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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 386

Q. The constituent assembly election is?

Total votes: 4,291

Weekly Internet Poll # 387. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com
Q. What kind of state system would you like after the elections?

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A new public opinion poll has shown a deep schism between the hills and plains of Nepal, but both Madhesis and Pahadis overwhelmingly believe that differences can't be resolved by violence.

Respondents from the hills and the Tarai had widely differing perceptions on the grievances of Madhesi people, including on language policy, autonomy and performance of the government.

"The poll shows that Madhesis are growing pessimistic and if the state is not able to address their genuine demands the country could be headed towards disaster," says Sudhindra Sharma of Interdisciplinary Analysts, which interviewed 3,010 respondents from 30 sample districts in January.

The results can be compared to results from the same questions asked in earlier polls in 2004, January and September 2006 and in 2007. After a sharp decline in support for the monarchy from 81 percent in 2004 to 46 percent in 2007, the monarchy's support has increased slightly to 49 percent. Support for a Hindu state remains rock steady at 59 percent in the last three polls since 2006.

More people have heard about constituent assembly elections than last year, but their scepticism is growing. The number of respondents who said polls can be held dropped from 28 percent last year to 22 percent today.

The Election Commission Code of Conduct doesn't allow the publication of the relative popularity of the parties, but the poll shows that 58 percent of people still haven't made up their minds whom they will vote for.

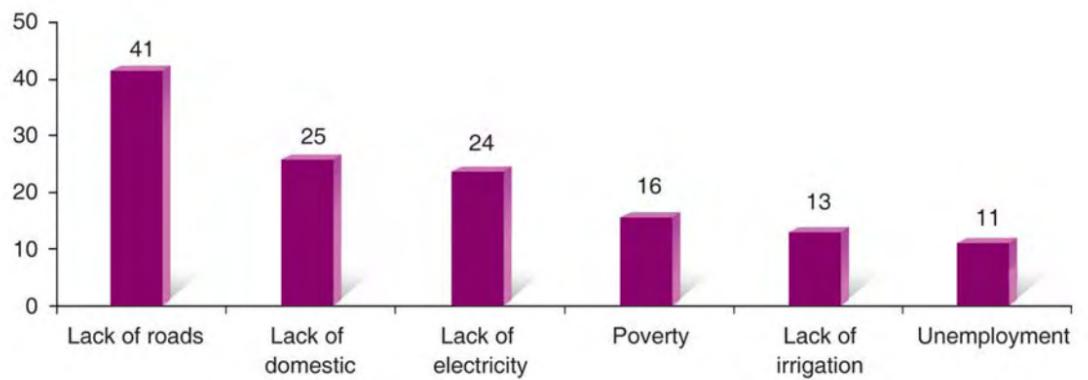
The poll shows a big gap between the expectations of the people and the preoccupations of the political parties. The Nepali people overwhelmingly are not worried about politics so much as inflation, lack of development and poverty. At the local level, the priorities are roads, water and electricity in that order.

Nepal Contemporary Political Situation V
Interdisciplinary Analysts,
January 2008
ida(at)wlink.com.np

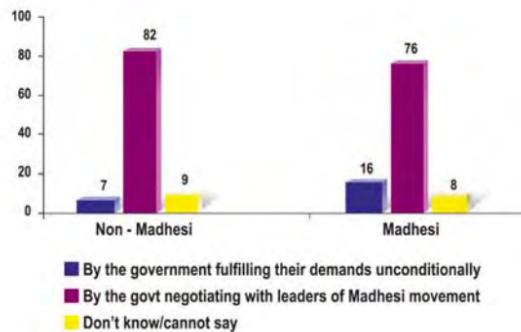
Pre-poll poll

Most Nepalis care more about roads, water and power than politics

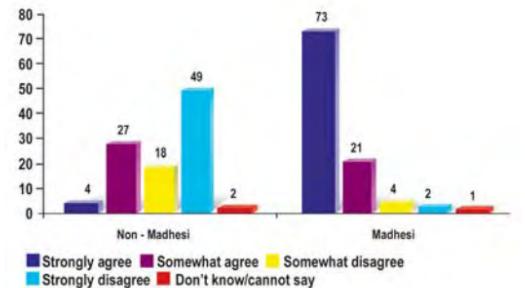
What are the two major problems at the local level?



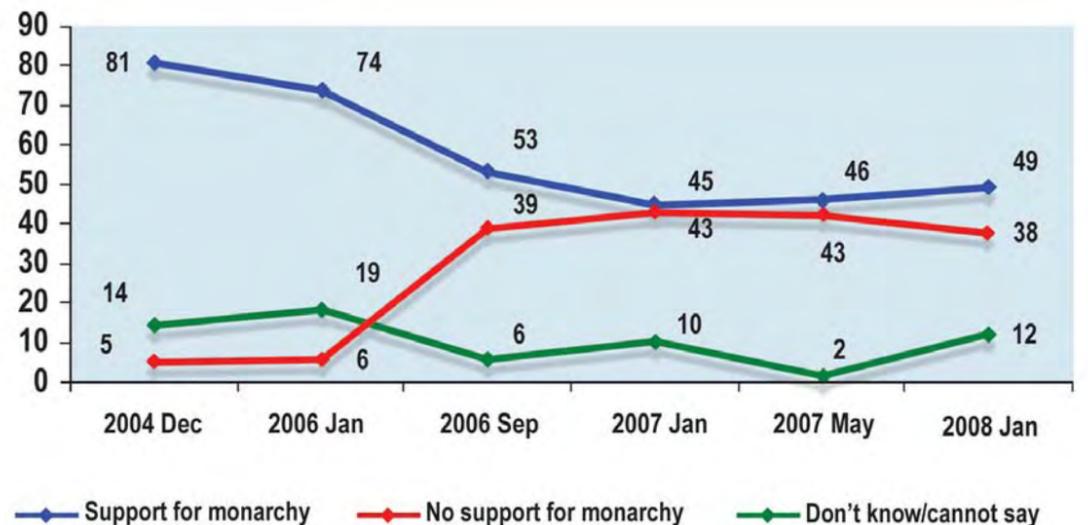
In your opinion, how can the Madhes crisis be resolved?



Do you agree or disagree with the demands of the Madhesi movement?



Public's stand on monarchy



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Missing the story

Kathmandu's civil society and media are a part of the problem

Kathmandu's self-righteous civil society and media have done the impossible. They have matched the insensitivity, insularity, inertia and ignorance of the central state.

The Madhes has been in crisis for a year. People are scared. There are 'political' killings every day, though most stem from personal rivalries, caste and property feuds, and revenge. The increasing number of rapes go mostly unreported. The legal system is a sham and justice elusive.



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

Nepal's activists were at the forefront of raising human rights issues during the Maoist insurgency. Yet on the Madhes, how do Kathmandu's human rights organisations react? Silence. Propped by donors, they spout buzzwords like "inclusion" but forget the exclusion within their own organisations. The district heads of Insec in the Madhes, for example, are Pahadis.

How else does one account for the absence of any fact-finding reports or investigations into the various forms of atrocities in the Tarai? It was only after the Gaur incident that Kathmandu's human rights wallahs got agitated enough to go down and produce what later proved to be inaccurate reports. For them no other incident, or the pattern of killings was worth a response. There is no report on the violations, if any, by the STF. Is the life of a Madhesi worth less than a Pahadi?

This week, police killed three people in Birgunj, claiming they were criminals. Independent observers say that there was no way to ascertain guilt. Either way, the police had no right to shoot first. Madhesi groups as well as the Madhesi leaders within the seven parties are furious and want action against the SP. The town has been shut down. But not a single national human rights group has, till presstime, issued even a statement.

And where are the OHCHR's reports on Nepalgunj, Lahan, the Madhes movement, Kapilbastu, and the general human rights situation? Are sporadic statements and internal confidential reports enough to justify the huge expenditure incurred for the upkeep of Richard Bennett & Co?

The Kathmandu media, it has to be said, is part of this conspiracy of silence. In an emerging conflict, one would assume that editors would attempt in-depth analysis, follow-up on stories, send their trusted journalists for on-the-ground investigative reportage. Instead, in most papers there seems to be a deliberate ploy to underplay and underreport the gravity of the

Madhes crisis.

