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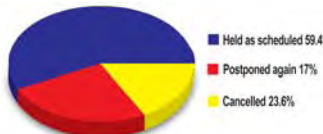
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Lamjung and Gorkha adjust to a fading monarchy

A priest prepares for evening prayers on Monday at the Gorakhnath temple, the patron deity of the Shah dynasty in Gorkha.

Twilight

KUNDA DIXIT in GORKHA

As the sun sets, the russet bricks of the Gorkha Durbar are suffused in golden light and a conch shell trumpets the end of prayers.

It was from this mountain-top fort that the Shah dynasty began its conquests nearly 240 years ago to shape what is now Nepal. But Gorkha is preparing for elections that may soon consign Nepal's monarchy to the history books.

Another Gorkha native, Baburam Bhattarai, was here this week to file nomination papers

for an election in which his main rival is his maternal uncle of the NC. "This election will see the birth of a federal democratic republic of Nepal," Bhattarai told a rally on Monday in Gorkha's main square.

The Maoist ideologue climbed up to the Gorakhnath temple on Tuesday and was blessed by high priest, Tek Prasad Ghimire. Not everyone here is happy about getting rid of an institution that has historically been part of Gorkha's identity.

"Even if the monarchy is

gone, we will keep praying to Gorakh Baba to protect this nation that Prithibi Narayan Shah founded," the head priest said. Bhattarai replied: "Now you must bless us for our victory."

The Shah dynasty actually started in Lamjung where Prithibi Narayan's ancestor Yasobramha Shah established a kingdom in the 16th century after escaping the Moghul invasion of north India.

"History forgot this place, the kings neglected us, so there won't be too many people here who will miss the monarchy," says Hari Dulal, who lives in Gaunsahar in Lamjung.

Prithibi Narayan was born at Gorkha Durbar and became the ninth Shah king at age 20. He immediately embarked on his conquests to first capture Nuwakot and then Kathmandu Valley in 1768. Gorkha was abandoned for centuries after Kathmandu became the capital.

It was King Birendra who rebuilt Gorkha's fort and its palaces in the 1980s. The masterplan for the restoration of

one palace was designed by none other than urban planner-turned-revolutionary, Baburam Bhattarai.

The museum took 22 years to finish at a cost of Rs 180 million, but its inauguration by king Gyanendra in April 2006 had to be postponed because of the people's movement. Now, UML and Maoist representatives here haven't allowed it to be opened because the displays "glorify the monarchy".

EDITORIAL

The king castles

p2

Election roundup

p10-11

The Department of Archaeology has been instructed to look for exhibits depicting the indigenous Ghale and Gurung cultures of Gorkha. Museum curator, Ganesh Bhattarai, says wistfully: "History is history. It has meaning only when it is in the past. We may start valuing the monarchy only after it is gone." ●



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THE KING CASTLES

Some countries are cursed with geostrategic importance or have huge oil reserves. This make them pawns in the turf wars of the big powers.

Happily, Nepal is not worth fighting over. The British in India and the Sino-Tibetans who invaded us separately in the 18th and 19th centuries realised that as soon as they caught a glimpse of this cantankerous and craggy country. Unlike Iraq, we don't have oil, and unlike Afghanistan our location is not that strategically pivotal.

The Nepali language media never tires of trying to get India and China to fight over us. But it has been clear for decades that New Delhi and Beijing have demarcated their spheres of influence. Both are still suspicious of the Americans romping around in their backyard, but the US ambassador in Kathmandu now gets briefed by Indian officials in New Delhi. And the Chinese seem happy enough to let India handle the Americans.

Although there may be no real territorial rivalry between the powers, what complicates matters is that Nepal has become a domestic political issue in India. Nepal may not have oil, but we have lots of water that India wants. Nepal's peace process is a joint project of India's ruling Congress-Left alliance, and the opposition Hindu right is keen to prove it a failure.

Hence, recent statements from BJP stalwarts and their VHP-RSS mentors supporting the revival of Nepal's Hindu monarchy. Bihar's anti-secular royalist bands are also on the rampage south of the border. The fact that these groups are operating in direct support of conservative Madhesis is all the proof we need about who is pulling the strings in the Tarai crisis.

This calls for better vigilance by India's Intelligence Bureau in the borderlands of Bihar and UP and increased coordination with the establishment in Delhi.

It goes without saying that the Madhesi people have genuine grievances against the Nepali state. And the Indians would not be playing games if our rulers were united and had a better sense of national mission.

But it looks increasingly like the solution to the standoff in the Madhes lies in New Delhi and in the hidden links between Kathmandu's royals and their Hindu right supporters and in-laws in India.

Nepal's kingship mustn't be a pawn in the religious chess game that Indian politicians play at election time. Here in Nepal, the ruling alliance thought they had the king cornered. But he is castling his rook.



The Madhes Street

After a week of brinkmanship, we near a deal

It was a week of dangerous political brinkmanship. Deals looked tantalisingly close, but both sides took turns to push the envelope. The Nepali people were treated as cannon fodder, and more lives were lost in the Tarai towns.

A compromise was worked out last Friday when second-rung leaders carved out flexible language on an autonomous Madhes province. But then the NC developed cold feet. The left parties, suspicious of meetings



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

between the NC and Madhesi groups at the Indian Embassy, were not too keen.

The Madhesis ratcheted up pressure, with belligerent statements from MJF leader Jay Prakash Gupta. The prime minister attended the negotiations for only ten minutes. The government talks team was not even present in full strength. And Madhab Nepal discussed everything except the formal demands with Madhesi leaders. The momentum dissipated and agitation intensified.

