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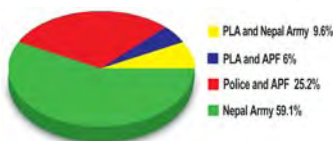
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Times

nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 385

Q. Who should be entrusted with election security?

Total votes: 4,345



Weekly Internet Poll # 386. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. The constituent assembly election is?

KUNDA DIXIT in DANG

Twelve years after the Maoist revolution began in the mountains north of here, people are still waiting to pick up where they left off when the war began.

The constituent assembly election slated for 10 April would bring finality, but no one is sure it will happen. After being let down twice the euphoria that accompanied the ceasefire two years ago has been replaced by disillusionment and resignation.

"If it happens, I guess I'll go and vote," says youth activist Sanam Poudel in the highway town of Lamahi. "But we need the election so we can close this chapter in our history and move on with our lives."

That view is echoed across the towns of Western Nepal. Local politicians, like NC's Krishna Chandra Nepali in Nawalparasi district, realise that the people are blaming them for the delay. "Their heart is not in elections. We have let the people down, now we have to reassure them that polling will take place," Nepali told us.

The public meetings organised by the seven parties across the country that ended on Wednesday in Birganj have been well attended despite bombings and strikes by Madhesi groups. But most of the crowds were party faithful.

In Satbaria, where 52 policemen were slaughtered in a Maoist raid in 2003, the gutted building has been torn down. There are few scars of war remaining. And when Satbaria's most famous son, former NC home minister Khum Bahadur Khadga, visited this week there was only a lone police van accompanying him. Sujata Koirala also passed through recently, but hardly anyone noticed.

There is a wait-and-watch

Top heavy

Let down twice, Nepalis are sceptical about polls

mood here among the people who have seen the quality of their lives deteriorate despite the absence of war since 2006. The local economy is still stagnant, there is no investment and young people are migrating by the tens of thousands.

Although there has been some reconstruction of damaged infrastructure, health and education are still in a shambles. For many, the elections are synonymous with peace, without which they know there will be no development.

"We haven't had a peace dividend at all," says Ram Hari Rijal, a teacher in Ghorahi. "If the elections are held, hopefully we will finally see an improvement in our lives." ●



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BEG, BORROW OR STEAL

Nepalis have come to expect shoddy treatment from their rulers, whether democratic, autocratic or feudal. Preoccupied as this interim government is with managing the alliance and making sure the peace process doesn't derail, and as the political leaders are with feathering their own nests, there is no time to ensure basic services.

Nepal's long-suffering citizens didn't expect things to get better overnight. But it's been nearly two years. Euphoria turned into disillusionment long ago. Now the frustration is turning into anger. The one way this unelected government could have demonstrated legitimacy was by delivery. In that, it has failed pretty dismally. The denizens of the capital are lucky they have 12 hours of power cuts a day. Outside Kathmandu, power lasts only a few hours. Water supply is even more erratic. It is unlikely the poor are going to get free health care anytime soon. There has been no effort to bridge the gap between rich and poor schools.

None of this is due to a lack of resources. It is the result of gross mismanagement, criminal wastage and endemic corruption. And that is true also of the most glaring example of government bungling to date: the chronic fuel shortage. The ignominious roll-back last week exposed not just an ill-planned price rise but also the incompetence and weakness of the state. The result is a nationwide shortage of diesel that has brought the country to a standstill.

The government has the money to pay off the Nepal Oil Corporation's debt to Indian refineries so supplies can resume, but doesn't want to do so until retail prices are raised to more realistic levels. So the Indians have stopped supplying diesel and kerosene and hence the serpentine queues, this time of buses and trucks. What with the lack of diesel to run generators combined with load shedding, the cost of industrial production has gone up substantially. Transporters have also begun to charge more even though the price of diesel remains the same. After all, if you can't buy fuel when you need it, the price becomes meaningless.

If the shortfall in the market is to be eased, someone has to pay India. The Ministry of Supplies (which should be renamed Ministry of Shortages) blames the Finance Ministry which in turn wants NOC to live without subsidies. Fair enough. But how to do that when the government doesn't allow it to even recoup its acquisition cost from consumers? As with everything else in Nepal the problem is politics rather than economics. With just about two and a half months to go till elections, the seven parties don't want to invite public wrath by raising fuel prices. But they will soon have to face street anger caused by the lack of diesel, gas and kerosene. It is a Catch-22 situation: increase prices and face protests, don't increase prices and invite anarchy. There is no way other than for the Finance Minister to clear NOC's debts so fuel shortages won't fuel instability in the run-up to elections. He faces competing funding demands from Maoist cantonments, war victims seeking compensation and the elections. But even if it has to beg, borrow or steal, the government needs to pay off India to resume supplies to get us to April and beyond.

Just do it, Mr Mahat.



SAM KANG LI

Things fall apart

Will the Madhesi centre hold?

There is a problem with the base, form, agenda, and vision of the Madhesi movement. The eastern Tarai Mithila mafia of Thakur, Yadav and Mahato may want to claim leadership of the entire southern plains. But they have neither been able to steer Madhes in the right direction in the short term nor thought enough about how to reconcile regional and national priorities in the long run.



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

Madhesi leaders don't lack commitment, neither are they opportunists. Rajendra Mahato's son was suffering from a fatal illness in Delhi after February 2005, but the Sadbhavana leader still ran around to lobby for both democracy and Madhesi rights. In 2006, at a central committee meeting when other NC leaders condescendingly said they should now 'give' citizenship to Madhesis as it would be electorally beneficial, the mild-mannered Thakur responded angrily: "You still talk of giving to Madhesis what is their inherent right." And Upendra Yadav has worked hard to build political consciousness. All of this when Madhesi activism was

not profitable.

But that is not enough. The first problem with the Madhesi forces is that their class and caste base is limited. People from various communities died during last year's movement, but the leadership failed to capitalise on the prevailing sense of unity. Dalits are disenchanted and have started saying that they have no choice but to launch their own movement, armed if necessary. Tharus in the west always felt apart, but now even eastern Tharus who see themselves as Madhesis find little space. Where are the Muslim leaders? Where is the progressive agenda for the landless? They may come out on the streets because of a shared sense of discrimination, but the alienation from the Madhesi mainstream is unmistakable. The leaders surely know that without them the movement will hit the wall.

There are problems with the agenda and strategy as well. Madhesis want and need the polls more than anyone else. If April 2006 had not happened, January 2007 would not have happened. Democracy is a pre-requisite for Madhesi rights. And if polls do not happen, the resulting authoritarianism will not help the Madhes at all.

Madhesi groups fear they will not win, at least not in enough numbers to influence the constituent assembly debate. The major parties could play a role in assuring them of basic electoral prospects. But irrespective of that, Madhesi groups should know this movement will continue even after the polls, both inside and outside the assembly.

The people will not accept any discriminatory clause any more. A confrontation does not help the Madhesi groups right now. They

are vulnerable and will only become exposed. They should know the limits of bargaining. Instead, their shifting goalposts only confirm suspicions that royalists and those keen to disrupt the polls are influencing decisions in each party.

Mahanta Thakur defines the problem as colonial and says the Madhes needs a judiciary, executive, and legislature. Federalism is clearly non-negotiable. But what will be the shape of that structure? What will be the integrative mechanisms with the hills and the nature of resource allocation?

Madhesis claim they are close to 40 percent of the population. Why is the aim restricted to only securing power in the Tarai? Shouldn't it revolve as much around ensuring a share of power in the capital, and demanding that a Madhesi be the country's prime minister or president? For that to happen though, the leaders need to have a clear vision of how the Madhes fits into the larger national framework. Only the Maoists had that theoretical understanding, conceiving of an alliance of marginalised communities, though they failed miserably in translating it on the ground. Or is the final aim, as many Madhesi leaders privately admit, independence? Won't such an unviable aspiration only lead to more bloodshed and suffering? These weaknesses should not make Kathmandu think that the Madhesi movement can be crushed easily. Sending the army in would be disastrous. Instead, Madhesi leaders must be supported, as they provide the only hope for pulling things back from the brink. And that is why it is important that the Tarai leaders get down to some serious homework and introspection. ●

India can help

Our neighbour has influence but in the end the buck stops with Mr Koirala

Three top Kathmandu-based diplomats have expressed their views on how to approach the political situation in Nepal. UN Special Representative Ian Martin focussed on peace-building through constituent assembly elections while Matthew Kahane, the UN Resident Representative and Humanitarian Coordinator, emphasised a role for India in



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

helping Nepal through its woes. The implication is that the UN does not take for granted Nepal's ability to handle its challenges by itself. In marked contrast, Indian envoy Shiv Shankar Mukherji told the media that Nepalis were fully capable of solving all problems on their own.

