-barrel funds for election expenses.

Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat was hard pressed to answer concerns from Kathmandu-based donor representatives on Wednesday about the expenses. He clarified that the Rs 1 million had already been budgeted as expenses for VDCs and the ruling parties had decided to give the money to their MPs. Donors said this would give an unfair advantage to incumbent parties, and they were not satisfied about how this money would be accounted for.

Mahat calculates that the government will need Rs 5 billion to finance the elections, pay for Maoists in the cantonments who haven’t been paid since April 2007, compensate conflict victims and provide security in the tarai. But he can only muster Rs 2 billion. Mahat called the meeting with party leaders to ask donors to meet the shortfall.

“Even if we pay only Rs 100,000 per conflict victim, then to meet all the other expenses included in the 23-point agreement we need another Rs 3 billion,” Finance Secretary (Revenue) Rameswor Khanal told Nepal Times.

The Finance Ministry is massively in arrears on payments to Indian Oil for petroleum imports, and domestic borrowings have already exceeded Rs 8 billion at a time when interest rates are going up due to a liquidity shortage in the market.

The government’s main source of revenue is next week’s share auction of Nepal Telecom, which is expected to yield Rs 10 billion. The government is selling its 150 million shares at a minimum of Rs 600 per share. But there is a writ in the Supreme Court about discrepancies in the pricing of the shares for the public, who will have to pay six times more than the company’s employees.

Representatives of Kathmandu-based embassies were encouraged by the presence at Wednesday’s Finance Ministry meeting of Baburam Bhattarai from the Maoists, Jhalanath Khanal of the UML and the NC’s Chakra Bastola.

Said one donor representative: “Now that they were there to discuss money, it looked like elections were finally for real.”
MADHES CHECKLIST

It’s time someone gave the Prime Minister a wake-up call on the madhes. Two NC ministers who should be warning their boss about the tarai, Peace Minister Ram Chandra Poudel and Home Minister Krishna Prasad Shalala, are both in deep denial. Poudel is under the impression that all the demands of the madhes parties for regional autonomy and representation in the army and government have already been met. For the MP led by Upendra Yadav, the rump Sadbhavana of Rajendra Mahato and the Tarai-Madhesh Loktantrik party of Mahanta Thakur, this is a slap in the face.

If there is such a wide communication gap among moderate madhes who are committed to non-violence and elections, imagine the communication gap by arms-bearing tarai. True, not all madhes agree with all the demands made by Yadav and recent detectors from the mainstream parties. The madhes itself is multi-layered, divided by caste, language, religion and ethnicity. Here is an opportunity to address the grievances of the southern plains at one go, but the government is squandering that chance.

However dire it may look from Kathmandu, however radical the demands of the madhes leaders, things haven’t got to a point of no return. Madhes are sure of what they want and they’re not hiding it. But instead of negotiating with moderate forces, Baburawat is letting things drift dangerously. This will only help residual radicals who want to disrupt the elections at all costs, and make it more difficult for the madhes leadership to win the tarai torch from the hands of the militants. Election can be held only if they doubt that will provide excuses to those who want to avoid polls. Sections of the international community and UNMIN must allow negotiations to be held. Self-sufficiency won’t be smooth as a referendum in Switzerland, where people cast their ballots in the post office on their way to work. Our elections are sure to be messy. (But at least we will have a greater turnout than in the Swiss cantons.) Elections will provide closure and clarity, and many of the pending demands for identity and representation can be addressed and added to the elected assembly.

Many of the madhes grievances are at the level of perception, but the three Brahmins of Baluwatar seem not to have understood that. Here is a simple three-point checklist:

1. restart the negotiation process
2. send positive signals to the tarai
3. announce concrete steps to redress grievances right away

Kathmandu’s status-quoists have to realise that the days when the valley’s rulers decided on the future of the country are gone. Now, the rest of the country will decide Kathmandu’s future. Moderate politicians have shown responsibility and maturity by underlying the non-violent nature of their struggle and by expressing support for elections. They must now speak out as openly to condemn the violence being perpetrated in the name of the madhes struggle by the militant groups.

To see an example of what could happen in the Tarai-Madhes, consider the situation in the Swiss cantons.) Elections will provide closure and clarity, and many of the pending demands for identity and representation can be addressed and added to the elected assembly. The only remedy is to declare elections on 10 April. Anyone who doubts that will be accused of selling yeti stories as shapes of its head resembling the helmet-like “chhapani”, alluding to the peculiar Barun Valley. They describe an ape-like creature in the Barun Valley. They describe an ape-like creature in the barun valley. They describe an ape-like creature in the barun valley. They describe an ape-like creature in the barun valley.
Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala must have been aware that the appointment of Sujata Koirala as de facto deputy prime minister was unlikely to go down well in his own party, let alone with his coalition partners in the seven-party alliance. Clearly it was a considered risk. Perhaps there is something he wants done that he can only entrust to his daughter.