On Sunday night, the text of the agreement was almost finalised when Upendra Yadav demanded a firm constitutional guarantee that would ensure implementation, and said if that needed a postponement in polls, so be it. He came out looking like a spoiler because

other Madhesi groups would have been satisfied with an address to the nation by the prime minister.

For once, the government could pretend to be sincere. Upendra may have wanted to act more radical and increase pressure, or he could have been driven by some other power centre. But with some Indian tail-twisting, the MJF came around.

Tuesday's failure of talks would have been farcical if it wasn't true. There was an agreement to set up a committee to monitor implementation and extend the nomination cycle by three days. The Madhesi groups wanted Koirala to sign the deal in return for having given up the demand for an amendment. But he refused, saying Krishna Sitaula or Ram Chandra Poudel would sign, leaders who have no credibility in the Madhes. Saying he would need the approval of the cabinet and seven parties, the prime minister went off to sleep. The Madhesi leaders were furious and walked out. The next day, Sitaula came over to the Sadhabana Party office to make up and hammer a compromise on new differences that had cropped up.

The government has been petty. But the real problem is with Madhesi groups which don't know how to get out of the mess so that they don't lose face in the plains. There is also insecurity about poll prospects, and the presence of forces on all sides that would be happy to derail the process.

In the south, the two-week Madhes protests have intensified. The movement may not be as broad-based as the one last year, but the appetite for a fight goes deep. The Kathmandu media underplayed it, but the day of nominations saw protests, firing, lathi charges, and killings. Each

time Madhesi leaders went in for negotiations, there were phone calls from activists and sympathisers from the Tarai asking them not to give in.

Madhesi leaders will have to sound radical if they want to survive in chauvinistic identity politics. The three parties may not be representative of the people, but they do symbolise the mood and sentiment of the plains.

A deal looks imminent. But signing it will only be half the battle won. There are other challenges ahead. To start with, all Madhesi leaders will have to simultaneously work out their electoral alliance as well as sell the agreement on the Madhesi Street. They need to translate the momentum of the movement into campaigning, hammer out seat-sharing arrangements and figure out the proportional representation system, given these are three different parties in an alliance.

Militant groups feel that they are responsible for the success of the strikes but mainstream Madhesi leaders have hogged the limelight. Jwala Singh sources say that they will intensify the agitation from next week, irrespective of a deal in Kathmandu, to show who exerts real power. Jwala needs to be given incentives (withdrawal of cases, cash, post election assurances) as well as put under pressure in Bihar to keep him quiet.

The 10 April elections are important. What is even more important is that they be credible so the results and legitimacy are widely accepted. That is why Madhesi forces and people need to be brought on board in a sensitive manner with assurances and visible sincerity in Kathmandu. Doing it any other way will only lead to more bloodshed. ●

How can we forget?

The war isn't over for the families brutalised by conflict

The pain of violence, its psychological impact and its effect on society persist for a long time after a war is over.

Today, 'terrorists' and the 'class enemies' are both in government and we are headed for elections after which they have agreed to turn Nepal into a federal democratic republic. They share seats in



GUEST COLUMN
Ramkumar Bhandari

an interim parliament and in the cabinet. Yet, despite this and the crisis in the Madhes, their level of mutual mistrust is high.

The uncertainty about elections and the instability of this extended political transition has prolonged the agony of those families whose relatives suffered brutal killings and disappearances. The result is that nearly two years after the People's

Movement and after two postponements, elections are still uncertain.

In this period, we who were bereaved during the conflict have neither got justice, nor have we been told about whether our near and dear ones are dead or alive. The internally displaced are still uprooted. The wounds of those who were hurt may have healed, but many are still disabled and the psychological trauma of the war persist.

These feelings bubbled to the surface as I looked at the photographs in the photo exhibition, *A People War*, in Besisahar this week. My personal memories became intertwined with what my family and society had to go through. I became worried that our country hasn't learnt its lesson from this war.

Others in my town looked at the photographs with a combination of memory, grief and outrage. I shared my tears with those who suffered. In Lamjung alone, there are at least 26 families of disappeared.

My father, Tej Bahadur Bhandari, was taken away from the street in broad daylight six years ago. He was severely tortured in detention by the army, and has not been seen since. The local administration is mute, the political parties don't understand. The activists move in high circles in Kathmandu. It is clear that for the victims of conflict, and families of the disappeared, the lonely struggle for justice goes on.

The question from the pictures to the state and the former rebels is that they should engage in some self-analysis about the effect of all that brutality. The answer must necessarily be that the use of violence was counterproductive and was not worth it in terms of the cost to human life and the damage to the country. It is in the Nepali character to try to forget the past and move on. But if we forget what happened to us, there is a danger the atrocities will be repeated.

The photographs make us realise that the cruelty we see in them should never be

repeated. For that, we must remember our history, and we must seek justice for those who suffered loss. Only then will the country be saved from further violence, counter-violence and revenge.

But if we continue with our current political drift and ignore the sacrifices of those who laid down their lives, not only will the peace process be fragile, but there is a real danger that the victims of war will rise up again. Their war is not over. ●

Ramkumar Bhandari is the station manager of Marsyangdi FM in Besisahar, and also the convener of the Committee for Social Justice in Lamjung which brings together the families of 26 disappeared people in Lamjung.

A People War photo exhibition concludes its 30-district tour with a final show on 29 February and 1 March at the Art Council Hall in Babar Mahal. The exhibition includes an extended section with comments from people all over Nepal.

LETTERS

MADHES

When he analyses the Tarai movement, Prashant Jha shouldn't forget the hand behind the it. As a resident of the Tarai, I don't really oppose the movement but I think that any demands to divide the country are unacceptable to myself and most people.