Martin said in New York that: (a) he is optimistic the twice-delayed constituent

assembly polls will be staged successfully on 10 April; (b) the inclusion of Nepal's traditionally marginalised groups in the electoral process is central to ensuring that the polls are staged successfully; (c) a significant section of the Madhesi, janajati and dalit communities felt left out of the 23-point agreement between the mainstream parties and Maoists; (d) it should be possible to reach agreement on the participation of all groups in the elections because there is a common desire for such an election to be held; and (e) the dialogue needs to be urgent and real, and there needs to be a commitment to implement agreements reached with those groups.

It is difficult to find fault with any of his points, and he must be thanked for reminding the government in stark terms of its basic tasks.

Kahane, too, stated things that are obvious: (a) humanitarian vulnerabilities are increasing; (b) landlocked Nepal depends on India for food and crucial

supplies; (c) conflict is exacerbating vulnerabilities in the Tarai; (d) some groups that are making life difficult in the Tarai may have links to northern India; and (e) it would be enormously helpful if India could keep these people under control.

Basically, it's a 'to do' list for India to prove its sincerity. And extremely well put, sir. In contrast, outgoing Indian envoy Shiv Shankar Mukherji's response was rather lame. Talking to the media on India's Republic Day, he said Nepalis could sort themselves out. If only that were true. Then it wouldn't have been necessary for our mainstream parties and the Maoists to go to Delhi to draft the 12-point understanding. Nor would we have had to wait for the top Indian spook to come to Kathmandu to bang heads together to sign yet another 23-point agreement.

Unlike the forthright observations of the UN officials, the ambassador's comments seem to be based on assumptions. Probably the Indian establishment considers that: (a) bringing the Maoists into the mainstream is more important than anything else; (b) the SPA government has the credibility, competence and commitment to address all other issues on its own; (c) the constituent assembly elections need to be held at all costs; (d) the uprising in the tarai is a minor irritant; and (e) another postponement of the polls on any pretext would be unacceptable.

Perhaps those were the messages that US Ambassador Nancy Powell, now in Delhi, understood from his remarks. In about a week's time, Pushpa Kamal Dahal will probably be following in her footsteps to the Indian capital.

Meanwhile, reports from Baluwatar suggest Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is even less concerned about the fate of the elections than he indicates in public, preferring instead to work on securing his daughter's political future. Mahanth Thakur was used, discredited and discarded after being asked to negotiate with agitating madhesis a year ago. Ramchandra Paudel is awaiting a similar fate, with the government failing to implement any of the many commitments he made to Pasang Sherpa and Upendra Yadav. Meanwhile Bimalendra Nidhi and Ram Baran Yadav are attracting scorn by saying things they know to be untrue.

Clearly, NC hasn't changed its discriminatory attitude towards madhesis. Had it been any different, there would have been many more madhesi names in the list of party bigwigs slated to address mass meetings all over the country.

The UML had originally wanted a 24th point put in the agreement, stating that Koirala would go if he failed to conduct elections on the stipulated date. It was removed in deference to the old man. But the situation remains the same: the buck stops very much at Baluwatar. ●

LETTERS

MADHES

I am not Madhesi but I have respect and sympathy for the legitimate demands of the people of the Madhes who have been treated like second-class citizens since Nepal was born. The mass movement spearheaded by the MJF forced the government to make Nepal a federal state, to increase the representation of Tarai people from 42 percent to 48 percent, to give one million to the families of martyrs of the Tarai movement and to provide medical facilities to those injured in that movement. Forgive my ignorance but I don't know why the Tarai movement has again started when the nation is trying to conduct the elections. I would request the respected CK Lal and Prashant Jha to inform us: 1. why Mr Thakur left the NC and is now starting an agitation. 2. why groups in the Madhes are still carrying arms when the state has met the demands made by the MJF?

It looks like the Madhes agitation has started again just to prevent the election, because as far as I can see, the core demands of the Madhesi people have already been fulfilled.

Name withheld, Kathmandu

● By now it is clear that the Madhes movement that started with such promise has degenerated into petty communal hatred. If the Madhes' problems had been only due to Pahadis living there then you would have started seeing some tangible improvement in the living standards of Madhesis in places like Janakpur and Siraha, which have been in effect ethnically-cleansed of Pahadis. I am sure the local populace will repent in the years to come for having chased away their Pahadi brethren. Make no mistake, the new 'Nepalis'—read Biharis and UPites—who are mainly responsible for fanning this communal hatred, will start unleashing their terror on the ethnic Madhesis once their 'Pahade-bhagao' mission is over. I fully agree with Matrika Yadav when he says that the very people who were hell-bent on deploying the army against the Maoists when they first truly

raised the Madhesi issue are the ones who are shedding crocodile-tears now. When you see scoundrels like JP Gupta and Rajendra Mahato leading the 'revolution', you can well guess who the revolution is going to benefit: the landlords and the corrupt. The only good thing I see



coming out of this 'movement' is that the oppressed Madhesis will have the satisfaction of being ruled by a goon who wears a dhoti and speaks their language instead of a goon who wears a topi and speaks Nepali. It is the elite of the Madhes who will benefit from this.

Biplab Nepali, Kathmandu

● Who are you threatening, Prashant Jha? If you have the Indian mobile telephone numbers ('Another window', #384), then you can tell the armed terrorists there is not going to be a separation of Nepal. If the government is offering autonomy, the Madhes should take it: there is not going to be right to self-determination and there is not going to be one Tarai state. The Tarai is too diverse to let Madhesis rule it alone. Don't forget the Tharus and many other ethnic groups who will then fight for their own state. That is the bottom line and they can either face it and come forward for talks, or face the army. Now it is a matter of protecting national identity. We will all unite in that, and 'we' means all Nepalis who love the country. The elections will happen and all are invited to voice their concerns through voting, not by intimidation.

Sandeep Dhungana, email

ELECTIONS

Kanak Mani Dixit's analysis ('Getting There', #384) is true to

some extent but the security situation in the Tarai, eastern hill areas and even Kathmandu itself is not satisfactory. In April 2006 I was out in the streets not to replace absolute monarchy with a seven-party dictatorship but to replace dictatorship with legitimate democracy. However, the decision to declare Nepal a republic without a referendum and to divide it into a communal/ethnic-based federal state is surely a very undemocratic move and a spit in my face. What is the purpose of a CA when everything is already decided by this parliament? In pursuit of peace, the parliament has given everything demanded by the Maoists. Peace is not simply the absence of war but also the presence of justice. Is there any point in having an election when less than 500 people have already decided the future of 25 million Nepalis? I do not see any reason why I should vote in the CA election.

Dilip Buda, Kathmandu

● Somebody please give Kanak a hug. He sold us the claptrap of multiparty democracy and he is still feeding us with the same to save his own skin. It's okay Kanak, we forgive you for bringing down the king and helping, in your own way, these monkeys to power. Still so much hope? Was it really worth it?

Reena Budhathoki, Chelsea, London

SUJATA

PM Koirala's recent appointment of daughter Sujata Koirala as a minister in the interim cabinet has inspired a great deal of pessimism about the democratisation process in a country that has suffered forever from family dynasties. The silence of the political leaders and cadres on this fundamental assault on the spirit of democracy underscores their inability to live by democracy as they preach it. The PM is quoted as saying he may give the nation its first female prime minister. If the difference between democracy and monarchy has been forgotten, leaders are not 'given' in democracy. They emerge. And they demonstrate their credentials, not to some coterie of fat cats, but to the masses, the people. The struggle for democracy in Nepal has produced several future leaders, from all genders, regions, castes and ethnicities. It is a great irony that their chances are being pre-empted by the smearing of a budding agenda with nepotism and sheer arrogance. The PM's decision to groom his unpopular daughter as his successor tarnishes his reputation at home and abroad, where he was lately celebrated for his genuine courage and diplomacy in bringing the rebels into the mainstream. It undermines the forces struggling to undertake free and fair elections that will shape the new Nepal, and provides

arguments to those in the country who claim that the very word 'democracy' is a monkey's coconut.

Mallika Shakya, Washington DC

DIPLOMACY

I hope the next ambassador to our country will have the same sense of humour as Mr Mukherjee (Interview, #384). His logical diplomacy is heart-winning. I hope from now on India will keep in mind that a fair treatment of Nepal means a good deal for them too. And so future treaties between our countries should be based scientifically on true proportionality. Let's hope that the first new treaty would resolve the border dispute we're facing so that ultra-nationalists from both countries can't take undue advantage of it.

Nirmal Ghimire, University of Girona, Spain

LETTERS

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with 'letter to the editor' in the subject line.