It is equally unlikely that minister without portfolio Sujata Koirala didn’t consider the anger her remarks about the monarchy and the 1990 constitution would create. She carefully calculated the likely repercussions of her seemingly intemperate observations and decided to court controversy anyway. Obviously, to her, the political stakes are high enough to warrant the irrational advocacy of such an irrelevant, unpopular institution.

The rumour mill has begun working overtime, and almost everyone has a conspiracy theory to explain the weird ways of the Koiralas. Some believe papa feels honour-bound to protect the monarchy and wants his daughter close so she can advance his agenda. Others even believe Sujata wants to be queen herself.

Remnants of the royal regime contend that the prime minister has consented to support a military-backed civilian government headed by his daughter if the scheduled elections fail to take place again.

A new dynasty emerges to replace the monarchy

Such a step would confer ex post facto legitimacy on the ‘doctrine of necessity’ that King Gyanendra used to usurp all constitutional authority. Royalists hope the amity between the Shahs and Koiralas would enable the constitutional monarchy to reign supreme once more.

Leelists are more cynical. They believe Koirala will use his daughter to bully, befool and bamboozle various insurgent groups in the tussle to make them fall into line for the elections. Mission accomplished, Sujata will be told to fend for herself in the cutthroat battle for the NC leadership. This is the reason Kangans andBanjaras have been rather muted in censuring Girija’s decision and Sujata’s statements.

The prime minister is, after all, accomplished in the political art of use and discard.

What is not to say that Nepal is not ready to accept a female head of state or government. Far from it: Nepali women have earned the right to lead this nation by their grit and determination rather than by relying on the will of a patriarch. There is no dearth of competent and committed women who could lend Nepal.

With her professional qualifications and long history of political struggle, Hira Yami would have been the ideal candidate. But she is in the wrong party: male domination in Marxist and Maoist parties does not allow women to rise beyond a certain level in power politics.

A democratic framework is the sine qua non for gender justice.

Chāculus Vārāca could have been another contender, but there is no shortage of pretenders to the leadership throne in her party. To improve her chances, she should look at the possibility of jumping on the Mahanta Thakur bandwagon.

Sujata’s critics—and there are many—may not like it, but if she can refrain from spoiling her chances further by not associating herself too closely with the monarchy, she may yet emerge at the top of the heap to claim her father’s crown. The royal dynasty may be sidelined, but long live the democratic dynasty.

Family business

Addressing the women’s wing of NC on the last day of 2007, Girija assured his audience the country would soon see a female prime minister. It wouldn’t be a day too soon for Nepal if his predictions were to come true: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have all had women presidents or premiers. But it is a little premature to connect Koirala’s wishes and his actions. Sujata may already be a grandmother, but in the political school of hard knocks she is no match for Sher Bahadur Deuba or Sushil Koirala.

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NATION
18 - 24 JANUARY 2008 #383

Entering another dimension

Nepal seeks to become world class in 3D animated film

Right now we don’t even have high-performance computers.” Training institutes like Pentasoft and the Maya Academy of Advanced Cinematics are attracting growing interest from students, but expectations may be outpacing reality, warn some local experts.

“They are some schools that charge an exorbitant amount of money to teach 3ds Max in three months,” says Prabhu Kar Chetri of Firefly Studios. He says it takes a year to master such tools.

“Just one thing to be an animator, one needs to be artistic. You can’t just learn 3ds Max in three months and expect to be creating 3D animation.”

Gurung, at the Pentasoft Academy, agrees: “First you learn the basics and then you specialise.” He says Pentasoft gets about 15 new students every three months to study animation, of whom only a very few have sufficient time and money to allow them to specialise further in this field.

Kiran Joshi, an ex-Disney animator, came back from the US to open his own animation studio, Incessant Rain (“Outsourcing toons”, #371). His production company, Pinkslip Productions, intends to outsource animation deals from companies like Disney in the US to Nepal to make the most of the plentiful talent and comparatively low costs. In partnership with Mercantile, Incessant Rain is recruiting young talent at a blistering pace, taking students straight out of animation school.

There has never been much demand for animation within Nepal. “Most advertising agencies cannot afford us,” says Yalamber Khairgoli, one of Chetri’s colleagues at Firefly Studios.

“Animation is hard work and very expensive.” All Firefly’s animators are self-taught and have gone into the field because they enjoy it, not because they think it will make them rich.

“We grew up watching Tom and Jerry and Disney cartoons, and all we wanted to do was create Nepali characters which are even better,” says Chetri. Decent equipment costs thousands of dollars, the reason why Joshi says he partnered with Nepal’s best-known IT company, Mercantile. But if he and fellow enthusiasts in Nepal can produce works of world-class quality, they can expect a good return on their investment.