If one only read the major dailies, it would be easy to believe that apart from sporadic incidents, the seven party mass meetings in the Tarai were a success. The Janakpur and Birgunj rallies were a disaster. Three thousand police were deployed and the state herded people into the rally. Even so, attendance was dismal, there were scuffles across town, more than 60 people were injured, and Ram Chandra Poudel had to run off after his speech. The impression in the Tarai was that the Pahadi parties were bulldozing their way through. Birgunj marked a major escalation in the level of violence, and may be a sign of things to come.

This week there were strike across the Tarai, multiple bombs in Rajbiraj, killings and tension in Birgunj, clashes in Nawalparasi, Banke and Mahottari, simmering communal tension and increase of activities of armed groups like Pawan's SJMM in Kapilbastu, targeted killings of at least one Pahadi each in several districts, no breakthrough in talks with the government and plans to escalate the movement.

Yet, the editorial line in most papers does not help. Seeing Madhesi groups as opportunists and irritants to be removed echoes the mainstream political line and misses the nuances. Advocating army deployment is counter productive. And hoping, as one paper did, that Madhesi mainstream groups would support such aggressive security measures is naive.

Kathmandu's civil society and media need to wake up and be a part of the solution. The risks of not doing so are too high. ●

THE RANARIDDH OPTION

Much as the 6+1 parties would have liked to remove the monarchy as a campaign issue in April's elections by getting the interim constitution to declare Nepal a republic on paper, it refuses to go away.

And they have no one to blame but themselves. It is the party leaders who keep on raking up the monarchy, accusing each other of being closet royalists.

With only two months to go to polls, Sujata Koirala is zeroing in on a chunk of voters who want to keep a symbolic monarchy. And so is diehard republican Pushpa Kamal Dahal who is busy building rapprochement with royals. Both are competing for the block vote of moderate monarchists.

We don't know exactly what proportion of the people want a monarchy, but the most recent public opinion poll (see page 1) puts it at 49 percent. King Gyanendra has also seen that figure, and has been giving interviews to say the people should decide on the monarchy and not the parties.

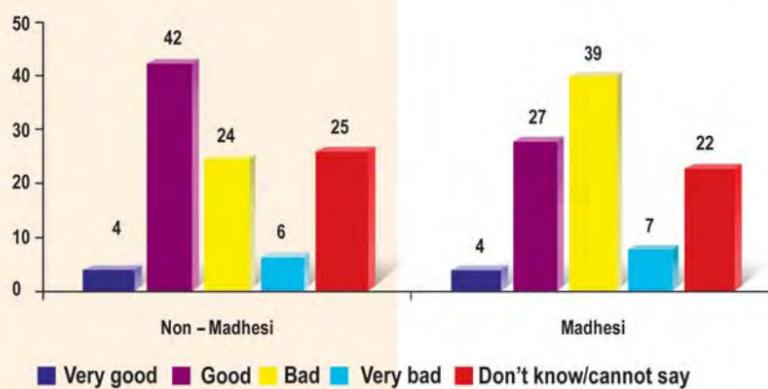
He still doesn't get it. Nepalis have always made a distinction between the institution of monarchy and the persona of the king. Half the people may want the monarchy, but few want Gyanendra or his son on the throne. The big challenge will be to reconcile the people's sizeable support for a symbolic crown and their rejection of the incumbent.

One solution would be to do what Prince Norodom Ranariddh did after his father made his half-brother king in Cambodia: he formed his own political party and named it after himself. The royalist Norodom Ranariddh Party is now the third strongest party. Who knows, Gyanendra could also one day be more influential as a political kingmaker than as king.

The argument of monarchists is that Nepal needs the king as a symbol of national unity. But the monarchy is looking more and more like a divisive force. Many undecided voters on 10 April may think the monarchy is just not worth the trouble to keep and regard a continued kingship as actually jeopardising the peace process.

The only thing going for the king now is the fecklessness of the political parties, and the hope that the seven party alliance will disintegrate. That is why it is more important than ever for the parties to see the elections not as a zero-sum game. If the elections are held properly, there will be no losers. We will all be winners.

Generally speaking, how do you assess the performance of the present government: very good, good, bad, very bad?



The games losers play

You can take seven horses to the water, but you can't make them drink

Early this week, the seven stalwarts of the seven parties took three important decisions, seemingly to prepare a level playing-field for themselves in the run-up to constituent assembly elections. But such is the distrust between members of the alliance that the deal fell through.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

With a large number of nominal members in the interim parliament, the Maoists would have gained most from the Rs 1 million per MP constituency development fund. The NC and the UML manipulated public opinion and exerted enough pressure on the seven party steering committee to have the largesse frozen till elections. The Maoists retaliated by joining hands with NC in rejecting the revival of local bodies that would have made the UML the strongest contender at the grassroots.

The UML took its revenge by making

the Maoists demand the postponement of the elections for the NC-aligned Free Students Union scheduled for 28 March and then protested against the decision in public. FSU elections were likely to help the NC most, but the rival UML-affiliated ANNFSU was most vociferous in condemning the poll deferral. No wonder the Maoist shock-troops at various campuses were baffled and NSU activists appeared bewildered. However, when their younger comrades exerted pressure upon the leadership, the UML commissar managing Tribhuban University as its VC declared that there was no plan to postpone FSU polls.

In this three-cornered contest to undermine each other, all the three lost ground in equal measure. Meanwhile, in the other elections (for the CA) there is a loss of momentum. Sincerity and a unity of purpose between seven parties are crucial for creating a political environment conducive to polls. If the steering committee of the SPA spends all its time and energy in resolving internal conflicts, there is no time to hold meaningful dialogue

with the various Madhesi groups or the Khamuwans looting arms from police posts in the eastern hills.

The Maoists used to consider themselves masters in manipulation. In the past, they successfully played the palace and parliamentary parties against each other and came out as winners. But they seem to have lost their edge. No matter what Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal does, his alliance partners manoeuvre around it. He tries to present his successes to his cadre, but always fails to sell his accommodative policies to his YCL hotheads.

In the wake of visits of powerful Kathmandu-based diplomats to the Indian capital, PKD was himself keen to go to New Delhi to present his side of the story. The YCL aborted it by burning Indian vehicles in Biratnagar. He wanted to return seized property to its rightful owners. Extremists of his party openly defied their leader's whip. By physically assaulting NC leaders and reactivating People's Councils under the stewardship of Baburam Bhattarai, critics of PKD's conciliatory approach have

practically registered a vote of no confidence against him. You may not like the antics of the Maoist chief, but the consequences of his marginalisation are fraught with unseen dangers.

The people are fed up with these games. Endless shutdowns in the Tarai, YCL terror in the hills and the apathy of the state everywhere has begun to affect the cloistered life of urbanites in Kathmandu valley. Rumours are doing the rounds that Gyanendra may have something in store for his customary Democracy Day address if he gets positive hints from high-profile Indian visitors. It might not do much to save the monarchy, but an extension of his stipend is still possible if constituent assembly elections are once again postponed under some pretext or other.

The Indians are leaning on various Madhesi groups to prepare the ground for elections. But voting can only take place if the parties want it. The seven horses have been taken to the water, but they show no inclination to drink. They are having fun playing games as rest of the country burns, all in the name of republicanism. ●

LETTERS

ELECTIONS

Mr Dixit, please explain to me how conducting CA elections will improve our lives ('Top heavy', #385). As far as I know, the CA election is only the first step towards a new Nepal as a general election will need to follow. And the general election will only be even more chaotic and bloodier than this.

Bhuwan Sharma, email

● The Maoists have advocated 'self-determination' within a set of federal states: What do they mean? Do they mean that these states would have their own parliament, own judiciary, and considerable powers as in the United States, Canada or India? Or do they mean that the states will be like Tibet in China, or states of the former Soviet Union?

It is quite surprising to me that Nepal's journalists, up till now, have not pushed the Maoist leadership to clarify their position on exactly what they mean by federalism and 'self-determination'. If the Maoists intend to stick to the map that they put forward earlier and plan to give powers to these federal states like in the US, there may not be any need for a Madhesi agitation. And if that's the case, why doesn't Prachanda clarify his position?

Ultimately, it is in the interest of the Madhesis to go for constituent assembly elections. However, what's the point in going for elections if politicians don't clarify their position on the most crucial issues for Madhesis, and if at the end of the day, it will still be the same five old Bahuns deciding on the future of the Madhes?