Suman Pathak, email

● I wish you would recognise that many Madhesi activist outfits are linked with organised crime, Hindutva fundamentalists (and therefore, the Palace), and caste-based groups with roots in Bihar and UP. Madhesis are not the only community with low representation in Nepal's government and upper echelons: a good half of Pahadis are in a similar situation. The casteist aspect of the movement is obvious when you see the names of the leaders of groups with a clearly expressed agenda of ethnic cleansing, and that the Tharus (who have a stronger claim to being 'Madhesi' than many of those agitating) are now strongly opposing the movement. The real goals of the movement, though unstated, are 1) to scupper elections again, and 2) to create a Madhesi-dominated Nepal, with a Hindu Samrat at the head. The result will be the splitting of Nepal, after which many Pahadis will turn to China for protection. This will leave India with a weak control of a mafia-ridden Tarai (a mere extension of Bihar). China's influence will for the first time be effective south of the Himalayan divide, a strategic disaster for India.

Marceau Reda, email

● The Maoist leadership has been playing short-sighted ethnic politics in order to get its ultimate goal of controlling the nation. Now the rug has been pulled out from under its feet (and the rest of the SPA) are scrambling to battle/save the Madhes. I commend the brethren in the Madhes, for they have realised how dependent Kathmandu and the hills are on them. They don't even have to go to the capital to get their demands met: all they have to do is shut down Birgunj. In this disunity, I fear that another unifier will rise in the form of a dictator or military junta. If they can provide security and stability people may consider liberty to be a dispensable ideal.

SN Singh, email



● Nepal must be in the topmost rank in the world for equal opportunities. We currently have three heads of the state. We have a king who still believes that he is the king even though our so-called constitution says that he is not anymore. We have the self-declared first president of modern republican Nepal. And we have the current embattled prime minister, who is not prepared to give up the position seemingly at any cost. Modern democratic Nepal also boasts two governments: an official and an unofficial one. The first

president of Nepal is in charge of both of these. We should be proud to be citizens of such a democratic nation.

Manab, email

DARK AGES

Thank you *Nepali Times* for carrying out the photo feature 'Dark Ages' (#388). The pictures have exposed the uselessness of Nepali leaders, who claimed they would improve Nepal's social and economic lives after the 'feudal monarch' is gone. What real improvements have there been in people's daily lives?

Bhuaneshor Sharma, Adelaide

DADELDHURA HOSPITAL

I am very saddened to hear that TEAM hospital in Dadeldhura has closed down ('In god's hands', #387). I visited the hospital in spring 2007 and I truly admired the high quality services delivered by the hospital in such a remote area of Nepal. I am also sad that medical professionals and societies seem to be quietly watching the show. It's high time that health care practionioners should take responsible leadership in issues like this and put pressure on the government and other parties to negotiate a way to reopen the hospital. Letting this hospital shut down is denying people basic rights and is a regression of earlier development. I commend *Nepali Times* for covering this issue when everybody is focussing only on the upcoming constituent assembly elections and the protests in the Madhes.

Anil Pandit, Maryland General Hospital, Baltimore, USA

● Your article about Dadeldhura Hospihal was excellent, but one statement may not be correct. I am sure that much more than four percent of women in the region are suffering from a prolapsed uterus.

Aruna Upreti, email

Dadeldhura Hospital was reopened this week, after an agreement was reached between the government and HDCS.

— Editor

FLIGHT CANCELLED

I would like to congratulate the team who built Danfe for their hard work and dedication to construct an aeroplane in Nepal. The domestic aircraft industry would benefit in many ways, and it is a shame that the Nepali bureaucracy has not given permission to test flight this plane. This is a good example of why Nepal is Nepal, and not America, Australia or New Zealand.

Sanat Dhungel, Auckland

● The cancellation of Danfe's test flight reminded me of the similarly sad cancellation of the test flight of Nirmal DC's aircraft in Nepalgunj a few years ago. It's a real shame the government can't encourage such ventures.

Surendra Malla, email

PRACHANDA BONAPARTE

Maybe it's not so apt, but another 'time-honoured Nepali tradition' like the one the donkey refers to (Ass, #388) is: 'beating up one's daughter in order to intimidate one's daughter-in-law'. There's no question about who the daughter is, it's the public. As to who is the beater and who's the daughter-in-law, well, that's something that only time will tell.

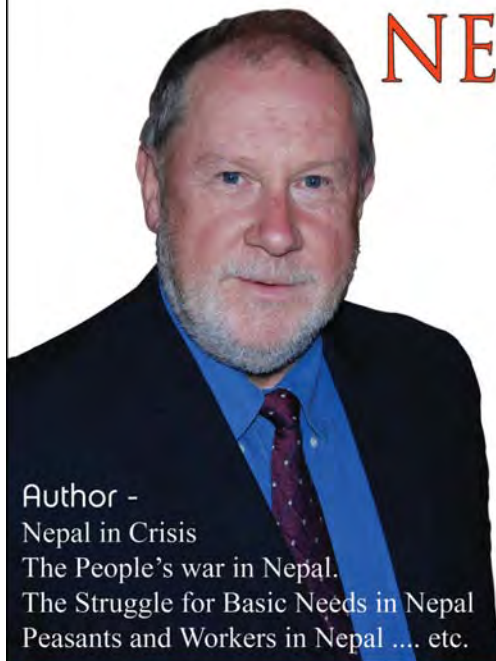
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A Ballad for Ba



Gopal Raj Bhandari
1921-2008

For many he was a mentor
His eyes had a spark of fervor
Humble in demeanor and gracious in wisdom
He campaigned for intellectual freedom

Gopal Dai they called him affectionately
A man of peace and tranquility
Approaching every step courageously
Confronting predicaments willingly

An intelligent businessman at heart
Legend says he was indeed smart
Always putting his talent to the test
Never contemplating on taking a rest

Always striving for perfection
The most precious jewel of a nation
He was a hero to us all
You will be missed Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall

We love you Ba

Your loving grandchildren
Suyash, Surabhi, Shaurya and Amode

Extra virgin in Nepal

Despite all odds, Himalayan Plantations sticks with olives



IRENE PERONI in
MAKWANPUR

Hartmut Bauder, the visionary, German-born entrepreneur who started Nepal's first olive plantation, is on his way to his farm in Chitlang. His driver has had to give up the steering wheel and is now dozing off in the back seat.