“Animation is expensive in terms of equipment and the amount of sweat we put in, but it’s what we like to do,” says Khairgoli, “and as long as we like doing it, we’ll keep making animation.”

PRANAYA SJB RANA

Nhucheman, who is clad in the daura-suruwal. They talk of the coming elections. Maya, a smart schoolgirl asks Raju questions, a kindly teacher, while Kanchi prepares tea.

It looks like a normal enough Nepali scene, with birds and butterflies in the air and a bike speeding past. It’s hard to believe this three-dimensional animated film has been made in Nepal.

Gone are the days of the classic two-dimensional cartoons, thanks to computer-generated animation by the likes of Pixar and Dreamworks. Now, Nepali cartoonmakers are using the same softwares as went into the making of films like Finding Nemo and Ratatouille, to craft the country’s first 3D animated shorts, Messengers of Change.

Developed by Firefly Studios, the film is intended for use as a public service announcement to prepare people for the elections. The quality is astonishingly good, the attention to detail impressive—from Kanchi’s red tika to Maya’s phuli. If Nepali studios can produce this sort of quality, they could soon be knocking on Hollywood’s door.

Nepali animators have all the skill required, just not the tools,” says Manish Gurung, who teaches students how to use 3ds Max, a professional-quality graphics application at the Pentasoft Institute. “To create world-class animation we require better equipment, the likes of which Nepal may have never seen before.

“Enter another dimension”

Nepal seeks to become world class in 3D animated film
The real world

The ‘market’ is not a theoretical concept but the phone call from a customer

My friends ask me: “You’ve been the CEO of a company for some months. How is running a company different from what you were doing earlier?”

As someone who made the transition from the profession of offering business advice to that of executing corporate decisions, I find it hard to respond easily. On the one hand, a few months add up to a pitifully short time in any company. But then, just as the morning signals the day ahead, the first few months at the helm of a company indicate the sort of transition from the profession of offering business advice to that of executing corporate decisions. I find it hard to respond easily. On the one hand, a few months add up to a pitifully short time in any company. But then, just as the morning signals the day ahead, the first few months at the helm of a company indicate the sort of management path the company is likely to take in the future. Still, here is what I have observed, learnt and adapted to so far.

Job vs Career: I used to believe that employees should focus on doing their jobs well. I have now started to believe that employees will do their jobs better if management takes time to explain and re-explain what career paths the company can offer. Given today’s job-market in Nepal, skilled employees, especially those who have to produce ideas and have to play with numbers, do not work hard for the sheer love of late nights or because they want to make money for others. They work hard because their diligence is meaningful to them in the contest of a career path. The sooner management learns to frame narrow job-related discussions within broader career-related goals for each individual, the quicker a motivated employee sees how his present job, with certain results, leads to where they want to go next. I do not waste time these days explaining what jobs employees should do. I worry about not being able to show clearly which jobs are likely to lead to which career paths, and what employees can and should do to get there.

Weakness vs Strength: One thing I have noticed in many Nepali companies is that people are hired from outside for their strengths. Once inside, they are then hounded by management and colleagues for their weaknesses. But as the late management guru Peter Drucker never tired of explaining, for any employee it is hard to improve on a weakness. It’s much easier to focus on a strength and build on it. I have found this to be true.

Secrecy vs Openness: Most Nepali companies are secretive to the point of being financially sick. This is not surprising. When management spends too much time hiding, information and playing one group against another, employees have no choice but to use up their working hours to obsess over management’s every gesture. Factions form, loyalties are fragmented, and products and customers are neglected. The antidote is to install a communication system that lets employees focus only on selling what the company produces.

Previously, the ‘market’ was a theoretical construct. These days, I find it in the phone calls of customers.

Responsible Yeti

As part of their corporate social responsibility, Yeti Airlines will now provide a 25 percent discount to all employees of UN-affiliated organisations and INGOs till 30 April 2008. Yeti Airlines will also donate Rs 4 from each flight ticket to four social organisations, Tewa, OCCED, Sewa Kendra Leprosy Relief and Nepal Glaucoma Eye Clinic.

Eithad flying full

UAE carrier, Eithad Airways, which started flights to Kathmandu from Dubai in November has recorded its highest ever passenger figures carrying 19,000 passengers on 3, 4 and 5 January with average seat factors of 88 percent across its network. The best performing routes included Singapore, Brisbane and Sydney which were 96 percent full during this period.

New scheme

KIST Merchant Bank has introduced a new deposit scheme where customers can open an account for just Rs 1 deposit and the bank will deposit Rs 100 as a bonus, along with a free SSB Debit card. This scheme is only for the first 10,000 customers.