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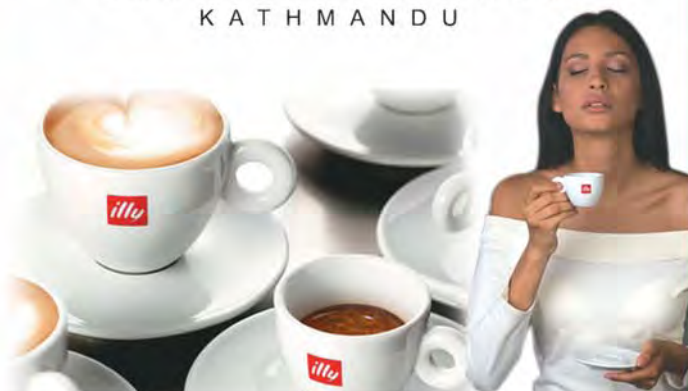
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Do it yourself

Palpa's villagers don't suffer power cuts because they generate their own electricity



PICS: GOVINDA LUITEL

GOVINDA LUITEL in PALPA

The electricity is one-tenth the NEA's tariff. There are no power cuts.

Sounds too good to be true. But if you live in rural Palpa these days, like thousands of families, you don't have to suffer the inconvenience of load shedding.

Located 50km from Nepal's biggest hydroelectric project on the Kali Gandaki which generates 144 megawatts of power, Palpa's villages sent petitions to Kathmandu to be hooked up to the grid. But the NEA didn't listen, neither did the politicians.

"We took the matter into our own hands, we said if they're not going to do it for us, we'll do it

ourselves," recalls Sushila Gaire of Dobhan in Palpa where 100 households get 24 hour electricity from a 3 kilowatt micro-hydro plant on the Suketal rivulet. Sushila says she used to spend Rs 200 a month for the kerosene for lighting, but now has to pay only Rs 50 a month for the electricity.

The entire project costs less

than Rs 1 million and was built with local donations and voluntary labour from villagers. The same model was used in dozens of villages in Palpa with seed support from the Alternative Energy Promotion Centre (AEPC) in Kathmandu.

There are nearly 2,000 micro-hydro plants below 500 kilowatts all over Nepal and they generate nearly 13 megawatts of total power. If Palpa is any indication, the way out of the power shortage in rural Nepal may be to decentralise energy generation from Himalayan streams and rivulets.

At Kachal Okhaldhunga in Palpa, villagers donated Rs 5,000 each to build a peltric-turbine power plant and a 1km transmission line that costs Rs 1.3 million and provides electricity to 84 homes. "We never imagined we'd ever see an electric light in our villages," says Om Bahadur Gharti, "now we know anything is possible if we get together for a common goal."

Debi Arkhal, a local farmer, says: "My children can now study till late and don't have to squint while doing their homework in the flickering kerosene lamp."

Palpa residents have lived in darkness for centuries, and even after the transmission lines from Kali Gandaki were strung up over their villages eight years ago, they never got any power. "It's a dream come true," says project in-charge of the Dobhan micro-hydro, Kesar Singh.

AEPC's technician, Narayan Subedi is equally excited. "Palpa is an inspiration for other parts of Nepal, this model of local self-help can easily be replicated elsewhere in Nepal." In the past year, Palpa villagers have set up five micro-hydro plants with local initiative generating a total of 36 kilowatts of power and benefiting nearly 700 households.

Today, when the villagers hear the news over the radio that power cuts in Kathmandu have increased to six hours a day, they feel like thumbing their noses at the capital. ●

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Another colony

Guna Colony, the latest housing project, is located in Sinamangal and has a total of 160 apartments. Each flat consists of three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a living room and a kitchen, dining room. The flats are available for Rs 3.2-3.9 million.



Distributing deal

Logitech has appointed Neoteric Informatique as a distributor. Logitech is a Swiss electronics giant with a wide-range of computer peripherals, home-entertainment and gaming and wireless devices.

Artificial beauty

VLCC has unveiled various styles of beauty treatments including botox, a natural protein that is injected under the skin where wrinkles have formed to give it a smooth look, fillers, where chemicals are injected for volume augmentation and peeling, where a superficial layer of the skin is peeled off.

Golf winner

Major Bejoy Moktan has won the first ever Johnnie Walker Classic Amateur Challenge at the Le Meridien Gold Resort and Spa. The Amateur Challenge has been taking place for 18 years but this is its first time in Nepal.

Revamped condoms

The Dhaal and Panther brands of condoms have been relaunched as the Dhaal Deluxe and Panther Premium. Dhaal was launched in 1975 with Panther in 1986, both are manufactured by the Nepal CRS company.

Valued Hyatt

Budget Travel Magazine has selected the Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu as a leading Best Value hotel. The hotel was ranked number seven in Asia and number 22 worldwide in a list showcasing the 100 best value hotels with an average nightly rate of \$250 or less.



Political youth

Our ageing politicians neglect the young at their own risk

Two out of three Nepalis you meet on the street are younger than 30. But three out of three politicians you see on television are nearly 60 or older. Nepal's Jana Andolan II was remarkable in that young people under 30 took to the streets, broke police cordons and



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

even lost lives to ultimately recycle, in a strange evolutionary twist, the same old Nepalis over 60 as the leaders of New Nepal.

When the old politicians saw how young people could sacrifice themselves for the benefit of their elders, how likely were they to take seriously the issues related to the youth and children in New Nepal? Very unlikely!

Even today, as the politicians stand on their pedestals in Nepalgunj or Birganj, they do not know how to explain what the new political process can do for these two core national constituencies. Complicating their ignorance are three additional factors.

Missing personal story: When was the last time you heard a Nepali politician happily talk

about his own children's future in Nepal? You haven't because most politicians' children, as the press is shy to report, do not live in this country.

When you feel that your kids' future is secure elsewhere, how likely are you to work hard here for a better tomorrow? People everywhere work hard for their children's better future. Few toil selflessly day-in, day-out, to give anonymous children a better tomorrow. This reality of absent kids distorts our political rhetoric. Our politicians cannot mine their own, or even their family's, stories to concretely offer hope and optimism for a better Nepal. Like trained parrots chirping phrases on cue, our politicians have to fall back on repeating abstract nouns such as political rights, freedom, democracy, youth power and the like until the audience becomes jaded.

Youth displacement: Another reason politicians do not talk much about the young is that they have quietly come to expect urban youths to go abroad for studies, and rural youths to become migrant labourers in the Gulf. When those who are most likely to take issue with poor governance are out of the way, why worry about what to say to them at

election time? In the Panchayat time, when going abroad was something few could afford, young people's restlessness was channelled into running state-blessed NGOs. Today, our politicians can afford to ignore the youth during elections because the most vocal of them are not in the country or are busy running various donor-funded NGOs that become, well, politically affiliated sooner or later.

No succession plan: Nepali political parties, run as they are by father-figure strongmen, never entertain succession plans. The father-figure's mode of operation is to extract maximum service from his underlings in return for a vague promise of party leadership someday, ensuring they all compete for his attention. As a result, to aim for leadership positions of any significance, ambitious young people have to compete with political nobodies over the age of 50 whose only virtue is that they are senior, and not necessarily more competent.

Every Andolan is a harbinger of hope. Next time, the young people of Nepal might stage an Andolan to put power in the hands of their peers, not their grandparents' generation. ●

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"The PLA will not be used as security guards"

Interview with senior Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Thapa in **Samay**, 31 January

In public meetings you have said that some Maoist leaders have to fear for their lives.

Some forces are conspiring against those who support elections, federalism and change. Recently those forces which are spreading terror in the Tarai met in Patna. Some of the participants of the meeting have confirmed that certain groups in the Tarai are targeting us. The bomb that recently exploded in Kathmandu at the public assembly was meant to hurt Maoist leaders.

What are you doing to address issues of security for your leaders?

They make these plans in India, so the seven parties have to address this issue through diplomacy. We also have to inform the Indian public that such conspiracies against Nepal are being hatched on their soil.

Do Nepali Maoists have a hand in increasing Maoist influence in India's Jharkhand region?

We have a principle, which is why we have always resisted imperialist forces. In places where people are demanding better pay, where they are speaking out against labour oppression and discrimination, the rulers are threatened, so it is obvious they will speak out against us. You also have to understand that Nepalis and Indians share a deep relationship because we believe in justice and change.

How to solve the Tarai issue?

Security in the Tarai has to be tightened, and the state has to be

समय



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

responsible for providing security. The people of the Tarai also have to help and support the government and the political parties. If the situation worsens in the Tarai we should deploy the Nepal Army and People's Liberation Army together.

So you don't think diplomacy and talks will solve the problem?

People's demands are slowly being met. But there's also a section which is demanding that we split the Tarai into pieces. Such unreasonable demands will not be met.

Isn't their movement for autonomy?

Madhesi people are raising some very valid demands, which the state has to address as soon as possible. However, some criminal groups are trying to break up the country in the name of autonomy. These criminal groups are regressive and armed. This is against what the people want. These groups cannot play on people's feelings and call their unreasonable demands a fight for autonomy.

Why is there a dispute about the issue of army integration?

The issue of army integration has to be addressed after the constituent assembly elections have been conducted, after much debate by elected representatives. The way the likes of Sujata and Katuwal are talking about integration goes against the comprehensive peace agreement. As far as the PLA goes, Nepalis have to understand that these soldiers fought for the liberation of the Nepali people. If there are people who think that they cannot be integrated into the national army, that they be used as security guards, then they are speaking against the movement that was formed to liberate the people, and against the peace agreement.