Anand Jha, email

● I am not convinced by Prachanda's confidence of winning a majority in the CA polls, as most common people are frustrated by the Maoist politicians' lack of maturity and honesty. So far they have shown no sign of departure from the bloody mentality of capturing state power employing any method necessary. This Machiavellian thinking will eventually bring their downfall because you can fool people sometimes but not all the time. I expect they would come third behind the NC and UML, but my biggest fear is that they will not accept this outcome. If comrade Prachanda is sincere about the election then he should accept the result even if it is not in his favour. Will he and his party show that political sincerity?

PB Rana, email

PETROL

I disagree with the student groups for their effort to tear down what is to a large extent a market driven phenomenon. There is no way that we will not be affected by changes in commodity prices at the international level. All the rhetorical statements in opposition of price changes have failed to provide any effective alternative.

I believe we should in fact raise tax on fuel consumption rather than reduce it. Couldn't all the people who are forced to breathe the filthy air in our big cities do with a little break from all the CO₂ emissions? While agitating with the intention to help people at the lower end, we are in essence subsidising a larger section who consume more fuel. Why don't we raise fuel tax and maybe use the money to subsidise those who really have problems affording it in the form of grant support? Wouldn't this put a brake on the urge for fuel in our society? Wouldn't it help reduce demand?

Anjan Pandey, email

● Thanks for at least addressing the alternatives to petroleum. Most countries in the world are searching for alternatives to gasoline, but we are not doing anything to that end. Is this because of poverty, ignorance or the corrupt mentality of our politicians? What a misfortune! Our ministers and other important people don't have any vision for our future; they are only interested in creating a good environment for themselves. Who cares about future generations? Decreasing or increasing the price of petroleum is no solution in the long run. We should focus on searching for alternatives to petroleum products.

Manab, email

SALT

Re: 'Salt Mountain', #384. Interesting article, beautiful picture but unfortunately many points of contention! As there are so many I will plainly list them one by one with some food for thought and a pinch of 'iodised' salt.

1. Volatility of iodine: we use potassium iodate because of its stability and long lasting characteristics, even under difficult situations. I have three bags of salt produced in 2002 and

since 2005 they have been on my windowsill exposed to the open air. The salt still contains iodate. The problem of loss of iodate and hence urgency to sell the product quickly is not true.

2. The figure of 90 percent coverage is not correct. The true figure is about 60-70 percent. The Salt Trading Corporation (STC) imports a large quantity of phoda salt, which is a dirty, large-crystal salt. They add some iodine but because the crystal is so dirty consumers wash the salt before consumption so the iodine is lost. I have contested the use of such bad quality salt, which is really only fit for animals.

3. Nepal does not have the cheapest salt in South Asia. It is the most expensive. Yes, we in the city pay Rs 11 but in places like Simikot they pay Rs 50-60 per kg. Bhutan is probably the cheapest (does it, like Nepal, import all its salt from India?...makes you think!).

4. Salt Trading is a semi-government corporation. This is the problem. It should be either private or public but not both and if private it should be an open free market. This status is causing set-backs to the Universal Salt Iodization (USI) program for the control over Iodine Deficiency Disorder (IDD).

5. The local food industry, in my experience, uses only iodized salt in its products which is a big plus in eliminating IDD. In fact, it is my view that iodine is being introduced into the diet through the consumption of instant noodles. Kids in Simikot consume about a pack of noodles a day!

6. The idea of iodising Tibetan salt may seem a good one but it would be better if the STC discussed the issue with China so that the salt is iodised in Tibet, meaning no imports of non-iodised.

7. Double fortification (DFS) is not an option at this stage as it is horribly expensive and there are still questions to be answered.

8. There is no salt in the world that contains sufficient iodine for human benefit. Iodine is found in salt only as a trace element, and must always be added.

9. Yes, in 25 years UNICEF/WHO/ICCIDD/MI have made enormous strides in USI/IDD and from a poor 20 percent, the 70/75 percent world coverage today is rather good. But not good enough and in almost all cases it is up to the governments to resolve this, because as long as the 25/30 percent is not covered many children will continue to be born with physical and mental disabilities.

Lorenzo Locatelli-Rossi, Kathmandu International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (ICCIDD)

EDMUND HILLARY

Over the last five years I have seen the country move from despair, to action and now to hope that the time of Nepal as victims is gone and the time of Nepal as victors is on the horizon. There will be set-backs prior to the elections on 10 April, but as Sir Edmund showed time and time again, if different communities work together the common gain for all is greater. What greater monument could Nepal create, for a man who has done so much for Nepal, than a vibrant, peaceful and successful country?

Peter, email

THE ASS

Dear ass, it is a good thing to have some humour in this chaotic world. In fact, I start reading the *Nepali Times* from the back page.

However, I am frustrated with your obsession of attacking foreigners all the time. Nobody ever said they were perfect. What about all those Nepal working outside the country? Would you be so pleased if some newspaper harassed them in the name of humour? Your country virtually survives on remittances and donor funding, so don't you think foreigners have a right to work here? After all they put up their bills...Before you can fund your country's expenditure, foreigners are here to stay, so you should get used to it--no hard feelings!

I know you are not a Christian, but there is a famous quote in the Bible that says 'do unto others what you would want them to do unto you'. Best regards, you are fun.

Name withheld, email

● The Ass column is probably the most critical, sarcastic and funny column I have ever found among all magazines and newspapers. The style is different from the norm and the contents are superb. I am actually addicted every Friday afternoon to browse the new version of nepalitimes.com and get reliable information on Nepal, given in a satirical way. The *Nepali Times* gives a unique taste among the bunch of other papers.

Sanyam Waglé, Canberra University, Australia

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New employment opportunities for Nepal's sexual minorities

Not just a pretty face

IRENE PERONI

Transgender people in Nepal will now have the opportunity to study to become hairdressers and beauticians under a new scheme funded by the Norwegian government.

The beauty and hair treatment courses, as well as cooking, catering and waiter training, will be offered as part of a three-year, 49,000-dollar project funded by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and run by Blue Diamond Society, a Kathmandu-based NGO fighting for the rights of sexual minorities and active in the field of AIDS prevention.

Transvestites are a particularly marginalised and vulnerable group with little or no access to the job market, and frequent violence directed against them. Sexual minorities experience regular extortion, exclusion from family and society, verbal and physical abuse, sexual abuse and rape, arbitrary detention, blackmail and even murder.

Norway says it is committed to fighting sexual discrimination wherever it occurs as part of its development policy. "We want to empower socially excluded people and protect their rights by helping them to be included in the mainstream socio-political dialogue," Norway's Environment and International Development Minister Erik Solheim told the *Nepali Times* on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

OUT IN FORCE: Sexual minorities marching for equal rights in Kathmandu last year

Because of their physical appearance, transgender people are often prohibited from attending school and experience great difficulties in finding jobs. The project seeks to provide income-generating skills training in order to give sexual minorities, who often work in the sex industry, the opportunity to seek alternative jobs.

"In addition to securing their survival, this will also prove that given the opportunity, sexual and gender minorities can contribute to society," Solheim added.

But helping transgender people find proper jobs is not the only aim of the Norwegian-sponsored project. One of the main concerns is having their rights protected under the new Nepali constitution.

Metis, as transgender males are known in Nepal, have repeatedly been the victims of acts of violence by the police in the past, as reported by Human Rights Watch and gay and lesbian advocacy groups.

They have often been accused of

'obscene acts' and 'immoral behaviour', and reportedly criminalised even for carrying around condoms, seen as evidence of their illegal activity ('Obsecnity', #355). But many of them have been making a living from prostitution because of widespread discrimination and lack of legal protection.

By coincidence, the launch of the Norwegian program, which had started taking shape as early as in 2006, comes in the wake of a landmark verdict by Nepal's Supreme Court issued on 21 December 2007. The top court ruled that laws should be changed in order to grant sexual minorities the same rights as other citizens.

"Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and inter-sex people are also 'natural persons' though they are not masculine or feminine from the perspective of gender," the court said. "They should be allowed to enjoy all the rights defined by national and international human rights law and instruments."

The ruling was a major victory for the Blue Diamond Society, which had filed a petition with the Supreme Court asking to put an end to legal discrimination against sexual minorities. The group's director, Sunil Pant, hailed the decision as "extremely progressive".