BoK meet

The 13th Annual General Meeting of the Bank of Kathmandu concluded on 14 January. The bank was able to increase net profit by 30 percent since last year, loans and advances increased by 29.45 percent at a total of Rs 11.14 billion.

Romantic menthol

Jaya Confectionary, makers of Crave premium candies, has launched a new campaign with a romantic theme. Called #Freshness ka Romantic (ahar) the campaign is for the Fresho menthol candies brand.

NEW PRODUCTS

CONNECT: Ohm Solution launched the ZTE MZ16 USB EDGE Modem, which is a quad-band wide area wireless network modem. Along with the modem, Ohm also launched two data terminals, the MG 880 CDMA2000 and the MC 315+ CDMA2000.

Ero mobile

Choose a plan...

...किन्नर बुक लें जो एक साल धेरै समय लाग्ने गर्दा पाउनुहोस्।

No Hassle, Queue सस्तो उपलब्ध जस्तै आसानी साथै।

BOUNDLESS opportunities
I couldn’t just be a spectator anymore

Interview in Sajha Sawal, BBC Nepal Service, 13 January

Mahanta Thakur, the madhesi politician who resigned from government, from parliament and from his Nepal Congress party last month to set up his own Tarai-Madhesh Loktantrik Party, answered questions at a public hearing in Lahan this week. The event was part of the Sajha Sawal program provided by the BBC Nepal Service.

Jeewan Jha, Nawalparasi: You have been in powerful positions, but you never spoke a word about the tarai then. Why are you trying to project yourself as a saviour of the tarai now?

Mahanta Thakur: In our partyís Jhapa convention, I had raised the issue of the under-representation of madhesis in state units, including the army. The prime minister admitted the weakness and had promised to rectify this.

Narayan Shrestha: But why did you have to set up a new party?

Sushil Sharma: You were a senior leader of a national party. Why did you choose to become leader of a regional party?

Sushil Sharma: You yourself were in a position to solve the tarai inputs, let us know, we will try to include them, if it is useful. We have written it down in our mission statement. If you have any anger and resentment we are witnessing today.

Bidya Choudari, Bardiya: You have claimed you represent us tharus?

Mishrilal Harijan: There is communal tension. How are you going to bring the two communities together?

I think we can have a dialogue and solve our problems rationally.

Rashagan Choudari, Bardiya: There is violence in the tarai. Donít you think it will overshadow the problems here?

We have formed a new party partly because of the violence. We hope that our demands would be met. You come to a tipping point.

Sushil Sharma: Why didnít you form a new party then?

Sushil Sharma: So why didnít you form a new party?

We were being extremely patient and hoping that our demands would be met. You come to a tipping point.

Sushil Sharma: If yours is a national party, what is your roadmap for Nepal, not just madhes?

Sushil Sharma: If youíre a national party, what is your roadmap for Nepal, not just madhes?

We have written it down in our mission statement. If you have any inputs, let us know, we will try to include them, if it is useful.

Sushil Sharma: You yourself were in a position to solve the tarai problems for last 15 years. You became the deputy speaker, you were admitted the weakness and had promised to rectify this.

You canít consult an astrologer about these things. It happens when one canít take it anymore.

Mishrilal Harijan: There is communal tension. How are you going to bring the two communities together?

I think we can have a dialogue and solve our problems rationally.

Rashagan Choudari, Bardiya: There is violence in the tarai. Donít you think it will overshadow the problems here?

We have formed a new party partly because of the violence. We hope to work together with other groups to stop it. After we announced the formation of our new party, the leaders of the armed groups congratulated us. We havenít really met them in person yet.

Sushil Sharma: There is a history of madhesi groups splintering again and again. How can you ensure that your party will be an exception?

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Narayan Shrestha: But why did you have to set up a new party?

Sushil Sharma: You were a senior leader of a national party. Why did you choose to become leader of a regional party?

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my question is: why do I have to get a new one when all the other information on the card is the same? I am sure it is not just me, but other third-gender friends who are facing the same problem. People do not molest and assault us as they used to in the past. More people at decision-making levels, in civil society, the administration, and among donors know about us and accept us. But people still think that those who stand around in Thamel late at night waiting for customers are the only people of third gender in Nepal. The biggest problem the third gender faces is unemployment. This is why so many of them have had to resort to working as sex workers.

Talk talk

Editorial in Rajbhasha, 10 January

After the failure to form the commissions as agreed under the peace accord, the Maoists and the government have reiterated the need in the 23-point agreement. Last year, the Maoists and the government agreed on the formation of commissions for truth and reconciliation, for peace and rehabilitation, for disappearance investigations, and for scientific land reform, and a high-level commission to monitor the comprehensive peace agreement. The peace agreement this time has set a deadline of a month to establish all the commissions and committees. However, even though 15 days have already passed, the government has not made any serious move to implement the plan. If the parties live up to their tradition of merely talking and fail to do anything substantial, the promise to work will fail to live up to their tradition of merely talking and fail to do anything substantial. If the parties live up to their tradition of merely talking and fail to do anything substantial, the agreements and proposals will have no effect.