Any answers?

Kiran Nepal in
Himal Khabarpatrika,
30 January-12 February

हिमाल

Even two weeks after the Bara Pasaha bridge bus tragedy, the truth about what actually happened remains murky. The bus fire on 16 January killed nine people but how it happened, what kind of flammable material was used and whether the incident was premeditated or an accident is still unknown. Although police DIG Kiran Gautam claims that "someone left petrol on the bus and somehow it caught fire," the passengers, the bus workers and even an armed group say otherwise.

The Tarai Army rebel group claims responsibility, saying that they used 'nitrogen'. But the police rubbish this assertion, saying that nitrogen would not spread the flames but would instead extinguish them. The police seem to be sticking to the story of the incident as an accident.

But many facts do not support police assumptions. Except for two women, none of the other passengers smelled anything nor saw anything suspicious. Even if the police hypothesis does hold, petrol requires a spark to ignite. According to the passengers, there was no smell of cigarette smoke. Mechanics say that the seats A3 and A4, from where the fire started, couldn't have been the source of the initial spark. If

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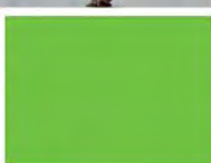
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RAJU SHRESTHA

faulty wiring were to blame then telltale smoke and an acrid smell would warn of the imminent danger. The bus’s regular mechanics are adamant that the fire could not have started in the bus’s inner workings and that external agents are to blame.

The bus left Birgunj for Janakpur at 6.20 in the morning but returned to Bardibas at 11.45 citing problems with a faulty tire. The majority of the bus’s passengers got on at Harioun. About 16km before Pasaha, two Madhesis suddenly stopped the bus and got off and even cursed the driver for being slow. About six minutes after they got off, the bus burst into flames. The police have not been able to ascertain who those people were.

The police are dismissing an attack by terrorists as there was no big explosion. Used to dealing with Maoist and armed Madhesi units’ Improvised Explosive Devices, they are not considering that an incendiary IED could have been used, one that would not cause an explosion, shock or shrapnel wounds. These kinds of weapons are made with nitrogen, sulphur or chemicals of a similar nature. Chemicals like petroleum, ether and acetone are easily available at the bordertown markets.

Perhaps the most neglected fact is the involvement of ‘Mr John’, who is also Rautahat’s Kaushal Sahani and the purported leader of the Tarai Army. Within an hour and a half of the explosion, Sahani had already called up a Birgunj FM journalist to claim responsibility. The Army was also responsible for the 2 September Kathmandu bomb explosions. This outfit doesn’t take part in rampant killing, abductions or extortions but instead spreads ‘mass terror’. It doesn’t have a specific agenda and doesn’t deal with the media much except for one specific journalist or publication. All ominous signs of a very dangerous group.

Even 15 days after the incident, forensic evidence hasn’t been properly analysed by the experts. This incident now also runs the risk of being labelled ‘unsolved’ and disappearing into the background, just like the Nepalganj and Kapilbastu incidents and the Kathmandu bomb explosions.

Diplomatic pay
Sitaram Baral in *Jana Astha*, 23 January

आस्था

It seems that the Nepali new year will bring good things for our diplomats. The government has finally decided to increase the

foreign allowances that our ambassadors in foreign countries receive. Of the 28 Nepali ambassadors, five of them will not even have to wait for 2065 to arrive. Their allowances are being increased in January.

After a four-month debate, the finance ministry finally decided to let the foreign ministry take this issue to the council of ministers. There had been no increase in allowances for ambassadors and embassy staff since 1994, while salaries and allowances for other workers increased three times over this period. Since 1994, there has been a 36.25 percent fluctuation in the US dollar and inflation has risen accordingly.

Given the dollar’s recent decline and increasing inflation, it was becoming very difficult for ambassadors and embassy workers to meet their daily expenses, to the extent that it was having negative effects on Nepal’s reputation and pride. Worst off was the Nepali embassy in Russia and its staff. After the fall of the Soviet Union, prices increased dramatically and the currency’s value fell.

Facing pressure from all sides, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a plea to the Ministry of Finance. However, Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat rejected the proposal, saying the amount requested was too much. After adjusting the amount, the foreign ministry once again asked for a raise in the daily allowance. This time the finance ministry has given its approval. According to the agreement, the newly established embassies will receive their increased allowances in January, while the others will have to wait for the Nepali new year.

The biggest increase will be for the Russian ambassador, Surya Kiran Gurung, who has been receiving a monthly living allowance of \$1,870. He will receive \$2,850 starting in the new Nepali year – an increase of \$980. The foreign ministry had originally asked that it be increased to \$3,295.

In the case of the US, the finance ministry has agreed an amount larger than the figure requested by the foreign ministry. The ambassador in Washington DC, Suresh Chalise, will receive \$2,845, up from \$2,070. The foreign ministry had asked for \$2,545.

The ambassador to the UK, Murari Raj Sharma, had his allowance increased to £1,500 from £1,309. Nepal’s ambassador to China, Tanka Karki, will receive \$2,755, up from \$1,815. New Delhi’s designate, Durgeshman Singh, will get \$2,370, up from \$1,575. This increase was made with Shailaja Acharya in mind. But she hasn’t been able to assume her position due to ill health.

Nepal, 3 February, Tularam Pandey, Kalikot

नेपाल

In November, people from 17 VDCs in the north-west part of Kalikot failed to get treatment at the week-long specialist health camp organised by International Fellowship Nepal simply because there were no bridges for them to cross the Karnali River.

“It’s easier for us to go to Surkhet than to Manma,” says Sarjane Bishwakarma, 67. “I have a stomach illness. Although I heard about the foreign specialist doctor, I could not go because there is no bridge that connects my village to Manma.”

During the decade-long war, six suspension bridges over the Tila and Karnali were blown up by the Maoists. The damage done to the bridges has affected the daily lives of more than 70,000 people from the almost two dozen VDCs in the district. The headquarters, Manma, has become more like a foreign land, far away and out of reach. Since the bridges were destroyed, three children and seven adults have lost their lives trying to cross the river in boats.

Although the pain caused by the Maoists and the security forces has ceased, it is still difficult to cross the Tila and Karnali. Hiralal Devkota, 88, says: “Talks about constructing the bridges have been going on for two years but nothing has materialised yet. If the bridges are built, I could go to Manma for an eye check-up.”

The Maoists blew up the biggest and busiest suspension bridge at Ralingghat seven years ago to prevent the security forces attacking them. The explosion killed 11 policemen and seriously injured 14 others. The same night the Maoists blew up another suspension bridge connecting Manma with Kotbada.

The destruction of the bridges has seriously affected business at the district headquarters. “When the bridges were intact we could earn about Rs 10,000-15,000 daily but now it is difficult even to earn 5,000,” says Ananda Giri, acting chairman of the FNCCI in Kalikot. Many businessmen have left the district to go to

Dailekh, Surkhet and Nepalgunj because of the downturn in business.

The makeshift ropeways over the Tila and the Karnali rivers cost Rs 30 per person, which is a high price to pay for the ordinary villagers. Jukti Prasad Chaulagai, a farmer, says: “Even after paying such a high price, the fear of dying by falling off the ropeway is still there.”

Non-governmental organisations have been working towards easing the burden on the ordinary people. The EU in collaboration with Practical Action Nepal has been working on constructing improved ropeways.



TULARAM PANDEY

“Although the Rural Region Development Committee has been trying to construct bridges over the Tila and Karnali rivers since 2002, it has not been successful yet,” says UML district secretary Tularaj Bista. According to him, during the royal takeover some royalists collected more than Rs 12 lakhs in the name of constructing bridges.

Last year the district development committee gave a time limit of June 2007 to two construction committees that included party workers of the various political parties to complete bridges at Ralingghat and Raraghat. However, the committees have not even completed half the work. Various reasons, including substandard materials, have been cited as reasons for the delay.



Man: NOC
Fire: Debt
Container: Price rise cancelled

हिमाल Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 Jan - 12 Feb

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“The machinations to make brother fight brother in the Tarai have started.”

Acting chairman of Nepali Congress Sushil Koirala quoted in *Gorakhpatra*, 25 January

A-DRESSING THE NATION

WONG SHU YUN

You can't go far in Kathmandu without coming across a tailor's shop or hearing the whirr of a dress maker's sewing machine, but Nepalis' skills in garment design have not yet made much of an impact internationally.

Now an increasingly ambitious and trend-conscious generation is trying to change that.

Among those hoping to set the trends in the near future are aspiring clothes designer Srithi Bista and her friend Najima Aman, who runs a clothing export business with her husband. The two women met at Kathmandu's IEC School of Art and Fashion, which has been teaching would-be designers since 1997.

