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 After being let down twice the euphoria that accompanied the ceasefire two years ago has been replaced by disillusionment and resignation.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, realize 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 Khashga, 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 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.”

KUNDA DIXIT in DANG

Let down twice, Nepalis are sceptical about polls

Top heavy
BEG, BORROW OR STEAL

Nepalis have come to expect shoddy treatment from their rulers, whether democratic, autocratic or feudal. Preoccupied as this infant government is with maintaining 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 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 badly. The demonstrator with a garlic bulb has 12 hours of power a day. Outside Kathmandu, power lasts only a few hours. A water supply is even more erratic. It is unlikely the people are getting 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 effort. 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. Therimonous roll-over last week, exposed not just an ill-priced rise ran also but the incompetence and weakness of the state. The result is a nationwide shortage of diesel that has brought the economy to a standstill. The government has the money to pay off the Nepal Oil Corporation if it has to beg, borrow or steal, the fuel shortages won’t fuel instability in the situation: increase prices and face till elections, the seven parties don’t want to invite public wrath by short on subsidies. Fair enough. But how to do that when the Shortages) blames the Finance Ministry which in turn wants NOC to shedding, the cost of industrial production has gone up substantially. Transportation costs of goods have increased even though the price of diesel remains the same. After all, if you can’t buy fuel for your transport, then you won’t be able to pay. If the shortfall in the market is to be eased, someone has to pay.

India can help

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

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MADHES
I am not Madhess but I have respect and sympathy for the legitimate demands of the people of the Madhess who have been treated like second-class citizens since Nepal was born. The mass movement spearheaded by the MUF 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 MUF? 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 Madhes 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 ‘Nepali’—read Bhairs 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 Mrika Yadav when he says that the very people who were hell-bent on deploying the army against the Maoists who were fighting against this cause, have already been fulfilled. Madiha Koirala’s issue are the ones who are shedding crocodile-tears now. When you see soundbites 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 sari 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. Biplav 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 Madhes 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 Nepal who love the country. The elections will happen and all are invited to voice their concerns: voting, not by intimidation.

Sandep Dhungana, email

ELECTIONS
Kanak Mani Dati’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 2008 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 you 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 skin. It’s okay Kanak, we forgive you for bringing down the king and helping, in your own way, these madmen to power. Still so much? Was it really worth it?

Reena Budathoki, Chelsea, London

SUATA
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 and sheer arrogance. The PM’s decision to groom his unpopular Buddhis Koirala as a 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. Malika Shyala, 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 acceptable, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with ‘letter’ in the subject line. Email: letters@nepalitimes.com. Phone: 1101-152015. Mail: Letters, Nepal Times, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Palpa’s villagers don’t suffer power cuts because they generate their own electricity

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.

Locate 50km from Nepal’s biggest hydropower project on the Kali Gandaki which generates 144 megawatts of power, Palpa’s villagers 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, Nayan 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 sticking their tongues at the capital.
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 Revamped condoms first time in Nepal.

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 Regency, Kathmandu as a leading Best Value budget Travel Magazine has selected the Hyatt company.

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 even lost lives to ultimately recycle, in a strange evolutionary twist, the same old Nepalis over 60 as the leaders of New Nepal? Very unlikely! 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 Nepal? Very unlikely! Even today, as the politicians stand on their pedestals in Nepalgunj or Birgunj, 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 your children’s better future? Few tell selflessly day-in, day-out, to give anonymous children a better tomorrow. This is how young people distort 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-sponsored 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-figures 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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Authorised Dealers:
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 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, Nepal’s have to understand that these soldiers fought for the liberation of the Nepal 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

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
finally decided to increase the diplomats. The government has 23 January Sitaram Baral in Jana Astha, the background, just like the been properly analysed by the incident, forensic evidence hasn’t been a very journalist or publication. All dangerous group. ominous signs of a very journalist to claim responsibility. The Maisots 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 Mama 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 Rs 5,000,” says Ananda Gir, acting chairman of the FNCCI in Kalikot. Many businesses have left the district to go to Daikeh, Sunkhet and Nepalganj because of the downturn in business. The makeshift roeways over the Tila and the Karnali rivers cost Rs 30 per person, which is a high price to pay for the ordinary villagers. JAK Prasad Chaulagain, 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 roeways.

"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 Tulraj Bista. According to him, during the royal takeover some noblemen 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.

Still unconnected
Nepal, 3 February, Tularam Pandey, Kalikot

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 is easier for us to go to Sunkhet than to Mana," says Sarbajna Bhikawarna, 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 Mana."

During the decade-long war, six suspension bridges over the Tila and Karnali were blown up by the Maisots. 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, Mana, 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. Hiralkot Devkota, 88, says: “Talks about constructing the bridges have been going on for two years but nothing has materialised yet. If the bridges are back, then I won’t go to Myagdi for an eye check-up.”

The Maisots 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 Mama 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 Rs 5,000,” says Ananda Gir, acting chairman of the FNCCI in Kalikot. Many businesses have left the district to go to Daikeh, Sunkhet and Nepalganj because of the downturn in business. The makeshift roeways over the Tila and the Karnali rivers cost Rs 30 per person, which is a high price to pay for the ordinary villagers. JAK Prasad Chaulagain, 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 roeways.

"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 Tulraj Bista. According to him, during the royal takeover some noblemen 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.

Still unconnected
Nepal, 3 February, Tularam Pandey, Kalikot

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.