Song of unity

Anushil in Himal Khabarpatrika, 15-29 January

She may be a Gurung, but the way she sings in the Maitili, Bhojpuri, Dhimal, Tharu and Awadhi languages, one feels she is a native speaker of all those languages. Madhuri Gurung, 38, has sung more than a dozen songs in Bhojpuri and recently released the Bhojpuri album, Aayaa Sanees. She also sings with Gopal Thakur in Bhojpuri in an album called Nirmohiya. Madhuri's love for madhesi music led her to participate in Madhes Night, held in Kathmandu. She often travels to the madhes to sing in concerts, and doesn’t believe people are being forced out of their areas.

Anushil

Bato Roje, an anthology of Madhuri's songs has recently been published, and she teaches music in Kathmandu.
Having travelled to Upper Mustang via Jomsom 20 years ago, the changes this time are dramatic.

After getting off the plane at Jomsom airport, one is greeted not by the sound of mule bells but by motorcycles revving up. Tractors roar along the cobbledstone streets like steam locomotives. Diesel fumes assail the nostrils just as in Kathmandu. There is a traffic policeman, and in the past two years there have already been two vehicular accidents with four fatalities.

And the road hasn’t even reached Jomsom yet. All the motorcycles and tractors and the fuel to run them have been flown in by cargo helicopters.

Among locals in lower Mustang, there are two schools of thought about the road. The orchard owners who need a market for their apples, apricots and Marpha’s famous brandy think the link will give them better access to markets in the city. And other traders anticipate a boom in business.

But those who depend on trekking are worried that the road will destroy the unique selling point of the Kali Gandaki, which has carved the world’s deepest gorge as it flows between Dhaulagiri and Annapurna. The highway is presently being blasted by an army demolition team through cliff-faces that should have been declared a World Heritage Site, they say.

There are still trekkers walking round the Annapurna circuit, but they know they are the last visitors to see this stupendous gorge in its pristine state. Even as they walk towards Tatopani, the sound of dynamite blasting echoes and re-echoes in the narrow valley. There is only a 300m portion near Ghasa and another 700m north of Tatopani that remain to be cleared on the 83km road between Beni and Jomsom.

Some trekking entrepreneurs in Jomsom have already diversified to pilgrim tourism, which they hope will bring in more Indian and Nepali visitors once the road is open. Pilgrims can already buy a two-hour 28km pillion ride on a motorcycle from Jomsom to Muktinath for Rs 1,200. A jeep ride costs Rs 450. The jeeps were brought in by helicopter at a cost of Rs 470,000 and the transporters feel they can easily recoup the cost.

It is the low season in Jomsom, and there are only three flights a day from Pokhara. If the road is blacktopped, the airport will have little use. However, some hotel owners here are not so worried about the road. They say there is now more potential to sell walks to the side valleys like Meso Kanto, the pass to Dolpo, the east Dhaulagiri glacier and other areas of upper Mustang. They also say the airport could then be used for flights to Kathmandu and perhaps even to Banaras or Delhi to facilitate more pilgrim traffic.

There is also anticipation here that the newly-released film Kagbeni will bring a flood of urban middle-class Nepalis to Mustang in the spring when the road is finished.
Ladakh to Jomsom
Mustang to Mustang
In Morang each day, locals are treated to the unusual sight of a middle-aged British couple pedalling their bicycles to or from the District Education Office, the Teacher Training Centre and various schools around the district.

David Spinney, 61, and Deborah Jordan, 59, have been following this routine for the past seven months in their work as teacher trainers. David, former principal of a school in London, is now helping improve the quality of teaching at three schools in Biratnagar. Deborah, his wife, has been a teacher for 33 years and is running a 10-month training course for teachers from Morang, Sunsari and Sankhuwasabha.

The couple came to Nepal with the British development charity VSO after a three-year teaching stint in Ethiopia. It is David’s first time in Nepal, although Deborah once came to Pokhara on a school trip with her students. At that time, she admits, she had little interest in Nepal’s educational system. But now, with a job to do, she has made sure she knows all about it.

Compared with Ethiopia, Nepal’s education system is in good shape, she says. In Britain, more than 90 percent of students go to government-funded schools and the educational standard is generally high. “Here it is the exact opposite: only the poor send their children to public schools,” says David. “Even middle-class people hesitate to send their children to government schools.”

Deborah believes the poor student-to-teacher ratios and small classrooms often make teaching ineffective in Nepal’s public schools. David, after seeing 135 students packed into a single classroom at the Janapath Higher Secondary School in Biratnagar, says: “When you ask a question, 55 of them answer simultaneously.”