Bista and Aman have more ambitious plans for Nepal's fashion industry than most in the business. Traditionally, the bread-and-butter work for clothes designers here has been making costumes to celebrate the country's numerous religious festivals. The potentially more lucrative and exciting alternative is to design for the export market, for sale to European and American shops.

Tenzin Tseten, a prominent local designer at Himalayan Couture, says the difficulty with aiming for the foreign markets is that good designs are copied and relabelled by overseas outlets, while the name of the Nepali designer fades into oblivion.

Nevertheless, sustained creativity and flare will doubtless attract attention, and industry watchers here see the demand for good design slowly growing - thanks in part to the efforts of people like Shailaja Adhikary, the director of the IEC fashion school, who

has popularised the concept of fashion design among Nepal's young urban middle class. When Adhikary opened the school in 1997, few could see any demand for what she was offering. "People didn't know what fashion designing was about," she says. And parents couldn't see any future in fashion for their children. They wanted them to be doctors or engineers.

But the past decade has seen a six-fold increase in the number of students at the school, and Adhikary says capacity cannot keep pace with demand. "Today, we have to screen the students." She admits that not everyone is concerned about fashion, but believes demand will continue to rise steadily over the next decade.

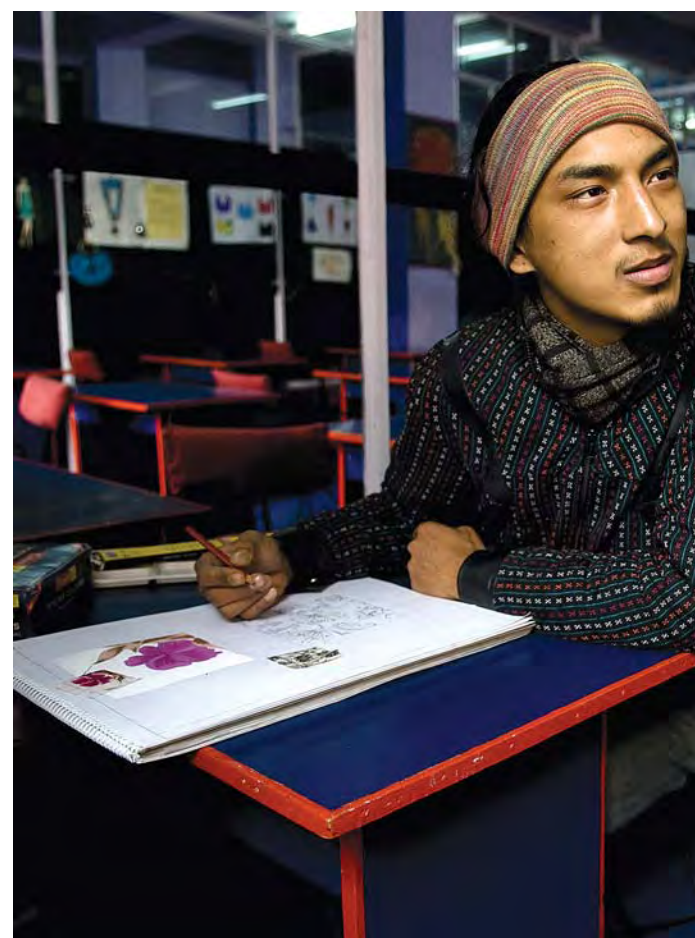
While women of all ages and backgrounds take classes at the school, Adhikary's plan is to bring fashion to the more remote parts of

Nepal. "There are designers from remote areas who are very creative and have the desire to do fashion designing, and they have to come to Kathmandu to learn it," she says. "I have a dream to open up branches in other parts of Nepal so fashion design can reach out to more people in the country." It will be a while before Nepal truly establishes its own fashion style.

Adhikary, noting the evolving fashion scene in Singapore and Malaysia, hopes that one day Nepal will also be headed in that direction. She says the government can play a role, just by encouraging design exhibitions. "These small opportunities will also count," she says.

Mirroring the state of the country's fashion industry, Adhikary admits the future will be tough: "I still have a long way to go," she says with a hopeful smile. ●

Ambitious clothes designers seek to expand their market



IN THE HOT SEAT: Adhikary believes that creativity must be nurtured, and plans to expand her fashion school to remote parts in Nepal.





HANDS-ON HOPE

Aspiring designers at the IEC School of Art and Fashion turn their paper dreams into reality

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

GIFT AND GLAMOUR: Neeti Acharya makes an embroidered shawl as a present for her aunt.

AFTERNOON CATWALK: Students shuffle to get to lessons, which come in one-hour blocks.

REAP AND SEW: A student materialises her designs in a drafting class.

DRAWN TO LIGHT: Sketching classes include selecting textile, fabric and silhouette types.

NO AVERAGE JOE: Tailor Sujit Ratanamrakal attends the school to develop his design sense, one of the increasing number of males engaging in fashion.





Kids of Cosmandu

Young pioneers of astronomy in Nepal

In my previous columns, I have mentioned a group of enthusiastic young astronomers who have formed the Nepal Astronomical Society (NASO). This time, I will be talking about what activities the society is engaged in and what captivates its members about astronomy and stargazing.

Though stargazing is a very new phenomenon in Nepal, members of NASO are organising 'star parties' in different corners of the city. At these events, they show planets like Jupiter, Mars and Venus to the public through a telescope. They also publish press releases on important celestial events like meteor-showers and eclipses.



STARGAZING
Kedar S Badu

"We can't see all the planets at the same time, so we are showing them according to their appearances in the night sky," says Suresh Bhattarai, student of Tri-Chandra College.

Riwaj Pokharel, also from Tri-Chandra, recalls his recent experience: "Recently, I tried to make people in my neighborhood understand the positions of planets in the night sky. They all laughed at me and said that those were only stars and I was just trying to outsmart them." However, this kind of attitude among the general public in no way undermines the zeal of these astronomers. They feel that, in this age of globalisation, young people should come forward to fight superstition, help educate people and publicise the truth about the cosmos. Suresh thinks that astronomy can even help the economy through "astro-tourism".

I found a real passion among the young astronomers for studying the firmament and also a feeling that it is important to keep up with developments in the rest of the world. They feel that astronomy and stargazing are important in this regard, and are somewhat frustrated about the government's lack of interest in developing this science in Nepal. "We visited government officials many times when we needed help, but every time we returned empty-handed," says Riway. "We think it's a shame that the government has no interest in our work."

Suresh says the group's main difficulty is that they don't have any telescope of their own, and so every time they hold a star party they have to borrow one from somewhere. This sadly limits the amount of parties they can conduct.

He also laments the fact that there is no systematic study of astronomy in Nepal, meaning that anyone who wishes to study it has to go abroad. "The BP Koirala Planetarium was established long ago, but even now it is not functioning properly," Suresh says.

As we approach the 400th anniversary since the invention of the telescope, let us hope the government will understand the role astronomy can play in modernising Nepali society and will help these budding 'Kids of Cosmandu'.

February 2008 Highlights:

This month there will be a solar eclipse on 7 February, but sadly it will be visible only from Antarctica. We will then have a total lunar eclipse on 21 February. Seen from Nepal, the eclipse will begin as the moon sets. Among the planets, Mercury will go through an inferior conjunction on 6 February as it switches from the evening to the morning sky. NASA's Messenger craft has just visited this planet for the first time since Mariner-10 visited 33 years ago. Granted, the western sky is kind of dull, but don't neglect the dawn sky. In early February, two brilliant worlds, Venus and Jupiter, will appear close together, low in the southeast at dawn. They will be joined by the crescent Moon on the 4th. During the month, Jupiter will move up and away from Venus, which will be joined by Mercury at month's end. Mars, in Taurus, is almost overhead in the evening. Saturn, in Leo, reaches opposition on 24 February and is visible in the east after 7PM. Wishing you clear skies and great stargazing in February!

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Back from breakdown

Post-conflict mental trauma is hard to treat

SUBRATH SHRESTHA

The international community sees Nepal as a "nation in transition" where government, civil society and humanitarian organisations are striving to bring peace after a decade of war. A key part of peace-building is the provision of treatment for those mentally traumatised by the conflict, either directly as victims or perpetrators, or indirectly as witnesses.

Such treatment is essential in helping them to once again feel, think and behave appropriately within existing societal norms. It helps to stabilise patients' minds and allows them to focus on other significant needs of daily life, such as economic survival and education.

Since many of these patients have had direct experience of conflict, they often suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), various mood and adjustment disorders, schizophrenia and other psychotic problems.

For proper treatment, they need help from psychiatrists, clinical counsellors, psychologists and psychiatric social workers, who can offer them either medication or a range of therapies and counselling to help with their rehabilitation.