"I love driving in Nepal, believe it or not, it's a lot safer than driving back home in Germany," he says with a cunning smile. "There are simply too many rules to follow there."

Bauder's love affair with Nepal and with olive trees started during his childhood in Provence, in southern France. Later, while working as a manager with the German chemical giant BASF in Bombay,



he kept wondering why Indians did not grow olives despite the suitable climate.

He finally learned that a large Italian-led project was just being launched in Himachal Pradesh. Keen to follow the experiment close-up, he started visiting the site and talking to the experts on a regular basis.

His idea of going into early

retirement and setting up a similar project in Nepal, his wife's country, was shaping up and gaining strength.

"The more you know about olive trees, the more you convince yourself that this looks like an ideal crop for Nepal: olives grow on very poor soil, they don't need water," Bauder explains.

When *Nepali Times* selected

Bauder's Himalayan Plantations as its Company of the Month for March 2008, he was thrilled. The man has teutonic tenacity, but after 13 years even he was on the verge of dumping the project, mainly because of a pesky fungus that affects olive trees, the political uncertainty and of course, rife extortion.

When he set up Himalaya Plantations in 1995, Bauder was met with scepticism from those who maintained that olives require a Mediterranean climate to grow. Bauder remained unfazed. He imported the first trees and started growing them in a nursery. Then he selected the two five-hectare sites in Chitlang (named Tuscany and Vinci) for its microclimate and soil and also proximity to Kathmandu.

A committed Rotarian who is behind several charitable projects in Nepal, Bauder acknowledges that initially he did not really know whether Chitlang would prove to be suitable.

"A couple of Nepali friends have a few shares in the company. Maybe I should not tell them that I accepted the fact that I might never recover my money," he concedes. His real aim was not to make money, but rather to prove that olive oil could be produced in Nepal.

Indeed, Himalaya Plantations' oil has been found not only to be extra virgin, but of excellent quality for taste and other parameters by the International Olive Oil Council's testing labs in Australia, Italy and Germany.



PICS: IRENE PERONI

The precious oil is already sold long before it is bottled, and is considered a real treat by whoever has tasted it. Its uniqueness makes it an exclusive gift: an Italian who owns a travel agency in Kathmandu presents his top customers with a bottle, while a Chinese lady sells a few litres at auction in Hong Kong to raise money for a monastery.

"We are selling our oil here at Rs 2,000 per litre, which even by European standards is a fantastic price, but production is very limited," Bauder explains.

Although the 2,000 trees on the two plots grow strong and healthy, a fungus is forcing Himalayan to harvest olives ahead of time, thus limiting oil production to 150 litres a year, far too little to make a profit.

Himalayan Plantations is collaborating with the Horticulture Department as well as the Agriculture Research Council to try to control the fungus. Bauder hopes Nepali farmers will start buying a few trees to start their own oil production for personal use. He believes olive oil can dramatically improve the diet of poor people even if it is produced on a very small scale.

For now, neighbouring farmers in Chitlang are sitting on the fence and watching. They have seen how hard Bauder and his farm hands have worked to grow healthy olives, and wonder why someone should bother so much about those small, hard and bitter green fruits that look pretty much like fodder.

It's time for Bauder to head back to Kathmandu, and this time he lets his driver drive to take in the spectacular scenery on the Tribhuban Highway. ●

www.himalaya-plantations.com



Gopal Raj Bhandari
1921-2008

Hits FM 91.2 mourns the sad demise of
Gopal Raj Bhandari
Founder, Mercantile Group



Global standing

Dun and Bradstreet have issued an impact report and rating of 5A2 for Nabil Bank. This is the first time that a bank in Nepal has received an international rating. Dun and Bradstreet's 5A is a reflection of the size of the bank and 2 is



the rating on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being the best. D and B, established in 1841, is a leading provider of business information.

Tracking

Etihaad Crystal Cargo, a division of Etihaad Airways, is introducing SMS tracking for its customers. The tracking system will enable customers to follow the status of their freight shipments



worldwide via mobile phone. Etihaad Airways is the national airline of the United Arab Emirates based in the UAE's capital, Abu Dhabi.

Beyond furniture

Fusion Furniture Solutions has opened up a showroom in Thapathali. The showroom will provide high quality furniture, carpets, flooring material, designer linen, LCD televisions and high end computers. Fusion is a member of the Golchha Organisation.

NEW PRODUCTS

PROTECTION: Nepal's first female condom, the V'Amour has just been introduced. The VA is made of latex and is lubricated but isn't spermicidal. The condom is available at pharmaceutical stores at Rs 120 per box.



Bye bye, Friedman

It does matter whether the cat is black or white

BERKELEY – Harvard professor Dani Rodrik recently reported on his blog that a colleague has been declaring the past three decades The Age of Milton Friedman.

According to this view, the coming to power of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Deng Xiaoping led to an enormous upward leap in human liberty and prosperity. Yes, and no.