But he feels the training he and Deborah provide can have a positive effect. They teach their students to speak in turn, and they show them how to make learning more fun – both for the teachers and the students.

Deborah says many teachers here are dissatisfied with their jobs. Low pay and society’s negative perception of teachers are part of the problem. She believes the government should make education a priority and give teachers more respect.

“I could have been a doctor or an engineer, but I chose to be a teacher,” David says. “I’ve seen that many are dissatisfied with teaching here but I don’t believe that I would have found satisfaction in any other profession.”

He remembers how proud his parents were when he was appointed principal of a London school. “I nepali society doesn’t respect the teaching profession,” he says. “This is why there are very few people who wish to become teachers.”

A dedicated British couple teach Nepali teachers

Feet on the pedals

DAMBAR KRISHNA SHRESTHA in BIRATNAGAR

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The Times 18-24 January 2008 #383
go zone for humans.

Subedi says people must realize that the environment of Chitwan, as everywhere, is constantly evolving in response to the pressures on it, both natural and man-made.

“If we are to preserve nature’s diversity, we must make decisions based on research and understanding,” says Subedi.

“That is where the campground can make a valuable contribution, by providing an affordable research location close to the park.”

Chitwan Campground is the first of its kind in Nepal. Its proximity to Nepal’s richest biodiversity area, to several successful community forestry activities in the buffer zone, and to elephant and gharial breeding centres, makes it a valuable place for field training and student research, Subedi says.

It is able to host school and university field trips.

The campground can also encourage a new type of ecotourism, one that goes beyond preaching “take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints” and actually provides a place for people to stay with the minimum of impact to their surroundings. This way “ecotourism isn’t just a meaningless marketing tool but a chance to stay and learn about the environment while doing minimal damage.”

Chitwan Campground
Bird Education Society
Sauraha, Chitwan
+977 056 580113
besnepal(at)wlink.com.np

Cost: Rs 450 per person per day.
Includes three meals, tea and accommodation. Tents, sleeping bags and mattresses can be hired for a minimal cost.

The Chitwan Campground is a project of the Resources Himalayan Foundation in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation and supported by Wildlife Conservation Nepal. It is managed by Chitwan Bird Education Society.
Sins of the sister

Stunning filmmaking atones for narrative shortcomings

As the strike by the Writers’ Guild of America rolled into its third month, the Golden Globe Awards were announced on 12 January this year in an abysmally unceremonial manner. It is ironic then that the top prize of best film went to Atonement, an adaptation of renowned novelist Ian McEwan’s 2001 book that is, simply put, a deep reflection on the power of writing.

The story opens on a country estate during an idyllic, languid summer in pre-Second World War Britain, where 13-year-old Briony becomes the jealous witness of a romantic/sexual tension that is already stirring beneath the war and Cecilia estranged from the family. Having thus said the main reason for writing the book was to familiarise prabasi Nepalis about the rich tradition and culture of their homeland. “It occurred to me that although the future of people like us, who have made our homes outside Nepal, is tied to the country in which we dwell, our language, literature, and culture are still Nepal’s, and everyone’s own literature and culture are dear to them,” Chhetri says.

In 2005, Basain was made into a feature film and on the 50th anniversary of its first edition in 2006, Michael J Hutt has brought out a flawless translation. As professor of Nepal at the School of African and Oriental Studies in London, Hutt has taken great pains to make sure nothing is lost in translation. The slim volume, with a preface, glossary, afterword, bibliography and copious footnotes will open a window to Nepal to many for whom the book has so far been out of bounds. And through that window, we see the reality of rural Nepal that hasn’t changed much in the five decades since the book was written.

Atonement’s protagonist is also an aspiring writer. And in her dishonesty and emotional confusion, the themes are not soul-stirring, and is a real crisis of credibility. The romance between Cecilia and Robbie feels tentative, the scenario may itself seem a bit trifling, but that is because by watching the film you get a sense that you are missing out on a lot of what McEwan tackles literally. The morbid presence of the war does give some weight to the narrative, and there is also a paradox in portraying Robbie’s haunting experience of the war. Forfeiting the cinematic experience of it is also something in the way a family’s identity and art in general (and perhaps also on their incompleteness). With a subject matter this nuanced, layered and literary, it is clear why the movie adaptation will be somewhat resented.

That is also the reason Hutt says he chose to translate Basain: “The way a family’s dispossession and flight from Nepal are represented in the novel tells us something about the historical fact of migration from the Nepalese hills, as well as the author’s attitudes to the fact.”

This is a moving and simple story of a universal family forced to leave home. Thanks to this translation, Basain will touch the hearts of many people worldwide.