It is important to recognise that soldiers on both sides of the conflict, as well as police and many

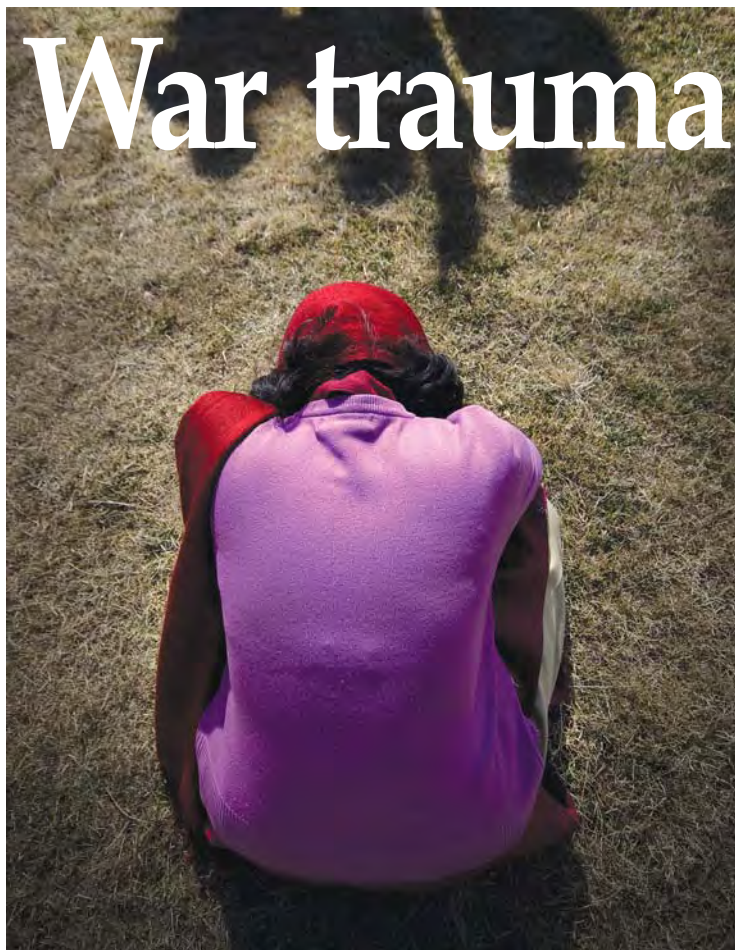
ordinary citizens have been struggling with these disorders at various levels of severity, sometimes for many years.

They may have developed a defence mechanism and become addicted to alcohol or drugs. If supporting organisations do not seriously address patients' mental health problems, there may be a significant increase in social problems such as suicide and homicide rates. An individual troubled by an unstable mind stands a greater chance of becoming homeless, suffering long-term depression and resorting to substance abuse.

The first pragmatic intervention could be to develop campaigns for awareness of and insights into mental illness in the Maoist cantonments, army and police barracks and communities living at the heart of the worst conflict areas. These campaigns could include psycho-educational programs such as street dramas, posters and visual documentaries to help people contemplate their mental health needs and feelings of security.

The next step could be to assess the need for formal mental healthcare. Once the individual cases and broad trends have been identified in the community, mental health professionals can try to create a therapeutic environment which allows the patients to vent their unresolved past issues. ●

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SAM KANG LI

Joona BK, 17, from Salle in Rukum district, was a Maoist fighter for seven months.

During her time with the PLA she received political and weapons training. Most days she was out in the field.

The physical training was very rigorous and Joona used to fall sick quite often. There was never enough medicine. When she could not participate in activities due to her sickness, she used to get physically assaulted by her seniors and leaders of the group. "If I could not come for training, the leader used to beat me up and kick me until I would join the others," says Joona. She had been looking for a way to escape for a long time. When her mother fell sick, she was given permission to go home. She never returned.

Back at home, life was not easy. Joona's parents said that because she had joined the PLA her reputation was tarnished. People in her community said she was 'polluted' as she had

lived with strange men in the army when she was away from home.

Joona still lives with her parents. The rigorous exercise routine and the beating from the leaders have left her physically injured with a severe stomach ulcer. But her psychosocial problems are more serious. She has flashbacks of some of the gruesome incidents she had to witness as a Maoist fighter. She is irritable, has no appetite, and says she feels lonely all the time. She still thinks the Maoists will come and take her back. Recently she swallowed poison in an attempt to kill herself.

Local doctors are treating her physical ailments. She also receives psychosocial support from professional counsellors, and after a few sessions has been making progress. Her relationship with the local community is improving, and she tells the counsellors she is feeling more positive and confident.

Divya Malla, 20, works at a stone quarry in Dhading. She left school because her family needed help earning enough money to feed them all. Shortly after she left school, she witnessed a close friend, Maya Devi, being gang-raped by boys from a neighbouring village. When news of the rape spread, the victim's mother accused Divya of spreading false rumours.

A few days later Divya was gathering firewood when some Maoist women seized her. For two weeks they beat her and made her do difficult physical work. They threatened to kill her if she would not join their group.

The five months she spent with the Maoist fighters were difficult. She had to gather firewood, plant rice, carry bricks to build roads and cook food. When she told them she wanted to go home they beat her again.

There were no separate rooms for men and women, so all the fighters slept together. She witnessed many of the women being molested and raped by male fighters. Luckily, Divya's father pleaded with the group leader to let her go. By that time Divya had become so sick that the leader said she was of no use to them anyway. Back home people ostracised her. Divya was called a 'loose' woman and not allowed to participate in public ceremonies. She tried to go back to school, but the teasing got so unbearable that she could not step out of her house.

"I am sad most of the time, my head hurts," says Divya. She suffers from an inferiority complex and is restless. Her sister says Divya has no appetite and spends her time alone, staring into space, too distracted to finish the housework.

Divya says: "Every time I see a bunch of women coming towards me, I think they are coming for me. If they take me now I know they will kill me." ●

Source: Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPON Nepal)

Ganatantra at 30,000ft

A New Nepal takes off in our kingdom-cum-republic

Ever since RNAC, our once reputable flag carrier, dropped the royal ‘R’ to become merely NAC (No Airplane Coming) the spirit of New Nepal has controlled the skies.

Who needs a national airline anyway, with the nuisance of irate customers who insist on adhering to a tiresome schedule? Better let the People’s Republic’s people simply take over all flights destined for Kathmandu. This is Naya Nepal, after all, where seizing the assets of others is official party policy of one third of our parliamentarians and a right soon to be enshrined in the constitution.

MOVING TARGET Foreign Hand

No better chance to see this new trend than on flights coming from the Middle East, where rowdy passengers and their raucous demands overwhelm hapless staff.

Like any gathering of Nepalis these days, passengers soon split into rival factions competing for attention. The political conflict that wrecked this country was always about access to resources. In a crowded plane, access to whisky, snacks and bathrooms is the jet-age equivalent of grazing rights and import licenses.

The Hand fully appreciates the allure of free booze, especially after being stuck in the Gulf for years. As for the bathrooms, it’s strongly advised to take care of bodily functions within 20 minutes of take-off. Answering nature’s call any time after that is hazardous to one’s health, and not only because of the filth and fluids covering all surfaces.

While queuing for the toilet on a recent flight, a young man with a bandana on his head barged forcefully to the front of the line. When a woman old enough to be his mother objected he turned on her with implicit menace, asked whether she knew



SURESH RAJ NEUPANE

who he was, and told her to shut her mouth or he’d fix her when they arrived in Kathmandu. Though clearly taken aback, she challenged him to show her what he had in mind. He hissed she’d find out who he was soon enough and slipped into the stall. Moments later, a drunk fat man fell on his face in the aisle behind us, lightening the mood considerably.

As Naya Nepal spreads its wings, one doesn’t actually need to arrive in the kingdom-cum-republic for a taste of where this country is heading. The chaos at Tribhuban International Airport and the madness of downtown traffic can now be enjoyed at 30,000 feet. Staying clear of

lurching drunks is akin to dodging crazed motorcycles, and the sight of harassed flight attendants placating the rowdies reminds one of helpless traffic police. The Hand’s personal favorites are those who insist on wearing headphones while talking loudly to their mates, reminiscent of our politicians who always prefer yelling to listening.

Nor does one have to reach home for the threats to begin. The YCL reportedly has members working in the Gulf and their network of informers insures the Maoist party gets a cut of earnings. Bandana-head sat with half a dozen others, the only coterie drinking without a grin.

In the past, a well-developed sense of

the absurd was all one needed to get by in Nepal, but if the culture of intimidation has become so routine that YCL goondas are willing to attack anyone who stands between them and the bathroom, it may be time to take up judo.

Wheels barely touch the ground before everyone jumps up to pull their huge hand-luggage from the overhead bins, the drunker ones getting knocked backwards by the sheer weight. Shouting stewardesses and the flashing seatbelt signs do little to deter these stalwarts of empowerment. For the rest of us, at least, this cartoon that started hours ago is good preparation for the free-for-all that waits in the airport and beyond. ●

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Who owns the world?

Not America anymore

The United States acts as if it owns the world. This might seem counter-intuitive. After all, more and more foreign entities are lapping up bargain properties in America.