The priority now is ensuring that the newly-rehabilitated citizens are granted concrete opportunities to become economically self-sufficient, he added. ●

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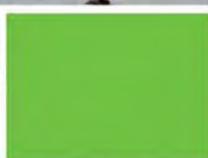
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Consul Khetan

The Republic of Turkey has appointed industrialist Chandra Prakash Khetan its Honorary Consul General for Kathmandu, Nepal. Khetan is director of Laxmi Bank and Prime Life Insurance and also honorary secretary of the Nepal India Chamber of Commerce.

Understanding banks

Bank of Kathmandu and Himalayan Bank have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to extend their banking services together. Extended banking services under the MoU will be implemented from 13 February. As per the MoU, customers can cash up to Rs 50,000 from any branch of the two banks.

To Guangzhou

Beginning 31 March, Doha-based Qatar Airways will begin flights to the southern Chinese industrial port city of Guangzhou. It will operate four flights a week using an Airbus A330. Qatar already flies to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong in China.

New Hama

Hama Iron and Steel have introduced Hama SG, an innovative new bar with a new design and produced using cutting-edge technology. The new design creates more surface area for cement to steel bonding.

Young Nepali economists

At a gathering in Guildford, England, two young activists from Nepal, Sanya Thapa and Atulya Raj Pandey, put forth challenges for the world's leaders at the World Economic Forum annual meeting. At the British Council initiative, sixty young participants from all over the world were involved in discussions concerning global issues.

Responsible Nabil

As part of their Corporate Social Responsibility, Nabil Bank has partnered with the Glaucoma Centre at the Tilganga Eye Hospital to increase overall knowledge about the disease, is supporting the education of underprivileged children at the Mary Ward School and has partnered with Nabil Three Star Club to promote sports.

NEW PRODUCTS

SILENT POWER: Himel Refrigeration and Electrical Industries has introduced the Reserve silent generator in Nepal. Available in various sizes, these generators come in 2-2000KVA power. The generators come with a one year warranty.

BLIND POWER: Su-kam has introduced the DSP Sine Wave inverter keeping in mind the growing power cuts in the country. Compared to the generator, the inverter cuts down on noise pollution, running cost and maintenance cost. It also doesn't require any fuel to run.

No outsourcing

There is no way the IT industry will make headway in Nepal

There was much hype about the recent CAN Infotech apparently drawing more than half a million visitors during the annual IT do. It has turned out to be another of the events in our calendar where hundreds turn up and little is known as to what volume of business transactions actually take place. For the organisers, the gate money is the key focus of the event.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

The Nepali IT industry began before the IT revolution in India. Nepali hardware vendors were importing equipment to be shipped to India. When mobile technology became affordable, mobile phones made their way from India into Nepal. However, no Nepali IT firm made any headway in expanding their business outside of Nepal or setting up large scale plants that could supply to India. Perhaps the doyens of IT industry were happier fighting for positions in CAN rather than making an effort to take their business to a regional or global level.

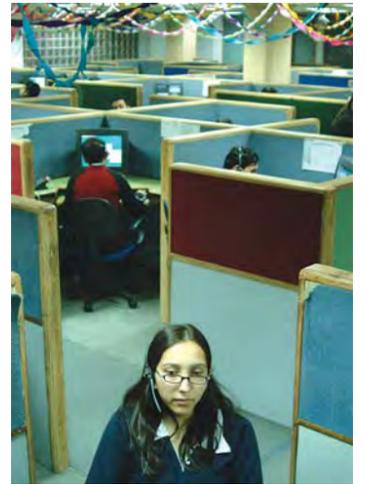
The hardware and software industries will continue to focus on the domestic market, and with technology breakthroughs still coming at a phenomenal pace, we would be more than happy to be the representative or agent of one of these companies. Talking about the pace of technological advancement in this field, the Chairman of Intel said that 95% of the products which Intel shipped in December had not

even been designed in January of that same year, which shows just how dynamic this industry is right now. It also shows that we have really missed the boat!

On a recent flight, a CEO of a global software company asked this Beed about the potential of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) in Nepal. He opined that in view of the political problems in Pakistan, the fear of confrontation between India and Pakistan always lurks. Therefore, having a backup in a neutral venue like Nepal seems attractive and several companies, including his, were exploring the possibility.

However, the scenario in Nepal is different. Apart from 'outsourcing' goons for political means, we seem not to believe in outsourcing. The politically active unions propagate direct employment by firms and not through an outsourcing agency. As this Beed told the CEO, outsourcing would be a possibility in Nepal if Citibank or Microsoft directly employed these workers on their payrolls, guaranteeing them minimum pay for not working, scheduled time to bask in the sun, and time off every time that they would like to celebrate Mao's birthday or a coming of age ceremony. The Indian IT boom was fuelled greatly by business process outsourcing and now countries like Egypt, the Philippines and even Eastern European countries like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have joined the fray. For Nepal, it seems we have missed another opportunity.

Several Nepali firms are facing the problem of employees of outsourced companies pushing to



ANUP PRAKASH

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES: Nepal may have missed the boat on BPO

be absorbed by the parent firms. This means that the guy working for a vegetable vendor of a hotel one day may want to come under the direct payroll of the hotel the next. There are few countries where support services are ever employed directly by the parent company.

The Chinese today lament the rule of Mao that hindered their country's economic growth for many years. We will not want future historians to look back on this period of Nepali history as the time when we retarded our employment market by decades. If we do not provide the legal, institutional and political framework for outsourcing as a service industry to develop and provide new employment opportunities to the hundreds of thousands of Nepalis entering the job market every year, then we should be ready for another round of prolonged conflict. ●

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"The monarchy doesn't want power"



King Gyanendra spoke with Hari Lamsal of *Rastra-Vani* on 30 January. He spoke about the role of the monarchy, his 1 February 2005 takeover and the peace process.

राष्ट्रवाणी

Your majesty, you have been silent for a year.

We have been silent because we want the peace process to be successful. The Nepali people should speak about the kind of direction the country is taking, where it is heading, and why there has been so much confusion. Even today the monarchy doesn't want power. The monarchy has come through many other difficult situations over the years, but we have always listened to the people and moved forward according to their wishes. It is not that we are not well informed, but for various reasons even the people have not been able to speak. We think that certain forces

are using democracy as an excuse to destroy the polity. We don't think that is democratic. No one should take the people for granted at any given time. Silence is also action. There can be various meanings to our silence. There are those who understand, and there are those who pretend not to understand. The Nepali people have their own character, and the monarchy trusts that essence. You cannot just talk about the people in urban areas, there are poor Nepalis living hard lives in the hills and mountains who are equally important.

What does your majesty want?

We want peace, democracy and want the country to be strong. We should follow the political system that the people want, the one that suits Nepal and Nepali people. Nepalis should be able to be able to hold their heads high. The confusion we are in at present should also be solved in a democratic way.

What do you think is the role of the monarchy?

The institution of the monarchy is older than the unification of Nepal. Had the nation builder His Majesty the late King Prithvi Narayan Shah not united us all, where would we be? When you insult him, we feel it is our insult. Instead of dredging up who was or wasn't awarded this and that in the past, and instead of blaming the monarchy, we think we should try and improve ourselves.

How should the monarchy move forward?

The people should take responsibility for taking the monarchy forward. Nepalis have such a big heart, there's space for everyone there. On 1 February 2005, our intention was to give what rightly belonged to the people within the space afforded to us by the 1951 Nepali constitution. We were not happy with the means used by the Maoists, which is why we were trying to do what the people wanted peacefully. It was not successful, and we have to admit that. The result is what the people are going through today. Our intention was good, and that has, in a way, been proven. The monarchy has no space in politics, and it should not concern itself with politics. We should understand what the people want the monarchy to be, and should try to transform it in the way they want. But democracy has become weakened, which is why the relationship between democracy and monarchy has to become stronger.

Devi's crusade

Himal Khabarpatrika, 20 January - 12 February

हिमाल

After years of fighting for justice on behalf of her daughter Maina, Devi Sunuwar of Kabhre has now emerged as a champion for the rights of all. After 15 year-old Maina was abducted by the army, Devi went to national and international human rights groups to try and find out what had happened to her. During this process, she met with UNHCR chief Louise Arbour twice. After a long campaign on Devi's part, the army finally admitted that Maina had been killed and those involved in the killing had already been punished by an army court. The army's court of inquiry found out that although there

were alternative ways of questioning, Maina was killed under extreme torture. Devi refused the compensation provided by the army and the government and is now campaigning for punishment of those involved in the killing. She says that justice will be done only when Colonel Babi Khatri, Captains Surendra Adhikari and Amit Pun and Major Niranjana Basnet have been punished for their crime.