KUNDA DIXIT

REVIEWS

CRITICAL CINEMA

Diwas KC

Not lost in

Two Nepali novels, written half-a-century apart, now in English

Mountains Painted with Turmeric (Basain)

Lil Bahadur Chhet

Translated by Michael J Hutt

Columbia University Press, 2008

Pages 144

Hardcover Rs

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acts are even more dramatic than fiction in societies wracked by war. Nepal’s conflict was no different. Nearly 15,000 people were killed and disappeared between 1996-2006, but a novel could be written about each one of them. The story of every family displaced by the conflict could be turned into a feature film.

But we only remember the numbing numbers: 15,000 killed, 1,500 disappeared, 75,000 injured, 250,000 internally displaced and almost the whole country affected in one way or another.

As the editor of Nepal’s largest-circulation newspaper, Narayan Wagle knew well the limitations of journalism in covering war. The news format wasn’t the best way to get across to readers how the conflict was brutalising Nepali society. Wagle chose fiction to get closer to the truth.

When Palpasa Café came out in 2005, its unusual non-linear style was an instant hit with Nepali readers. It was a fictionalised account of Nepalis caught in the grips of war. Wagle makes a cameo appearance at the beginning of the book and hears of the abduction of a real-life friend by soldiers. He turns his disappeared colleague into an imaginary painter named Drishya, and the rest of the book is about how the conflict sweeps everyone along.

Drishya falls in love with Palpasa, a Nepali American who has returned to the land of her parents after the post-9/11 America. Drishya meets with his childhood friend, Siddhartha, who has joined the Maoists and goes back to their war-torn village in the mountains. The two argue about the age-old questions of art and politics, about peace and justice, about whether the means justify the end.

In the novel’s first chapter Wagle, as himself, is sitting at a café in Thamel taking dictation on the phone from a district reporter. There has been another battle in the mountains. “That was nothing new,” Wagle writes, “we published stories like that every day. Today’s newspaper already carried an almost identical story, tomorrow’s would as well. It was the same thing every day… did newspapers exist here only to public body counts?”

Something is always lost in translation when novels cross the language barrier. Happily, this one, which got a final polish from Linda Trigg, preserves the original nuances. Narayan Wagle wrote a powerful anti-war novel, delving deeply through his characters at the human cost of conflict. Now, through this English translation, a larger international audience can read about what Nepal’s war did to its people.

Palpasa Café
by Narayan Wagle
Translated by Bikash Sangraula
nepa~laya, 2008
240 pages
Rs 500 (hard cover)
Rs 300 (soft cover)
**EXHIBITIONS**

- Acrylic paintings by Asha Dongole at the Park Gallery, Lazimpat, until 30 January, 10AM-6PM. 4419353
- Tibetan Lhosar photographs by Daniel Collins at the Saturday Café, Boudhanath stupa, 6 February–31 March.

**EVENTS**

- Electrowhistle at the JBar with DJ DannyCool from Ukraine, 19 January, 9PM. 4418209
- Youth Discussion Series on trade, economic relations and our strategy forward with Raghab D Pant, 18 January, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari, 4238050
- animaNEPAL community meeting to discuss the street dogs of Patan, 4PM on 23 January at the Summit Hotel. 9841334537

**MUSIC**

- Paleti with Prem Dhoh Pradhan, 25 January at the nepa-laya ñiri sala, Kalkausthan, 5.30 PM. 4412469
- Live fusion music of soft rock and classical by Static at Moksh, Pulchok, 15 January, 8.30 PM 5826212
- Ciney Gurung every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 7PM. 5821408
- Catch 22 live at the Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.

**DINING**

- Illy espresso coffee at the Galleria cafe, Thamel with contemporary Art exhibition at the Galleria lounge, every Friday espresso coffee cocktails, also at Park Village, BuddhaNikanthar,†
- International four course buffet at the Sunrise Café with a range of Botril signature dishes at The Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4294999
- Wine and Cheese every Friday and Saturday at the Box Bar, Hutt Regency, 5-8PM. 4491234
- Saturday special barbeque, sekuwa, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 9841250848
- Dice-licious brunch at Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50% discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30PM.
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and specialty coffees at Roadhouse, Bhatbateni 4426587, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4300187
- Cocktails and jazz at Hotel Shangri-la with Indian cuisine at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841250848
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and specialty coffees at Roadhouse, Bhatbateni 4426587, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4300187
- Cocktails and jazz with the JCS Quartet and a choice of cocktails at Fusion ñ the Bar at Dwarikaís. 4479448
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**GETAWAYS**

- Fulbari Resort and Spa, Pokhara Rs 10,999 for Nepali double, $219 for expat double, two days and three nights package, with transportation from the airport, drinks, tennis and swimming, discounts on food and beverages.
- Weekend getaways at Le Meridien, Kathmandu, Resident Night Rs 4,999 and two nights package Rs 9,998. Also includes breakfast, lunch, dinner, spa facilities, swimming pool, steam sauna, Jacuzzi and gym facilities.