The left despairs of the U.S. government's attitude. The radical right believes that the United

States abides by international law, indeed that we are largely responsible for the dispersion of wealth, political power, and transparency throughout the world. There might have been some excesses during the Bush years, the moderates caution, but the Dems will put everything back to right.

So, does America own the world or not? Let's go through these four key elements of ownership and see if they apply to Uncle Sam.

You Break It, You Own It: If a retail outlet filled in for a turn as president of the UN Security Council, imagine the bill that



WORLD BEAT
John Feffer

States should own the world and snarl with perfect De Niro intonation: "what are you going to do about it, huh?" The Moderate Middle pretends that the United



place. We don't have to send out proconsuls or viceroys to administer our properties around the world to qualify as owners. The Bush administration's attitude toward global power is as David Addington, Vice President Cheney's counsel from 2001 to 2005 put it: "We're going to push and push and push until some larger force makes us stop." We're seeing signs of this larger force emerge here in the United States.

When will it emerge globally?

When Argentina thumbed its nose at the U.S.-dominated World Bank and International Monetary Fund, it had the powerful Mercosur trade association to back it up. When the United States tried to muscle Europe into ending agricultural subsidies (while keeping its own) the European Union refused to back down. And now India, China, and Russia are drifting toward a partnership, alliance is too strong a word, that could transform global relations and shift the power axis from Washington to New Delhi, Beijing, and Moscow.

In many ways, democratic movements around the world also serve as a counterforce to U.S. domination. The United States, despite its rhetoric of "democracy promotion," maintains power and influence in key regions through its alliances with autocratic states, particularly in the Middle East. Pro-democracy movements in these countries challenge U.S. power.

The United States has done for the cause of democracy what the Soviet Union did for the cause of socialism. Not only has the Bush administration given democracy a bad name in much of the world, but its high-profile and highly suspect democracy promotion agenda has provided repressive regimes and their apologists an excuse to label any popular pro-democracy movement that challenges them as foreign agents.

One last indicator that the United States thinks it owns the world is sports. In the World Cup, soccer teams from around the world compete to take home the trophy. And in the World Series? Only teams from North America. Enough said. ●

would be sent to the U.S. Treasury: There would be the full costs of Iraq. There would be Afghanistan. There would be the economies we broke through odious debt. There would a large chunk of the ice cap.

You Have Exclusive Access: Russia occupies Afghanistan and the United States goes ballistic. The same with Vietnam invading Cambodia. And now the Bush administration accuses Iran of sending its troops to Iraq.

You Extract Rent: How is it exactly that the United States, the world's largest debtor nation, doesn't have to submit to an IMF stabilization program or answer to the requirements of its mainly Asian creditors? Because the US dollar is used for most of the world's financial transactions and remains the reserve currency

of choice. Wikipedia, however, tells me that there are now more euros in circulation in the world than dollars. That's perhaps one reason why Brazilian supermodel Gisele Bundchen began to demand payment in euros last year.

You Call the Shots: After the Wolfowitz debacle, you'd think that the world would rise up in revolt and say, "Let's put the 'world' back into the World Bank." Instead, the United States gets to choose again and selects former deputy US secretary of state Robert Zoellick. He's not the worst of the Bush team. But if he has a choice between taking a call from Condi or Lula, which do you think he'll take?

According to these four criteria, the United States certainly acts like it owns the



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Bloody capitalist

An American drama of oil and religion

There Will Be Blood opens deep in American soil—literally. At the turn of the 19th century on America’s western frontier, men toil doggedly in a subterranean setting, portentous contraptions looming around them. Our protagonist, headstrong prospector Daniel Plainview (Day-Lewis), emerges from this wordless world to become, over the course of the film, a monstrous oil baron. If you can’t already guess what this will entail, then prepare for the original American drama.



CRITICAL CINEMA
Diwas Kc

The frontier—which is always the sparse, desert-like landscape of the southwest where the film was shot—is the ultimate American trope. This is the mythical place where American (capitalist) democracy is thought to have ingeniously evolved from a dialectic of wilderness and civilisation. This is the place which most thoroughly embodies the American Dream, a favourite of filmmakers narrating tales of the nation’s success and identity.

If *Blood* reminds you of the hugely popular Western and gangster genres, it’s because of the shared construct. Like a Western, it points us towards the fear and violence that was fundamental to the creation of the American identity, a precarious identity that is both savage and civilised at once. Like a gangster movie, *Blood* is about a tragic individual(ist) whose success is inseparable from his failure.

Director Paul Thomas Anderson (*Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia*) hits all the right chords, telling this story of greed and conceit with a masterly touch. What the film lacks is a sense of allegory. If the cowboy and the gangster have been the imaginary figures of modern American capitalism, the capitalist himself is far too literal. And unlike *Citizen Kane*, with whom some comparison will inevitably be drawn, Plainview does not have genuine mystery.

Basing the film loosely upon Upton Sinclair’s 1927 novel *Oil!*, Anderson has done away with all the crucial political nuances that characterised the history of that great industrial surge. Instead, his ruthless, avaricious protagonist—portrayed by Daniel Day-Lewis in a bravura performance—serves only as a great character study. It is as if we are to discover in Plainview’s hatred of both God and humanity, and in his egoistic relationship with his son, a profound insight on capitalist pursuit.

We are also given Plainview’s far weaker antithesis, Eli Sunday (Dano), a spurious man of God, a prototype of the evangelist type who is to etch the 20th century with his own success story.

Anderson creates the two characters carefully, but at the end does not know what to do with them. The conflict between the two is occasionally compelling, promising an evocative mix of oil and religion, but is ultimately puzzling.

If politics had nothing to do with all this, and if Plainview were simply a figure of Aristotelian tragedy, it would make sense to laud *Blood* as an extraordinary achievement. Critics have welcomed it with enthusiasm and it has received eight Oscar nominations. So it is rather beside the point to complain that aesthetics alone are not enough to judge the rise and fall of capitalism. ●

There will be Blood
Director: Paul Thomas Anderson.
Cast: Daniel Day-Lewis, Paul Dano, Dillon Fresier.
2007. R. 158 min.





संयुक्त राष्ट्र जनसंख्या कोष

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect. UNFPA Nepal is in the process of recruiting the following position:

Post Title	: Communications Officer
Closing Date	: 21 February 2008
Level	: Locally recruited international post
Duty Station	: Kathmandu
Duration	: Eleven months initially

Under the direct supervision and guidance of UNFPA Senior manager, and overall guidance of the UNFPA Representative, the Communications Officer ensures the following major activities:

- Develop and implement communications strategies focusing on UNFPA’s global priorities in Nepal;
- Co-ordinate and oversee enhanced production and dissemination of communication and advocacy materials, including brochures, posters, pamphlets, and press releases as and when needed.
- Organize events and help raise national awareness on the issues that UNFPA advocates (including photo exhibitions drama festivals, song/poetry competitions, concerts, etc.);
- Network with Communication Officers of UN systems in Nepal, national and international media;
- Draft statements, speeches and press releases for the UNFPA Representative, and/or Senior Managers;
- Organize and undertake field trips for donors and international and/or national media to UNFPA programme sites and report on the events and progress;
- Assist in producing promotional materials in English, and Nepali together with national advocacy officer and others, including local dialects;
- Develop press and communication materials for media events such as World Population Day, State of World Population, International Women’s Day, World AIDS Day, International Day against Violence of Women and key national events such as launches of new projects and dissemination of key findings of study/research/assessments and evaluations;
- Make media arrangements for the UNFPA Representative at events and during the missions (involving local and national radio, television and news papers);
- Develop and produce a regular UNFPA bulletin on quarterly basis;
- Organize training workshop for country office staff, implementing partners and journalists to sensitize and create awareness on UNFPA’s mandates and work in Nepal;
- Develop strategic partnerships with key media organizations to assist in resources mobilization;
- Produce photo and information materials on the implementation of the multibi projects funded directly by donors, after searching and informing the UNFPA Representative on the priority areas of each donor interests together with resource mobilization focal point;
- Edit various reports/proposals/studies, press releases, speeches to ensure quality, including its gender sensitivity and social inclusion issues for advocacy and fund-raising purposes
- Support Programme staff in advocacy efforts and component of ongoing projects.
- Lead design, maintain and update of UNFPA Country Office’s Website;
- Ensure web applications are user friendly and visible; and
- Any other tasks given by the UNFPA Representative.

The applicants should have university degree, (preferably advanced degree) in social sciences, journalism, communications; good knowledge of media and public relations; strong advocacy skills; at least five years of increasingly responsible experience in public relations, communications, web based content creation and presentation; excellent oral and written communications and edition skills in English; Napali language skill is an asset; a thorough understanding of the UN system in general, and especially UNFPA mandate, its policies and operations and current development topics and political issues in Nepal; knowledge of policies and programmes in crisis and post crisis situations; ability to establish effective working relationship in the multicultural team environment; ability to work independently as well as a good team worker; networking, interpersonal, analytical and organizational skills; an ability to work well under deadlines; keen understanding of Nepal’s culture, history and political contexts; familiarity with communications approaches for planning, executing, and monitoring communications strategies; computer/information systems skills; resourcefulness, initiative and maturity of judgment; and demonstrated willingness to work as part of a team.