She is now in the process of constructing a children's welfare institute in Maina's name. This institute will provide disadvantaged children with free quality education. She is getting help for the project from students studying in the USA.

Devi lost her daughter to the armed conflict and will not rest



until the perpetrators are brought to justice. She believes that justice will never be done for those affected by both sides of the conflict until and unless everyone struggles for it together.

"A cultural king"

Interaction with Sujata Koirala on Sajha Sawal, *BBC Nepali*, 3 February

BBC नेपाली

Sarita Paudel, Kapilbastu: Sujataji, the constitution has made Nepal a federal democratic republic but you still favor monarchy.

Sujata Koirala: I am not in a favor of an absolute monarchy. In a democracy, we are all entitled to our opinions. Prachanda said in this very program that he didn't have faith in the parliamentary system. If he can say things like that why can't I?

Narayan Shrestha: So, minister, you are sure that the constitutional monarchy is the way out for the country?

Sujata Koirala: I don't support constitutional monarch. What I said was let's think about the concept of baby king.

Sushil Sharma: Sushil Koirala from your party has said action should be taken against you for saying that.

Sujata Koirala: I don't believe what the newspapers say. I don't want to discuss what Sushil Koirala has said only by reading the

newspapers. The media here has no credibility.

Narayan Shrestha: Do we need a constitutional monarchy or should we move towards a republic?

Sujata Koirala: Personally, I am for a cultural king. The monarchy is part of Nepal's cultural identity and we should safeguard it. If the king is bad, let's sack him, but not the institution. If we can save the monarchy the country will remain united and intact.

Sunil Pokharel, Dang: Isn't it a shame they haven't given you a ministerial portfolio?

Sujata Koirala: No, it is not necessary that a woman should be made only minister for women. One can look after women's issues from other places also.

Urmila Biswakarma, Hetauda: When dalit women were forced to eat rotten rice in Dailekh, you were on a shopping trip in Germany. Aren't you disconnected from the people?

Sujata Koirala: You all know that my family is in Europe. My husband is German. My family gave me gifts, and that is my personal matter. What you should look for is how I have helped my country.



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How deep is your love?

February is here again, month of love and leap years. As always, there's Valentine's day looming and you probably haven't got anything for your significant other...yet. Perfume and chocolates? Too clichéd. Flowers? Too cheap. A new Chevrolet Spark? Just right. This February, be extravagant. Love may be all about giving, but it turns out that it does matter how much you give. Don't be a miser. Get ready to spend, spend, spend. Don't want to get your hubby a boring tie? Why not a new sauna? Think your wife is partial to electronic gadgets? Gift the latest iPod. So if your pockets are deep (and we're talking really really deep), then take a gander below at *Nepali Times'* answer to all your gift-getting woes.



Handy Gadgets

A puppy may be romantic but a notebook is practical. For your Valentine who's always on the run, a notebook is not just somewhere to work but a way to keep in touch with you. Compaq's Presario V6714TU has stunning good looks, a high performance interior and works perfectly with a webcam so that you'll never lose touch. You can get this handy gadget from CAS Trading House for Rs 57,000 + VAT.

Remember your wedding video? Or that video you made when you went for that weekend getaway last year? There's no fun watching those precious memories on a small 21 inch colour television. For the perfect viewing experience of your home videos, get the Philips 42PF9831 LCD TV. This is 42 inches of pure TV gold. With full ambient light and jaw-dropping picture quality, this TV will do full justice to your memories. Just be prepared to shell



out Rs 400,000 for this beauty. If this is too heavy for your pocket then there's always the LG 42PC5RH LCD. It retails for Rs 179,900 but doesn't compromise on quality. At 42 inches of visual pleasure, it comes with a dynamic contrast ratio of 15000:1 for picture clarity and 12-bit Processor with 68.7 billion colours for true colour reproduction. We guarantee it, your wife will love this one.

Need a special music system to play that special mixtape? Well, there's nothing better than the Yamaha YSP-1100. With 42 digital amplifiers to power 42 sound



drivers, you can listen to your mixtapes together like never before. This home theatre music system comes with built-in amplifiers that belch out sound in 5.1 Dolby surround. Gift this to your guy and he'll never stop listening to 'Love is all around.' It costs Rs 133,000 but it'll be worth it to see the smile on his face. All Yamaha gadgets are available at the Yamaha music showroom at Tripureswor.



Your magic Valentine moment might fade from your memory but with Canon's new EOS-1D Mark III, you can always look back on the digital prints and marvel at how happy you look. The Mark III is one of a kind with a 10.1 megapixel CMOS sensor, three inch LCD display and dual Digic III processors. It delivers exceptional picture quality so get ready to smile.

A phone that looks good, sounds good and takes great snaps. Need anything more? The new Nokia 5610 Xpress Music slider phone comes with a 2.2 inch display, 3.2



megapixel camera, 512mb memory and works on the s40 platform. Available in the cool red and black colour combination, it is a perfect gift for your style-conscious girlfriend.



Another perfect way to capture those romantic memories. Why not gift your loved one a Sony Handycam? At just Rs 49,500, it comes with a 1.07 megapixel CCD, 25x optical/2000x digital zoom and a 30GB harddisk drive. Sony is also offering a carrying case, extra batteries and a tripod, all worth Rs 7,500. So go ahead, get round to filming.

And for the grandest gift of all. Watch your girl crumble as she opens her eyes to a red bow on a spanking new Chevrolet Spark. Available in nine colours, the Spark is a compact yet stylish car, making it the perfect Valentine's day gift. The Spark comes with a watercooled 995cc engine and a 35litres fuel tank. So go ahead, book your Spark and gift your wife the freedom she deserves. And there's even a special Valentine's price of Rs 13,90,000 from Vijay Motors in Lazimpat.

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Accessorise for the big day

If your date is fashionably late too often then here's a way to make sure that they get the point, while keeping in style. Omega's Constellation watches come for both men and women with 18K yellow gold on the dial and bracelet, and run on quartz precision movement so your date will never again be late. The Constellation Men's goes for Rs 246,000 while the Women's goes for Rs 240,000.

Watches are in fashion this Valentine season so go for

watches galore. Tag Heuer's Carrera comes with an automatic chronograph with personalized Tag Heuer oscillating weights and a two-year international warranty. It even has a sapphire back for an added touch of class, and sells for Rs 185,000. Christian Dior is in Nepal too with Dior's Chris 47 watch, with sapphire crystal, lacquered or sun-brushed dials in different colours and Swiss quartz movement. The Chris 47 goes for Rs 67,000. Seiko also has a few pieces of its own with the Arctura, one of the best, with kinetic chronograph, stainless steel case and bracelet and sapphire crystal glass. This one for Rs 37,523. Get these stylish pieces at Time World, New Road.



Designed by Louis Cartier, the Santos de Cartier is one of a kind. This watch marked the evolution of the pocket watch into the wrist watch and has been included in the Petit Larousse list of 'objects that have changed our lives'. Available at Regency Enterprises, New Road. Do your parents not approve



of your romance? Or maybe you'd just like to vanish into the night? Either way, you're going to need some clothes and something to put them in. Elope, or holiday, in style with Samsonite's Graviton and Cordoba. Made of ultralight



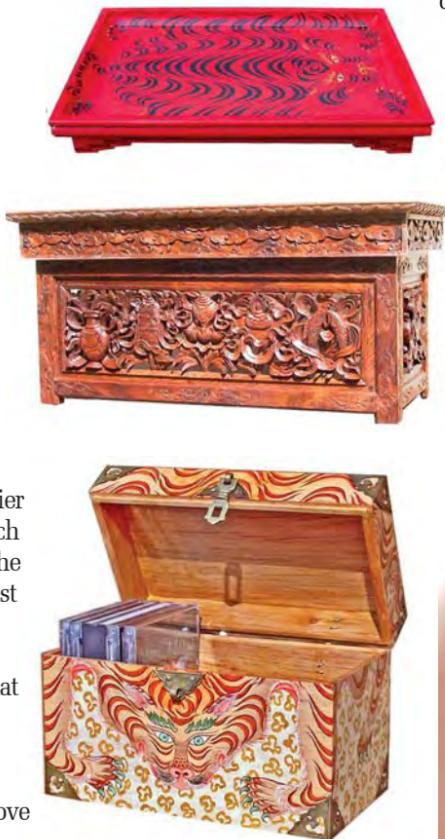
polycarbonate, these stylish carriers are perfect for anything you'd want to carry away. The Graviton is a men's range for up to Rs 35,345 and the Cordoba is women's for up to Rs 19,230, at the Samsonite showrooms, Darbar Marg and Kopundole.