MONEY MATTERS
J Bradford DeLong

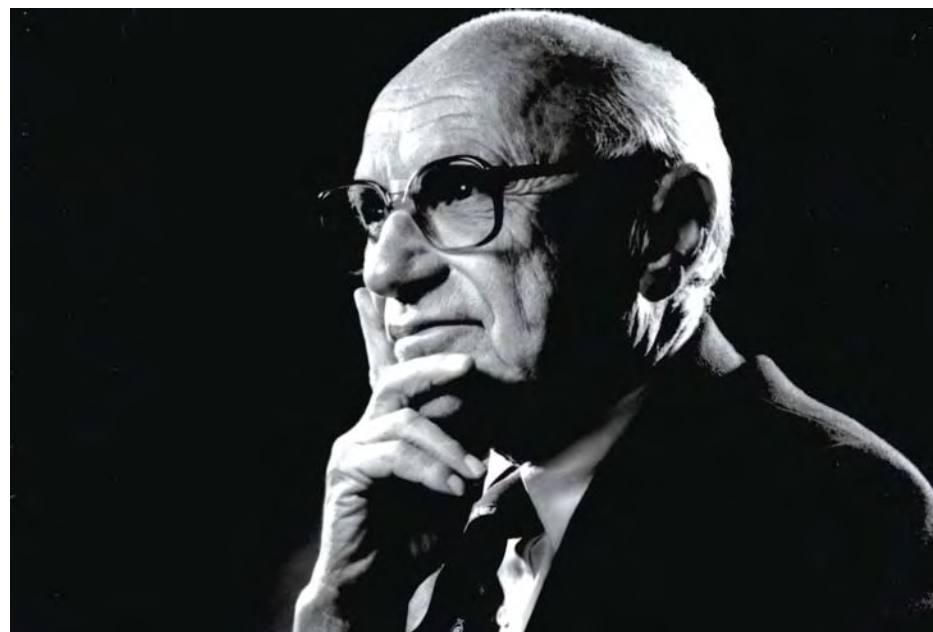
Friedman adhered throughout his life to five basic principles:

1. Strongly anti-inflationary monetary policy.
2. A government that understood that it was the people's agent and not a dispenser of favours and benefits.
3. A government that kept its nose out of people's economic business.
4. A government that kept its nose out of people's private lives.
5. An enthusiastic and optimistic belief in what free discussion and political democracy could do to convince people to adopt principles (1) through (4).

Measured against these principles, Reagan failed on (2) and (4) and adopted (1) only by default – Paul Volcker's anti-inflation policy in the 1980's dismayed many of Reagan's close aides. Thatcher failed on (4). And Deng – while a vast improvement over his predecessors Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, and Mao – failed on all five, with the possible exception of (3). We do not know what Deng's desired set of economic arrangements for a system of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" was, and, in all likelihood, he did not know, either.

But I say yes in part to the "Age of Friedman" proposition, because only Friedman's set of principles self-confidently proposed both to explain the world and to tell us how to change it. Still, I would build up a counterbalancing set of principles.

Market economies and free and democratic societies are built atop a very old foundation of human sociability,



communication, and interdependence. That foundation had a hard enough time functioning when human societies had 60 members, eight orders of magnitude less than our current global society's six billion.

My principles would be developed from Karl Polanyi's old observation that the logic of market exchange puts considerable pressure on that underlying foundation. The market for labour compels people to move to where they can earn the most, at the price of potentially creating strangers in strange lands. The market for consumer goods makes human status rankings the product of responsiveness to market forces rather than the result of social norms and views about justice.

This critique of the market is, of course, one-sided. After all, other arrangements for allocating labour appear to involve more domination and alienation than the labour market, which offers people opportunities, not constraints. Similarly, "social norms" and "views about distributive justice" usually turn out to favour whoever has the biggest spear or can convince others that obedience to the powerful is obedience to God. Market arrangements have a larger meritocratic component than the alternatives, and they encourage positive-sum entrepreneurship, making it easier to do well by doing good.

Nevertheless, the distribution of

economic welfare produced by the market economy does not fit anyone's conception of the just or the best. Rightly or wrongly, we have more confidence in the correctness and appropriateness of political decisions made by democratically-elected representatives than of decisions implicitly made as the unanticipated consequences of market processes.

We also believe that government should play a powerful role in managing the market to avoid large depressions, redistributing income to produce higher social welfare, and preventing pointless industrial structuring produced by the fads and fashions that sweep the minds of financiers.

Friedman would respond that, given the state of the world in 1975, a move in the direction of his principles was a big improvement. While movement in Friedman's direction was by and large positive over the past generation, the gains to be had from further movement in that direction are far less certain. ●
Project Syndicate

J Bradford DeLong is Professor of Economics at the University of California at Berkeley.

Ashutosh Tiwari's Strictly Business column will return to this space on 14 March.

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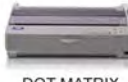
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Crises, solutions

Editorial in *Abhiyan*, 25 February-2 March

अभियान

The crippling fuel crisis still continues. The leadership makes cheap excuses to shift the blame. Why we don't have fuel in the country: low supplies from India and the Tarai bandh. Why we still have load-shedding: we aren't producing enough electricity to meet with growing demands. Government officials dodge questions about the fuel shortage by pointing fingers and blaming extenuating circumstances. There is no effort to find the actual causes behind the crises. No attempt at any solutions. Just blame everything and anyone else but yourself.

The political and civil leadership blame the Tarai closure but everyone knows that it is not the real reason. The actual reason is the lack of any honesty or decency. Whenever the topic of stopping leakages comes up, the NEA makes random excuses and claims that 'just stopping leakages will not solve the problem'. But isn't it at least a start? NEA authorities themselves claim that 24 percent of electricity is leaked (although independent agencies claim that it is 33 percent). It is true that there will always be some leakage but can't we reduce the leakage to say, 10 percent? It goes without saying how important the 10-15 percent actually is.