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you can’t go far in Kathmandu without coming across a tailor’s shop or hearing the whir 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 Sristhi 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 steady 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.
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 Ratnamrakal attends the school to develop his design sense, one of the increasing number of males engaging in fashion.
I joined by the crescent Moon on the 4th. Granted, the western sky is kind of dull, but don't neglect the dawn in the morning sky. NASA's Messenger craft has just visited this planet. The eclipse on 21 February will be visible only from Antarctica. We will then have a total lunar eclipse.
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.

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 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 Tribhuvan 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 politicos 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 bin, 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.
Who owns the world?
Not America anymore

T

he 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 should own the world and 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 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.

If a retail outlet filled in for a turn as president of the UN Security Council, imagine the bill that would be sent to the U.S. president of the UN Security Council, imagine the bill that 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 be 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 U.S. 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 supermarket millionaire Biometal kni he began to demand payment in euros last year.

You Call the Shots: After the Worldview 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 Condoleezza Rice or Lula, which do you think he’ll take?

According to these four criteria, the United States certainly acts like it owns the place. We don’t have to send out proclamations 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, President Cheney’s counsel from 2001 to 2005 put it: “We’re going to push and push and push until someone 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.

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WORLD BEAT
John Feffer
Here Will Be Blood opens deep in American soil—literally. At the turn of the 20th 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.

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 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 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 egotistic 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.
EXHIBITIONS
- photo.circle.xiv with Silvia Graber, Bijay Gyamay and Kathmandu Off-Beat participants, at the Sundhara Bakery Café, 3-5PM, 1 February at Martin Chautari, 3052050
- Political economy of the New Nepal with Hari Roka, 2 February, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 6910277
- The Kathmandu Chitlala rehearsals for the Spring season, 4 February, 7PM, at The British School, Sanepa. All singers welcome.
- 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 Sanas Shrestha, 3-5PM, 1 February at Martin Chautari.
-THE WINTER SCHEDULE

- Cocktails and jazz at Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4 February, 6.30 PM.
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas at the Galleria cafe, every Friday.
- Dice-licious brunch at the Allafance Francaise, last registration date 5 February
- Saturday special barbeque, sekuwa, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 9841250848.
- French classes with Hari Roka, 5 February, 11 AM-1 PM. 9841293432
- International four course buffet at Smokey Mountain High, Rs 700 including a bottle of beer.

DINING
- Smokey Mountain High midday BBQ lunch at Dwarfka’s Himalayan Shangri-la Village Resort, Dhillikhet, 28 January, Rs 700 including a bottle of beer.
- Illy espresso coffee at the Galleria cafe, every Friday alongside cocktails.
- International four course buffet at the Sunrise Café with a range of Boris’ signature dishes at The Chimney, Hotel Yak andYeti. 4248999
- Wine and Cheese every Friday and Saturday at the Rox Bar, Hyat Regency. 5-8PM. 4461234
- Jazz in Patan with coffee, food, drinks and dessert at the New Orleans Café, Jawalakhel. 11.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- Saturday special barbeque, sekuwa, mamos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 9841250848.
- Dice-licious brunch at Katori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, the roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50% discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30PM. 4573999
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, coffees at Roadhouse, Bhathatali. 4420587, Pulchok 5217557 and Thamel 4260187.
- Cocktails and Jazz with the JCS Quartet and a choice of cocktails at Fusion – the Bar at Dwarfka’s. 4479448
- Starry night barbeque 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
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- 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 Café, Thamel. 4700012
- Little Britain coffee shop fresh organic coffee, homemade cakes, WiFi internet, open all day, everyday. 4498207
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

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.

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

WEATHER

Most significant this week has been the winter snow that covered much of upland western Nepal and brought the snowline down to 3,000 m. But the cold fronts over China that produced so much 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 southern plains remain clear and warm. The weekend will see cold air from the weather systems, with the northern Himalayas blasted by cold air while the southern hills. As a result, the Kathmandu Valley, most of the hill region and the southern plains remain clear and warm. The weekend will see cold air from the high Himalayas blown by westerly winds.

KATHMANDU VALLEY

northwest keeping the Valley cold, with foggy mornings but warm sunny afternoons. The weekend will see cold air from the weather systems, with the northern Himalayas blasted by cold air while the southern hills. As a result, the Kathmandu Valley, most of the hill region and the southern plains remain clear and warm. The weekend will see cold air from the

Enquiries: 6929870, 6929875, 6929375
Website: www.questentertainment.com

Seher (Ayesha Takia) is missing one day in her life. She has mysterious scratch marks on her neck and unknown men are out to kill her. Her tame AC P Rayner (Ajay Devgan) is trying to find out who exactly happened on that fateful Sunday. As her hunched bodes surface, Seher is inexplicably linked to both of them. Rayner uneartens clues to Seher’s missing Sunday but grows increasigly suspicious as he realizes that Seher may not be as innocent as she claims to be.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com

QUEST ENTERTAINMENT

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

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HEARTFELT: Prime Minister KP Oli braves his own ill health to speak at the 10th anniversary of the Shahid Gangalal Heart Centre on Tuesday.

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

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

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

Many have described Nepali politics as a theatre of the absurd. But in Ass’s 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 sycophant. 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 Girijus, 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 Daughter 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 multinationalas 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 making 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.

No sooner had the Young Comrade’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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