A detailed Terms of Reference (TOR) can be collected from the UN Reception from Monday, 4 February 2008 between 10:00 and 17:00 hrs on working days at UN House, Pulchowk, Lalitpur. Interested candidates should submit their applications, clearly marked the position of the job applying on the top right hand corner, together with updated “UN Personal History Form (P-11)” available at www.unfpa.org/about/employment/index.htm, curriculum vitae, full address and contact details and at least three referees. The application should be sent to the following address. Personal or telephone solicitation will disqualify the candidates. UNFPA reserves the right to appoint on the same or lower position. **Qualified female candidates are encouraged to apply.**

The UNFPA Representative
UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund)
UN House, Pulchowk, Lalitpur

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **photo.circle.xiv** with Silvia Gruber, Bijay Gajmer and Kathmandu Off-Beat participants, at the Sundhara Bakery Café, 9.45 AM, 2 February.
- ❖ **Design show** with Kripa Joshi and others at the Pulchok Bakery Café, curated by photo.circle, until 29 February.
- ❖ **Tibetan Lhosar photographs** by Daniel Collins at the Saturday Café, Boudhanath stupa, 6 February-31 March.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Youth Discussion Series** on water, energy and our strategy with Ratna Sansar Shrestha, 3-5PM, 1 February at Martin Chautari. 4238050
- ❖ **Political economy of the New Nepal** with Hari Roka, 2 February, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 6910277
- ❖ **The Kathmandu Chorale** rehearsals for the Spring season, 4 February, 7PM, at The British School, Sanepa. All singers welcome.
- ❖ **French classes** at the Alliance Francaise, last registration date 5 February

MUSIC

- ❖ **Kutumba with Mica Sundari** live at Momo Mania 2008, Sundhara Bakery Café, 2 February, 5PM, Rs 350.
- ❖ **Ciney Gurung** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 7PM. 5521408
- ❖ **Catch 22** live at the Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.



DINING

- ❖ **Smokey Mountain High** midday BBQ lunch at Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-la Village Resort, Dhulikhel, 26 January, Rs 700 including a bottle of beer.
- ❖ **Illy espresso coffee** at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails.
- ❖ **International four course buffet** at the Sunrise Café with a range of Boris' signature dishes at The Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Wine and Cheese** every Friday and Saturday at the Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, 5-8PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** with coffee, food, drinks and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **Saturday special** barbecue, 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. 4273999
- ❖ **Scrumptious wood fired pizzas**, cocktails and specialty coffees at Roadhouse, Bhatbateni 4426587, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4260187.
- ❖ **Cocktails and jazz** with the JCS Quartet and a choice of cocktails at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarika's. 4479448
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666.00 nett. per person, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 6.30 PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Calcutta's rolls, biryani, kebabs** Indian cuisine at Bawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- ❖ **Xpress yourself** Lavazza coffee at La Dolce Vita and Roadhouse Cafe, Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Little Britain coffee shop** fresh organic coffee, homemade cakes, WiFi internet, open all day, everyday. 4496207
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

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- ❖ **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.
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For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com

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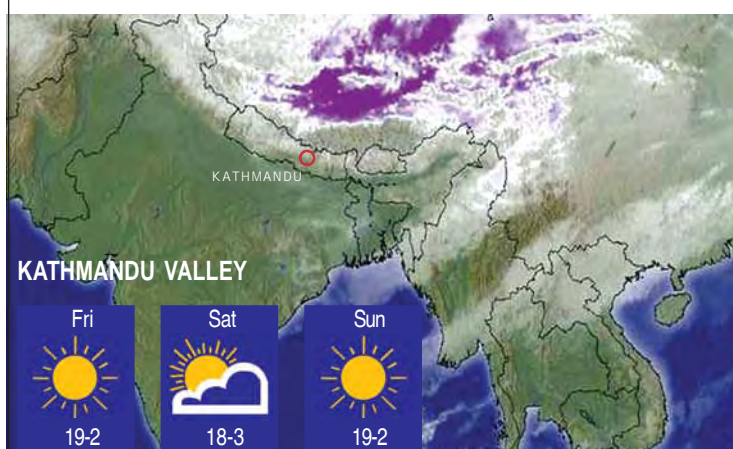
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Most significant this week has been the winter snow that covered much of upland western Nepal and brought the snowline down to 3,000m. But the cold fronts over China that produced that snow have captured much of the moisture meant for the southern hills. As a result, the Kathmandu Valley, most of the hill region and the south have so far received only a small portion of their winter rainfall quota, leaving them largely dry since the end of the summer monsoon last October. The satellite photo taken on Thursday morning shows Nepal sandwiched between two weather systems, with the northern Himalayas blasted by cold air while the southern plains remain clear and warm. The weekend will see cold air from the northwest keeping the Valley cold, with foggy mornings but warm sunny afternoons.



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KIRAN PANDAY

HEARTFELT: Prime Minister GP Koirala defies his own ill health to speak at the 12th anniversary of the Shahid Gangalal Heart Centre on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

SHIELDED: Security forces maintain a high profile at the penultimate seven-party mass meeting in Nepalganj on Monday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

MANHANDLED: a ballot box is carried across the hall for use in elections of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists' Kathmandu Chapter.



KIRAN PANDAY

DOPPELGANGERS: Models posing with their photo doubles at CAN InfoTech 2008, currently running at the BICC.

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AROUND THE WORLD

Social lavatory

Many have described Nepali politics as a theatre of the absurd. But in Ass' scatological opinion, it is more of a social lavatory. In all this, the squabbles within the Koirala clan are probably the most bizarre. Freedom fighter BP Koirala was jailed for 10 years for being a democratically elected prime minister by a king whose son staged a copycat coup 36 years later. Mahendra's son Gyanendra makes BP's son Prakash a minister for being such a **sympathant**. Prakash thus provided new meaning to his Dad's dictum of "national reconciliation". Then Prakash's daughter, Manisha, comes to Nepal and says Kingji is a great guy at a time when her uncle, BP's bro Girijau, is leading a pro-democracy crusade.

✽

This week, Manisha is in town again for her brother's wedding at the appropriately named **Crown Plaza**. Her uncle, the prime minister, boycotts the wedding on health grounds although he's out there, relatively hale and hearty the next day, to open a new coronary care unit at the Martyr's Hospital and even gives a short speech sitting down. You must admire the staying power of our PMji: he has been BP's gofer, an **underground guerrilla**, a hijacker, and it has recently emerged, also a printer of counterfeit Indian notes.

✽

But no prizes for guessing who the chief guests were for Siddharth Koirala's nuptial with Miss Kazakhstan: Kingji and Queenji. There was much back-slapping and guffawing as the evening progressed showing once more that this doesn't look like the Kingdom of the Setting Sun. Might the Sadhu Bandh in Birganj be a part of the reason? Seeing the pantheon of **Hindu godmen** from India in attendance sitting on the dusty Raxaul Road in Birganj the other day, it is clear our royalists are using the Hindu Card to make the monarchy an issue not in Nepal but in India.

✽

Meanwhile, the other feud in the Koirala clan between First Dotter Sujata and First Nephew Shekhar has dragged First Cousin Sushil into the

fray, who has pulled up the Portfolioless Minister for **shooting** her mouth off re: royalty.

✽

As the momentum of elections pick up, the parties have activated their Committees for the **Replenishment** of War Chests. While the mainstream parties are doing it in their traditional mainstream style of phoning up their patrons in the business community, the Maoists have proved themselves to be unable to get out of their traditional gun-to-the-head method. The YCL has been **hyperactive** in campaign financing mode, taking over property of anyone who refuses, making life-threatening phone calls and closing down businesses that refuse to pay election ransom to YCL extortionists. Indian multinationals are being especially targeted. When asked about this the comrades say they are just doing what all other parties are doing. Monkey sees, monkey does.

✽

The other parties are also raking it in through hydropower deals. The energy crisis is so severe that no one really cares who is getting kickbacks in which power deal. But the flurry of new licenses being granted to foreign companies in the final runup to elections does raise eyebrows. Every Indian conglomerate and their grandmother is in town for the Great Nepal Hydropower Garage Sale. You don't even have to be the highest bidder, you just need to know which gears to lubricate.

Here is the Ass' new buzzword for **Loktantrick** Nepal: not SSR but CFR. Campaign Finance Reform.

✽

No sooner had the Young Compatriot's League announced it would field 200 of its cadre per booth at election time (obviously not to pass out **soft drinks**), the NC's NSU also said it would have its members at polling stations. At this rate rival students are going to outdo each other in capturing polling booths. There is no doubt this is heading to be a Darbhanga-style election.

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