If a normal person doesn't pay their electricity bill for two months, their line is cut immediately but the homes of ministers, and the palace never see a power cut. They threaten the NEA and use electricity however they want. Even the government doesn't dare persecute them for this. It is the same situation with the oil corporation. And this is proof that this country doesn't run on laws but on the whims of goondas.



SAM KANG LI

The oil and electricity authorities have created a dozen committees to identify and solve their problems. Millions of rupees have been spent but all for what? It is well-known. The government creates committees and commissions to analyse and solve the problems but nothing happens and all that we get is the 'New Nepal.' Every other government body has already been privatised, so why not the NOC? It is clear that the NOC remains under government control for its strategic and economic value. But from Nepal's current situation, it is clear that that is not the way to go.

Those in power, and those who aspire to be in power, know very well that the NOC is a golden goose. That is why none of the parties ever talk of privatising the NOC. Like it or not, the solution to the fuel crisis remains: end the rampant corruption within the electricity and the oil authorities, and have not party-centric or minister-centric but organisation-centric management. Unless this type of management is implemented, no number of committees will be able to solve the long-term problems.

On another note, the government only looks at petroleum and hydropower as sources of fuel and electricity. There are other alternatives. Instead of petroleum, ethanol and jatropa-based biofuel, and using battery-powered cars, at least in the capital, can be considered. Various other resources can be researched, for instance briquettes, coal, sugarcane barks, and leftovers from wood mills to be used for boilers at home. If alternatives like these are not explored, the crises will never end. The government's announcement that load-shedding will end in 2011-12 is based on the current demand for electricity, by then, who knows how big the demand will be?

Emigrate

Letter to the editor, *Kantipur*, 27 February

वगन्तिपुर

My husband woke up one morning and said to me "Kalpana, let's immigrate. At least in a foreign country we will live the way we want. We have money here, but life is so difficult."

He was trained in Bangladesh in civil and environment engineering. He worked for a good real estate agency there. When he came home for a visit, his relatives encouraged him to stay saying he needs to do something for his country. He started working for a good housing company. Although the pay was not very much, he was happy to be with family, to have their love and to live close to them. He never regretted coming back, never resented the fact that he could have earned a lot more abroad with his qualification and experience.

Today he is the project manager and also does some freelance work in other housing projects. Financially, we are quite comfortable. I work at a bank and my salary is enough to support our small family. But these days my husband tells me that we should just pack and leave.

Violence and scarcity have become a part of our everyday lives. Just the other day my husband returned at midnight from the petrol station, tired and disappointed that he could not even get a drop of petrol. He had

been waiting since 3pm only to be told that the station had run out. Instead of getting people's hopes up, couldn't the government put a public notice out to inform consumers when they do have petrol? In the morning today my husband said to me: "Why don't you take a break from work and let's just move to some other country. If you like it we can stay, if you don't we can always come back." I saw the sadness in his face and there was nothing I could say to convince him to change his mind.

-Kalpana Shrestha, Gathaghar

Patriotism

Sambhu Shrestha in *Dristi*, 25 February

दृष्टि

When the Maoists abandoned class politics and moved on to ethnic politics they also planted the seeds of separatism. The communal violence in Nepal is a direct result of that. Politics is a science of principles and beliefs. Whenever politicians have tried to force it according to their will, they have failed. This leads to disappointment and some people become ascetics, and some rebels. Mahanta Thakur is a perfect example of that.

Inside the NC, Thakur is a leader who is not only sincere but also has strong principles. If a person like Thakur, who devoted his entire life to NC, was compelled to move on to ethnic politics, there must be something seriously lacking in our political

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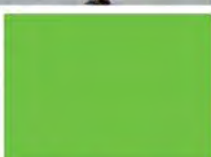
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landscape. The politicians have to keep that in mind, otherwise we may end up like the former Soviet Union.

Ethnic politics began when Madhesi leaders sat at the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu and boldly talked about ‘one Madhes one region’. Nepali people hate the fact that this happened. The fact that they sat in a room in some embassy in Kathmandu and talked so openly about this is against diplomatic decorum. But who will speak out against such an act? We are so helpless that we have no courage left to speak against such a naked interference. In Kathmandu KV Rajan is teaching us politics, while in Raxaul another Indian leader called Anil Kumar Singh is doing the same. As if Nepal is a small part of India, where the Indians can do what they like and get away with anything. The foreigners are taking advantage of our helplessness and attacking our nationhood.

True Tharus

Excerpts of the interview with Fulmati Chaudhari, a central committee member of Tharu Kalyankari Sangh in *Sanghu*, 18 February

सोध

Why are the Tharus against the Madhes uprising?
How can Tharus accept the demand for one Madhes one region? Who are the original inhabitants? And who are the Madhesis? There have been attempts to confuse the people with these questions. This uprising is led by the feudals. Even the Muslims in the Tarai are saying they are not Madhesis.

If the people that Upendra Yadav, J P Gupta and Mahanta Thakur claim to be Madhesi are not Madhesis, then who is Madhesi?

Madhesis are Aryans. The community came to the Tarai and kept a stronghold here because of the business prospects of the Tarai. They then started ruling over the original inhabitants. Nepal has mountains, hills and the Tarai. Trying to politicise the issue of a Madhes which does not exist is very dangerous. Nepal has Tarai, Madhesis but no Madhes.