What better sentimental Valentine's gift than a framed picture of your lovely wife (or girlfriend) for all the world to see? At Kalinta, they provide custom frames which are sure to accentuate your wife's feminine charms. Not just frames, but

Kalinta also provides pen holders, painted trays, boxes, folding lamps and the like. All of those small knickknacks are sure to charm your girl. Prices range upwards from Rs 100.

If you want to please a girl and hold off the ring until marriage, then try presenting her with a gold bangle first – it's more subtle. A 3.75 carat gold bangle laced with diamonds, the Bracelet with Roll from Shree Balaji Diamonds will add a touch of glamour, without the exaggeration – just like your lady would have done it. Sets you back Rs 198,015.

What's sexier than lingerie? If you really want to be risqué, then gift your wife/girlfriend some lingerie from Plum. It's a win-win situation all around, your girl's happy and so are you. This Valentine's, say it with lingerie. Brassieres start at Rs 950 and panties at Rs 350. At the Woodland Plaza, Darbar Marg.



www.plum.com.np

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Get away from it all

How about getting away from the hustle and bustle of the city for the weekend? Take your partner and just enjoy your Valentine's week somewhere far away. At least not Kathmandu. Alternatives include the Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, where you can cosy up in bedrooms with spectacular views of Machhapuchhre, Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and Manaslu. For \$222 per person, stay for two nights and three days with all meals, and Pokhara airport transportation. Enjoy the mountain views.

If you want to watch birds instead of mountains on your Valentine's weekend then there's always the Karnali Lodge and Tented Camp at the Bardiya National Park. For \$450 per person, you can stay for two nights and three days with all



meals, elephant and boat safaris, birdwatching and village tours.

Or maybe stay in Kathmandu, just move to Boudha. Hyatt Regency offers a romantic one-

night retreat for Rs 9,000. You get a 60-minute full body massage that will set your mood just right. And in the morning, breakfast in bed. Can't get any better.



Dwarika's special Valentine's The Gift of a Memory package should be one that lovebirds will be flocking to this Valentine's weekend. Available only for locals, Dwarika's Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort provides a romantic Valentine toast with a bottle of champagne followed by a candlelit dinner and breakfast in the morning. All at approximately Rs 6,000. And if you'd like a nice romantic picnic lunch the next day, they also have Valentine picnic baskets available.

And there's always Nagarkot. The windy hills of Nagarkot have always been a favourite spot for

lovers all year round. This Valentine's day, go for a weekend retreat at Club Himalaya. Last year, amazing snowfall at Nagarkot on Valentine's day had lovers reeling. Maybe the same will happen this year. Take a chance.

What better Valentine getaway gift than a Star Cruise? Zets Holidays is offering an exciting vacation from Singapore in Star Cruises at a 60 percent discount. The Cruises' largest ship SuperStar Virgo will take couples on a voyage on the open sea and offers an unparalleled romantic ambience.



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Another effective gift to help your significant other burn away those unsightly pounds would be the treadmill. But not just any treadmill. Health Track's Z-100-A8IV treadmill can speed up to 18km/hr and has a window



display that shows you inclination, time, calories burnt, distance covered and even your pulse rate. Goes for Rs 135,000 and is available at Spectrum Merchandise, Tripureswor.



The Harmony Spa, Le Meridien Gokarna's spa provides ayurvedic treatments amid serene and tranquil surroundings. The spa is a perfect hideaway. It is the ideal opportunity for you to spend some quality time together, while slimming down and relaxing. The weekend rate, including spa facilities, is Rs 4,999 a night. There will also be a special Valentine's party for houseguests that weekend, so be on the lookout for that.

Surprise your Valentine with a makeover from VLCC. Special Valentine's day packages for ladies include an exothermic facial and hair spa for Rs 1,499 and a fruit facial, pedicure, manicure and threading for Rs 1,399. The VLCC health clinic at Dillibajar has a lot more to offer, and not just for ladies but gents too. VLCC is India's largest health care management services chain and employs a panel of more than 400 health care professionals.



Food for love

A normal dinner at a normal restaurant isn't for Valentine's day. Make this night's dinner one that he/she will always remember. And Kathmandu has tons of places to offer:



Radisson: A lovely rose for the lady, chocolate dipped strawberries and a candlelit five course dinner for two. For Rs 2,999 (plus taxes). You can even get a photo of your moment together, all the while grooving to tunes by the Treasure Band.

Walter's: Valentine's at Walter's Restaurant and Bar at Babar Mahal Revisited should be mouth-watering with a glass of sparkling wine and a six course meal of cauliflower soup with grilled scallops, pan-fried red snapper with spinach, Beaujolais granitee, seared lamb rack and Himalayan French cheese. Desert has chocolate dream with ginger, lemon marinated strawberries and vanilla ice-cream. All for Rs 1,600



Café Mitra: Surrounded by artwork and sharing a glass of Kir Royale, what better place for those with romance on their mind? Spend a cosy Valentine's evening at the Café Mitra and Lounge Bar in Thamel with melting chocolate soufflé, a warm dessert perfect for two.

Dwarika's: Spoil your valentine with a romantic four course dinner at Dwarika's Hotel. At just Rs 3,000 plus a 10 percent service charge, you get a welcome drink, a four course dinner and a glass of wine. 4479488

Hyatt: Toast your love with sparkling cocktails and a five course candlelit dinner, all accompanied by a solo violinist. Could it get any more romantic than this? Only for Rs 3,000 (plus tax). 4489361



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Uneven and inequitable

Did development fail in Kenya?

NAIROBI—A month ago, Kenya fell prey to a sudden burst of post-electoral violence that has left over 1000 dead and hundreds of thousands displaced. The intensity and scale of the violence have stunned the world.

Of course, Kenya had lived through tense electoral periods before, and few people who know Africa were blind to the many difficulties the country continued to face. But things seemed to be going well recently. This year's campaign was exceptionally peaceful, and millions of citizens voted on 27 December—at times walking and queuing for hours to cast their ballot.



COMMENT
Jean-Michel Severino

Perhaps more fundamentally, Kenya was unanimously seen as the 'good student' of development, sometimes referred to as a symbol of an African renaissance. The 'Kenya vision 2030 framework', a set of ambitious macroeconomic, legal, and constitutional reforms, was being implemented in close partnership with the World Bank.

Cherished by the donor community, Kenya received almost \$1 billion in official development assistance in 2006—up by 250 percent since 2002. Its booming horticulture and tourist industries were hailed as models for other African states in their efforts to integrate into world trade. The country's economic expansion, which averaged 5.5 percent in the last four years and fuelled the progress of neighbouring economies, appeared to prove that vigorous growth is possible in Africa even without mineral or fossil resources. Today, this economic miracle is up in the air.

All is not lost, and there are strong reasons to believe that Kenyans will surmount the current political crisis and put the country back on its promising track. Nevertheless, as we sit on the brink of the abyss, it is worth re-examining our assumptions that since poverty breeds conflict, socio-economic development must foster political stability and reduce recourse to violence.

The first lesson we should draw from this month of civil strife is that



development, however well-managed, cannot solve everything. Some tensions are deeply ingrained in societies, and peace requires more than any development agency can deliver. Parallel to the growth agenda, there is a specific role for bilateral and multilateral diplomacy to play in support of improved governance.

In fact, development itself generates a number of strains on societies that lie at the very roots of conflict. Fast-paced changes of identity caused by urbanisation, the empowerment of women or exposure to foreign media tend to weaken traditional norms and social networks. And, at least initially, economic growth tends to increase inequalities within a country, as some communities or individuals benefit from rising income and others don't.

By displacing traditional centres of power, development can nurture collective resentment. Ethnic manipulation is a small step away, which many political leaders are disposed to take.

None of this, however, disproves the

link between development and peace, or inverts the correlation. At both the micro and the macro level, development projects and economic growth can do much to alleviate some of the structural causes of political violence. But development professionals, whose first duty is to 'do no harm' should be more conscious of the complex strains brought upon developing societies. In Kenya too, this sensitivity has not sufficiently infused our organisations and projects.