**Weekend Weather**

- Avalanche danger high in western and central mountains of Nepal and a dusting in the east. Rain showers are likely in the mid- hills going into the weekend. Fingers crossed this will end the two-month dry spell. The cloud cover should last till Sunday and will be back into bright sunshine next week. The Valley will have an overcast weekend with light rain and foggy mornings into next week.

**ABOUT TOWN**

- By NGAMINDRA DAHAL

---

Kagbeni begins with Krishna coming back to his village after spending time in Malaysia. After visiting his friend Ramesh, they decide to travel together. On their journey they come across a hermit who hands Krishna an animal’s paw that has power to fulfil wishes, but also creates horrific consequences. Unaware of its ominous powers, Ramesh makes a wish, and the journey of betrayal and revenge begins.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com
PARTY PEOPLE: A volunteer looks on as supporters of Nepal’s seven parties march towards Tundikhel for the seven-party gathering on Monday, shortly before a bomb exploded at Bhotahity injuring eight people.

ROYALLY DECORATED: Revellers adorn the statue of King Prithbi Narayan Shah on Prithbi Jayanti with garlands and flags at Singha Darbar to commemorate Unity Day on Friday.


HOMECOMING: CoAS Rukmangat Katuwal is greeted by an officer of the Nepal Army at Tribhuvan International Airport on his return from a week-long visit to China on Sunday.

As Nepal’s most-modern printing facility, Jagadamba Press is known for its state-of-the-art equipment. But we never forget the human touch.
With power cuts soon to go up to 11 hours a day, the Ass would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staying power of our rulers. Anywhere else they would have been strung up on poles.

Here we are, sitting in the dark and we still look on the bright side of things. Our national credo is: “It could be worse”. Given the foresight of our planners, we can now sell darkness as a tourist attraction. ‘Visit Nepal, Go Back To The Dark Ages’.

We count our blessings. We will wait for eight hours to get five litres of adulterated petrol once a week and we’ll still say: “Hey, that’s still better than no petrol at all.” Our cell phones always have a network busy signal, but we are so happy to have iPhones in which we can play Tetris in traffic.

Speaking of which, the Traffic Police’s campaign to eradicate congestion on the streets was doomed even before it started, but they have just extended it by a month. Have to give them credit for perseverance.

You can get the cops to don the flashiest fluorescent jackets and give them those wands that glow in the dark, but it won’t make an iota of difference as long as buses drop passengers in the middle of the road, taxi drivers think parking close to the kerb is an affront to their manhood, motorcycles are omnidirectional, and everyone from the Seven Party Conglomerate to the Federation of Disaster Preparedness insist on staging street rallies at rush hour. The Ass has a plan: on-the-spot public flogging of all violators.

The only good news is that the petrol station queues have started again in anticipation of the blockade of the tarai by madhesi groups from Saturday. That should bring down the traffic volume and make the capital’s streets manageable again. Actually, why doesn’t the government just close all gas stations, announce 24-hour load shedding, turn off the water mains, and shut the whole country down? Let’s all hibernate till spring and wake up to vote in April.

Every time our political figures open their mouths, they get themselves into trouble. But the suck up, already. The main problem in this country is the verbal diarrhoea pandemic among our leaders. Whenever a microphone is thrust on his face, the Fierce One can’t help jeopardise the 23-point agreement yet again. Girja goes to Biratnagar and invariably says something so controversial that the media reverberates for a week. Like father like daughter, Minister-sans-Portfolio Frau Jost also goes to Kotraila Nisho to shoot her mouth off. Comrade Makumey, of course, long ago mastered the art of publicly exposing the lacklustre performance of a government of which his party is a member. And every time General Ajaya P Nath goes off anywhere these days he can’t resist putting his jack boot in his mouth. There should be a moratorium on public statements by all politicians and a media boycott of anyone who tries to even get a word in.

The Election Commission could include that in its Code of Conduct instead of having clauses in it that prevent the media from criticizing the Commission. In fact, from next week we can’t even poke fun at the Code of Conduct anymore. The Code of Conduct sucks. There, the Ass said it. Arrest the Ass.

The Maoists have the knack of coming up with real gems. The latest from Awesomeji is that he wants the EC to postpone the Code of Conduct (not the election this time). This must be so that the YCL has some more time to spread mayhem. The young commies make the Mandalays look like traffic cops. At the Kabhre Central Committee meeting, Badal & Co agreed to go along with elections only if they win. In other words, they said they’ll go back to war if they lose. Naturally, therefore, they don’t want a code of conduct to restrict their freedom of speeches.