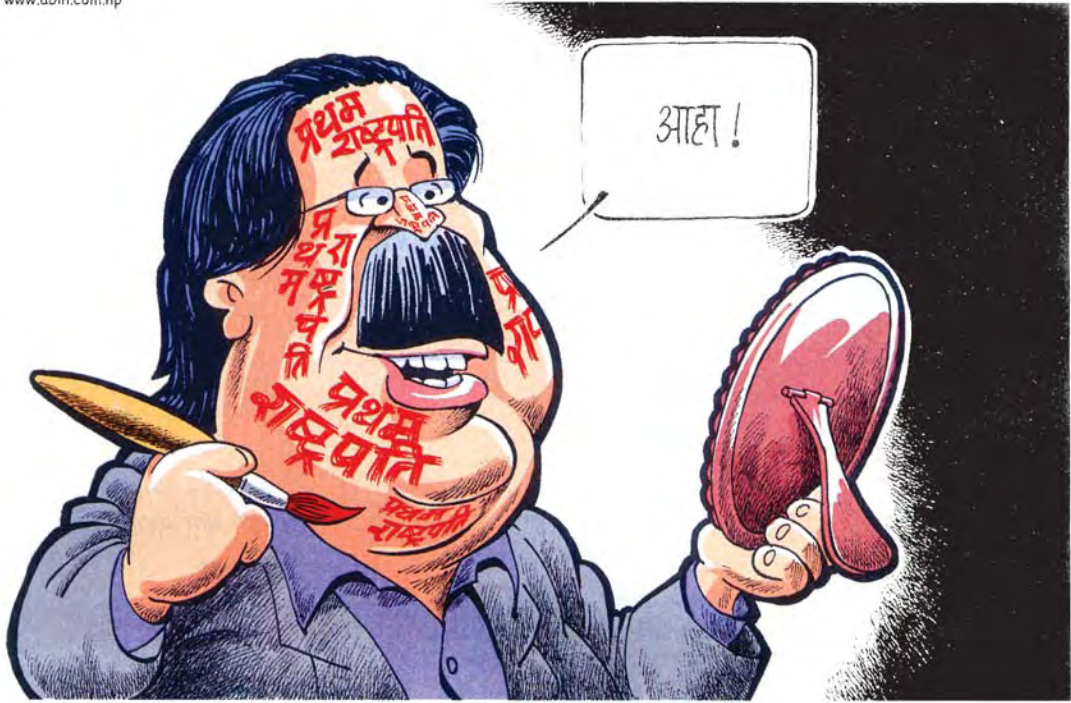
Has a conflict begun between the Tharus and Madhesis?

We won't pressurise anyone to leave like the Madhesis did to the Pahadis. We do not believe in using weapons to make our voices heard. Talks about one Madhes one region are just meant to stir unrest in the Tarai.

Didn't your demand for a Tharuhat help the Tarai become a separate region?
We are saying that places with our historical background should be Tharuhat. Our objective is not to divide Nepal by demanding an ethnic state.



www.abin.com.np



On Pushpa Kamal Dahal's face: first president, first president... Dahal: gorgeous!

समय Abin Shrestha in Samaya, 28 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ The NC is an old cow well past its productive age and which cannot be milked anymore, whereas the UML is a young but sterile cow. The CPN-M is the only heifer that can be entrusted with the future. ”

Senior Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai speaking at a Maoist rally in Gorkha.

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to **525 0333**
525 0845

New Fax number **525 1013**

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VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

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No to one region

Ramchandra Jha in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 28 February-13 March



After years of autocratic Shah rule, people in the Tarai are eager to set up their fortune and future through CA polls. They have been trying to free themselves of the discrimination to which they have been subjected. However, the violence and ethnic intolerance that has spread to divide the country is not acceptable to the people of the Tarai. If the CA polls cannot be held on time, the Madhesis will be responsible for it.

Two of the demands made by the United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) are impractical and objectionable. Asking to declare a vast stretch of 800km from Mechi to Mahakali as one region is objectionable. A region should be divided in terms of lingual, cultural and historical and developmental infrastructure. And if the government consents to the demand for one region, the country will have to face unimaginable rebellion.

In the Tarai there are different traditions and beliefs in terms of history and culture. In the last 5000 years, the region has never been under a single rule. Even in terms of today's situation, both developmental and socio-economical, the demand is not possible. If the basis of 'one Madhes one region' is purely geographical, we cannot ignore the possibility that another, larger, plains area, might cite similar geographical arguments for 'one area, one region' at a later time.

If the UDMF is not willing to give up its demand, it should let the people decide on it in the CA polls. The front can raise the one region as its main issue and resolve it through public polls. Similarly, it is politically harmful for a party to ask for an exclusive principle. While the agitating parties are asking for greater inclusion for themselves, at the same time they are trying to exclude other original inhabitants of the Tarai, janajatis, women and dalits.

Although some of the uprising in the Tarai is based on real issues, emotions and provocation are also involved. Certain quarters are trying to use the Madhesi uprising to imply that the monarchy is the only possible symbol of unity.

It is no secret that the Tarai has been looked down upon by the state. Tarai people are deprived of self-rule and social justice. The election is the only way to iron out the differences. Anyone who is against the CA polls is undermining the attempt to resolve the discrepancy.



THONG NA GA WA



BAREFOOT



SANA HASTAKALA



FIBRE WEAVE



The Yin and KUPOND

The main street of Kupondole has a good balance of boutique

TEXT AND IMAGES

When Pooja Karki recalls her childhood memories of living in Kupondole, they mostly involve visiting meat and wrought-iron shops. Now, as the 20-year-old has grown up, the street has burst into a flurry of colours in the form of boutiques and handicraft

stores. It's even given her a job – Pooja now works as an assistant in a shop across her house.