Ultimately, the enhanced economic activity that development generates is the only way to reduce inequalities, particularly in a context of rapid demographic growth. It is easier to work on a fairer distribution of a growing pie than of a shrinking one.

Moreover, fast-paced but ill-distributed economic growth can be accompanied by programs that focus on those who are left behind, thereby mitigating grievances. It is no coincidence that much of Kenya's ongoing violence is occurring in the slums

of its large cities. Had more attention been given to the country's most glaring inequalities in terms of access to water, shelter, or jobs, this population might not have chosen violence as an instrument of change.

Let us draw the right lessons from Kenya: socio-economic progress remains our best tool to prevent conflict in the long run. But the relationship between growth and political stability is subtler and less linear than we like to believe. Development is no miracle solution to violence, and may create its own set of grievances—particularly when implemented without regard to the abrupt changes it could bring to societies. Kenya isn't an illustration of development failing, but of development at work: complex, powerful, and yet fragile.

● (Project Syndicate)

Jean-Michel Severino, a former World Bank vice president, is CEO of Agence Française de Développement and a founding member of www.ideas4development.org.



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Far from home

Government muddle on IDP policy delays victims' home-coming



SAM KANG LI

Forced out

Three months after people fled en masse from Haripur, help continues to elude them

JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI
in SUNSARI

Many Pahadis have already been displaced from the Madhes, and life has become increasingly difficult for many more who remain with the resurgence of hostility between Pahadi and Madhesi communities

in the last year. In the plains, the line between empowerment and hostility has become blurred, exacerbating long-standing divisions between the two communities, and on top of this criminal elements have exploited genuine grievances to sharpen their own axe.

"We decided to leave after we

couldn't take it anymore," says Sukul Bahadur Limbu with a sense of humiliation and bitterness. Limbu and his family, along with 150 other families of Pahadi origin, were forced out by Madhesi armed groups from Haripur VDC of Sunsari district. Now he is literally scavenging to stay alive. "They (locals) only let

us work occasionally," he laments. With a family of nine, he is struggling to keep them warm and together. And he isn't alone.

For the last three months sixty families have been living in makeshift tents in Bange, one hour's drive from the Sunsari district headquarters Inaruwa. Man Maya Yakkha gave birth to a baby girl in her tent last month.

Most of these people fled at night-time with whatever they could carry. Some local organisations have been providing them with daily food rations. A local missionary school, Little Flowers, is helping the children with part-time schooling in the mornings. But nothing can make up for the loss experienced by both the children and the adults.

The events prior to their exile from their homes have deeply traumatised them. Men break down in tears as they recall the ordeal. Some were beaten and bruised, while their women and daughters were raped and sexually harassed in front of them, according to one.

Some of the displaced have gone as far away as Jhapa, Morang and Sankhuwasabha in search of some relief. But even those who had wandered far off are now coming to live together in Bange. The women refuse to go back to

Haripur, though the men say they might consider going back if the government provides adequate security. So far, however, no help has been forthcoming either from the government or from non-governmental agencies specialised in helping the displaced.

There is pain and anger amongst the people at Bange. Pain that such cruelty and excesses would be committed against them in their own country; and anger that the government continues to overlook their grievances. "We're not Indian or Bhutani refugees," says Kamal Tamang, "so why are we being treated like foreigners?" He also says that many of his Madhesi former neighbours were hand-in-glove with the criminals in harassing them.

The mixing of criminal elements with politics in the Tarai is stirring up communal venom and tarnishing the genuine demands of the people of the Madhes. Those displaced say that Madhesi Tigers and other armed groups harassed them continually up until they left – often in a very degrading manner.

"We weren't affiliated with any political groups," says Bal Bahadur Rai, "so why were we targeted?" Events like this are only likely to harden attitudes on both sides. ●



JOHN NARAYAN PARAJULI

MALLIKA ARYAL

The day in December 2003 started just like any other for Sabitri Regmi (pictured). She said goodbye to her husband, Amrit, principal at a local school in Bhurti, Dailekh district, and set off for work. Maoists came to his school that afternoon, sent the children home and abducted Amrit. Villagers found his body two days later, bruised and sliced open down the side, with nails hammered between his fingers, and his left arm hacked off.

The Maoists had threatened Sabitri's family before. They had robbed her small shop and at night they used to demand food. More recently they had accused Amrit of being an informer. "I was scared for his life and for the safety of my family, but he believed that we had nothing to hide," remembers Sabitri.

For a while after his murder, Sabitri and her six children received protection from the small army camp nearby. "A few months later, the officers came and said they could not protect me in the village any more," she said. "I didn't even have time to pack, I grabbed my children and ran to the place where the army chopper was waiting for us to bring us to Kathmandu."

Today she shares a dingy, cramped room with her children. They eat and sleep, and the children do their homework, in the small congested space which is mostly filled by two rickety beds. The building they now call home is full of families displaced by the war. Sabitri has received

compensation of Rs 165,000 from the state, and she knows the government passed legislation last year to assist internally displaced people like herself, but she does not know the details.

In fact, although the published policy is fairly comprehensive—covering registration, medical treatment, housing, employment and counselling—it remains worthless until the government approves directives on how to implement it, says Suresh Pandit of the Norwegian Refugee Council. The Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction says the directives are at the final approval stage, but the NRC complains that every day of delay means added hardship for victims from both sides of the conflict, and delays in their rehabilitation and safe return home.

"I'd rather live in dignity at home in my village," Sabitri says. "Life is hard in Kathmandu." She has banded together with 30 other war widows to do odd jobs. "We are not ashamed to do anything. We carry bricks and sand, make candles and incense—anything to feed our children."

The IDP policy gives those displaced by the war the choice of returning home, staying where they are, or being rehoused in a location of their choice within Nepal. Last September, the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction began providing packages to help those wishing to return home. IDPs with identification documents could receive free transport home as well as a food allowance, compensation to help refurbish their old homes,

money for education and an allowance to help them set up a small business.

But humanitarian organisations working with the IDPs say this does not assist those who do not want to go home. Many have gone through the process and collected their allowances, but have not gone home.

"The government is in such a hurry to give away the Peace Fund money, they think that the problem is solved when the money is handed out to the IDPs," says rights officer Geeta Gautam from Insec, Nepal.

Durga Nidhi Sharma, Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Peace, says relief packages are being planned for those who don't want to go home. But Pandit at the NRC says some of the complications that have arisen with the disbursement of IDPs' allowances could have been avoided easily if the different relief packages had been offered at the same time.

Across town in Katunje, 33-year-old Dolma Lama starts her working day at a small garment factory. Her husband, a Maoist fighter, died in crossfire five years ago. For the last three years she has been living in Kathmandu with her three children, and now has no desire to go home to Sindhupalchok. She says she would rather continue working her 10-hour shifts in Kathmandu. "A little money would have helped with the children's education, and I wouldn't have to work non-stop like this. But where do I go, who do I ask, how and when will I get the money?" ●



A cut above

Murderous barber on a rampage for vengeance

It seems that with every new incarnation in popular culture, Victorian-era London gets another thick coat of grime and gloom. In Tim Burton's screen adaptation of Steven Sondheim's grisly musical *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, the director takes relish in keeping things particularly grimy and gloomy. "There's a hole in the world like a great black pit/and the vermin of the world inhabit it/... and it goes by the name of London." This may sound a jaundiced view, but comes from the titular anti-hero (Johnny Depp) who has reasons to be bitter: he's just returned having spent the last 15 years as a felon shipped off to Australia, falsely charged by the lecherous



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

judge who coveted his wife. And when he discovers that his wife poisoned herself in his absence and his child has been taken as a ward by the very judge that sentenced him, he's out for revenge.

When Todd kills his first victim in a fit of rage, it is Mrs. Lovett (Helena Bonham Carter), the companionable and 'sensible' baker who devises the modest proposal to use the corpse to supply ingredients for her hitherto notoriously bad pies. And since Depp is initially thwarted in achieving his revenge on the judge, he turns his murderous attention to his customers, providing an abundant supply of meat to Mrs. Lovett. In her business and practical arrangement with the murderous barber above her establishment, Mrs. Lovett imagines and yearns for a kind of perverse domestic bliss, rounded up by the young Tobi (Ed Walters), the erstwhile assistant to one of Todd's victims who she takes in as an oblivious help. For a while the three of them have a semblance of happiness in a bustling satire of commerce (she does brisk business with her meat pies) and domesticity.

Depp, ghoulish with a gaunt pallor, is a portrait of a despairing and deranged man, at turns appearing tortured and demonic. His performance employs twitches and snarls to effectively convey a depth of emotion. Depp is good, very good; but I suspect he would eventually come across as stiff and tiresome without the glow of adulation from Bonham Carter as Mrs. Lovett. Bonham Carter imbues her character with a winning eroticism and yearning in the somewhat unrequited love she has for Todd. She also plays her character's pragmatism with a jocular levity that earns some of the movie's biggest laughs. The pair's chemistry—assisted by a generous script—outshines the other characters, making their storylines secondary despite some very good performances by the supporting cast.

This is a veritable Burton production, with a palette that is almost exclusively dark and gothic. In achieving that effect, much is owed to the magnificent stagecraft. It is a grin- and grimace-inducing sequence where after Todd slits the throat of his victim, he steps on a pedal to send the body tumbling down with a convincing and sickening thud into the kitchen floor of Mrs. Lovett below. But Burton is also concerned with exploring the deep complexities of the human psyche. There is no redemption in this story and Todd remains a monster, but he is a human monster, and one that we might actually pity. ●

Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street

Director: Tim Burton

Cast: Johnny Depp, Helena Bonham Carter, Ed Walters, Alan Rickman, Timothy Spall
2007. R. 116 min

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Hunting the wild yak and chasing the wild ass** a slide illustrated lecture on sport and adventure on the Tibetan plateau by Daniel Miller, at the Indigo Gallery, 8 February at 6.30 PM. 4413580
- ❖ **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, until 31 March.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Juno** a film by Jason Reitman with Ellen Page, 8 February, 5.30 PM at the Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Shastrartha** on the peace process in Nepal with Som Pudasaini, 9 February, 3-5PM at Martin Chautari. 6910277
- ❖ **Jhamsikhel Festival** by the Jhamsikhel Youth Club, 9 February, 12 noon at the Jhamsikhel Chok.
- ❖ **Bingo Nights** at the Welcome Food Plaza, Darbar Marg, starts 6PM every Monday. 2337201
- ❖ **Play and Learn German** at the German Info and Culture Centre, Thamel. 4700832
- ❖ **Toastmasters** a communication and leadership program, organised by Kathmandu Toastmasters Club every Wednesday 6PM at Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI) building, Tripureswor. 4288847

MUSIC

- ❖ **Cello and piano recital** by Franck Bernède and Mrs. Mary Wade at the Hotel Hyatt Regency, 6PM on 9 February.
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **Exclusive French wine dinner** with a five course meal and select French wines, at the Hyatt Regency, Boudha, until 9 February, Rs 7,000. 4489361
- ❖ **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** barbeque, sekuwa, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 9841250848.
- ❖ **Dice-licious brunch** at Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50% discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30PM. 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
- ❖ **Lavazza coffee** Italy's favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
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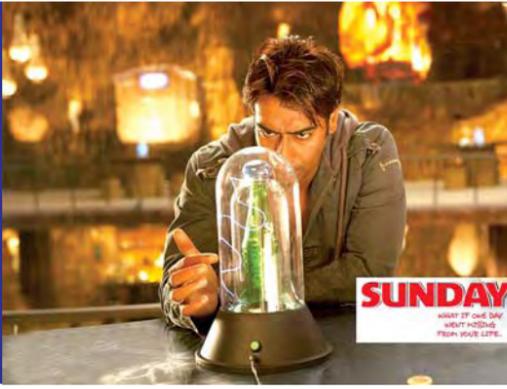


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- ❖ **Fulbari Resort and Spa, Pokhara** Rs 10,999 for Nepali double, \$219 for expat double, two days and three nights package, with transportation from the airport, drinks, tennis and swimming, discounts on food and beverages.
- ❖ **Weekend getaways 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

Quest Entertainment



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 fiancée ACP Rajveer (Ajay Devgan) is trying to find out what exactly happened on that fateful Sunday. As two dead bodies surface, Seher is inexplicably linked to both of them. Rajveer unearths clues to Seher's missing Sunday but grows increasingly suspicious as he realizes that Seher may not be as innocent as she claims to be.

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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The temperature has dropped sharply with a small amount of rainfall. The afternoons this week have been chilly with cold waves coming from the Siberian anticyclones, but in the coming week the temperature will gradually rise. However, the westerly wind has not weakened, and there will still be a chill in the air. The satellite picture taken on Wednesday morning shows clear skies over Nepal.



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SAM KANG LI

SCARCE AS GOLD: Drivers face long queues to get their hands on precious diesel at a Kumaripati petrol pump on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE: Many landless people are still living under plastic tarpaulins by the Bagmati near Prasuti Griha. Their demands for ID cards and voting rights in the CA election have still not been met.



SAM KANG LI

HAPPY NEW YEAR: Monks perform a ritual dance at Ka-nying Sherpubling Monastery in Boudha on Tuesday to welcome Lhosar, the Tibetan New Year.



KIRAN PANDAY

READY, AIM...: Nepal Army soldiers practise for the upcoming Shivaratri parade at Tundikhel on Tuesday.

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Luxury condos

The rate at which luxury condos are being added to the Kathmandu skyline and the fact that the penthouses have been sold out even before they are built must mean two things: a) the World Bank is right about Nepal's poverty rate going down, or b) **the rich are getting richer.** Either way, it will mean a bonanza for the sales agents of generator manufacturers since the **jacuzzis** in those units will need plenty of power.



The Ass had reported recently on how some areas are getting a **double whammy** because when there is water, there is no power and when there is power there is no water. There seem to be numerous variations on this theme, as some of you Ass fans have pointed out. When there is power in the office, the server of the ISP packs up because it doesn't have a four hour UPS, and when the ISP has power, the office doesn't. Another observant reader postulates that there is an inverse correlation between electricity and diesel. When you have one, you don't have the other. Everyone who'd bought a **35kVA diesel generator** to tide over the electricity shortage still has no power because the country has now run out of diesel.

And the iconic video image of contemporary SPA-governed Nepal is a truck filling up at the gas station where the pump is being powered by a diesel generator because there is no electricity.

Who says Nepal doesn't have oil? Nepal is actually a net exporter of fuel to India as the Ass noticed during a recent petrol patrol along the southern frontier. There is of course the firewood crossing the border, but besides that there are hundreds of bicycles with plastic **jerry cans** heading out every day to sell our subsidised fuel in India. The Indians should resume petrol and diesel supplies to Nepal forthwith because by stopping it they are just depriving their own citizens of fuel.



Ironies never cease in the New Nepal. Five Panchayat-era 'development regions' are still intact despite our deep inroads into republicanism. Each of these regions has a Radio Nepal transmission station which is under 24-hour protection by the ex-royal Army even though the Ministry of Information (MINFO) that controls the station is now in Maoist hands and the YCL produces its current affairs programs. So, who is the army protecting the transmission towers from? How about redeploying them to guard our borders against encroachment instead?



As we approach the **mirage of elections**, the big question is whether Comrade Lotus Blossom and Comrade Rambabu actually control the young commies. To get a hint, one has to listen to the directives Awesome gave his cadre in Chitwan last week in which he said: "If we don't win these elections, we will take

power by force." Ahem, did you hear that, **whoever-it-is-who-is-here-to-monitor-elections?** Of course, when Awesome was confronted about this later he denied ever having said it—"in exactly those words".

Meanwhile, the YCL is already in campaign mode by setting fire to Indian vehicles,

ransacking colleges that refuse to contribute to party coffers and closing down shampoo companies. Can all this happen without a directive right from the party leadership? The baddies are also on a recruiting spree of **village goondas** all over the country, and are arming them with latthis painted red. Red Sticks will be standing outside polling booths telling voters which way to vote, or else. The baddie top brass can't say they don't know since they are campaigning in various parts of the country even as we speak.

Finally Kingji breaks his silence to speak to sympathetic Nepali and Japanese media. "Is that so?" his erstwhile majesty asks, **feigning ignorance**, when informed by an interviewer if he knew that the interim constitution had declared the monarchy null and void. But he seems fully apprised of poll results, and as usual mistakes support for monarchy as support for him.

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