At Kupondole, women take charge – a hint that modern notions of gender relations are coming in with the rapid development. Anju Shrestha studied fashion in Kathmandu and interior design in India, and then started Saaranz boutique with her sister-in-law. Most boutiques on the street, of which there are no less than fifteen, are owned by women who have had just enough capital to get their plans off the ground. After her two children grew up, Sarita Gupta had a lot of time on her hands, and so she opened Gulmohar at the mouth of Kupondole selling ready-made saris and kurtas. "I wanted to start something of my own," she says, her cosmopolitan background apparent in her clear English diction and keen eye for fashion detail.

Several of the shops supply outfits for beauty pageants such as Miss Nepal. At Meher, an 8-year-old family-run business which pioneered the boutique boom in Kupondole, the walls are adorned with certificates of accomplishment won by designer Yagendra Meher for dressing the beauty queens of various contests. Meher acknowledges how much the area has developed and says, "It encourages creative work."

Go down the bustling street and you will come across pockets of handicraft shops. "It's a second Thamel here," says store assistant Anita Maharjan of knick-knack store Smile Wear, though the atmosphere is



A quick guide

Everyday, the display models at **Gulmohar** have their outfits changed according to colour. "I wanted the shop to be different," says owner Sarita Gupta. Those who often pass by the Bagmati River try to guess what colours might adorn the models the next day.

For eight years, **Thong Na Ga Wa** has been crafting contemporary wrought-iron furnishings in Nepal. Increasingly, it has added fresh home accessories such as clocks and wood furniture to its repertoire, which has been used to furnish several embassies.

It's not hard to notice the futuristic **Samsonite** standing out, after all, it's the only luggage company embedded in heart of the street. With Hotel Himalayan nearby, it begins to make sense. Every three to four months, the store updates itself with new collections, and you can also request to view their catalogue for a specific model.

The pioneer of conscience-driven handicraft stores in Kupundole, **Mahaguthi** looms over 3-storeys high, with a wide range of handmade items from clothes to furniture to children's play items. Adhering to fair trade values, the organisation provides technical training for village artisans, while also developing their business and design know-how.

Kipoo Handicraft is a hippie's heaven. From its traditional dhaka shawls to mini khukuri knives to cotton wear, there is nothing that the small abode does not carry. The six-year-old store also exports to Japan, where its colourful woollen wear makes big sales.

Small scale and home-based artisans get to exhibit their crafts at **Sana Hastakala**. Allo (wild nettle fibre) garments are delicately stitched, while woollen and felt items make for creative gifts, ranging from winter wear to accessories such as flower bouquets and neck adornments.



nd Yang of NDOLE

ple has blossomed with a
es and handicraft stores

WONG SHU YUN



certainly more relaxed.

Most of these handicraft stores have a strong belief in ethical shopping. It all started with Mahaguthi, the 23-year-old bohemian mega-store that was founded with the mission of alleviating poverty of female villagers in 17 districts of Nepal, spearheading fair trade in the country. Many shops though, export their goods. This has become important, as political instability in Nepal has rendered local sales an unpredictable affair.

At paper boutique Barefoot, owner Lotika Chadha notes that business has slowed down in the last five years due to the ongoing chaos. "We rely more on regular clients than new ones," she says. Om Raj Shilpakar of Patan Kalatmak Wood Carving and Furniture says that the frequent strikes sometimes prevent him from opening his store.

Still, the international repute of Nepal's handicrafts means that foreign traders keep coming back for more, such as Tibetan Khonchok Gyamtso who visits Kupondole every year to scout new products for his store in the United States.

Go back a decade and few would have thought that the street would evolve to what it is today –

Kupondole is teeming with indulgent boutiques and organic stores. No one planned it this way, nor did anyone ask for it, yet everyone wants a piece of it – rent prices have increased by up to 50 percent over the past five years, with average rental costs at Rs 15,000 for a space of around 7m by length and breadth. Yet increasing costs have not deterred contemporary furnishing store Thong Na Ga Wa from relocating from Babarmahal last November because it wanted more prominence.

With its modest days long gone, materialism and conscience now co-exist mutually in Kupondole. It is a rags-to-riches tale, and one can only hope it gets to earn its own happily-ever-after. ●



MAHAGUTHI



SAMSONITE



SMILE WEAR



Contemporary meets traditional at **Akarshan Interiors**, where the Indian marriage diyo set and the kasauti dining set sit alongside urbanely-crafted barbecue grills, office desk systems and intricate garden ensembles. Besides the wrought-iron furnishings, the rattan dining sets and wood beds are also eye-catchers.

At **Saaranz**, custom-make your own intricate saris and kurtas with the advice of designer Anju Shrestha. A blending of east and west gives her designs a cutting-edge, and she counts many high profile figures among her clientele.

Customised wood furniture takes centre stage at **Himalayan Wood Carving & Himalayan Interiors**, where you can bring your own designs to be made on site. Otherwise, check out the range of Chinese wood carvings inspired by the Ming Dynasty, as well as Nepali, Tibetan and European furnishings.

Lokta is a natural fibre made from the bark of forests in the hills of Nepal, also used by Tibetan monks for their manuscripts. At **Barefoot**, the fibre comes in the form of paper bags, photo-frames, wrappers and diaries. While the material is traditional, the designs have funky colours and prints.

It's not Christmastime, but if you walk into **Fibre Weave**, you can see a darling scene of angels and bells in the store. Hand-crafted by Limbu, Gurung and Tharu women, the woven accessories – which include

baskets, carpets and couches – are resistant to fungus and humidity, making for easy maintenance especially in warm season.

At the entrance of **Smile Wear**, silver and brass jewelry greet you with rustic charm. But go to the corners of the shop to uncover hidden gems, such as one-of-a-kind Mithila bags and extra comfortable hemp slippers, all which are handmade in Nepal.



SAARANZ BOUTIQUE

Trouble across



SUMIT DAYAL

TARAI TURMOIL: Police escort oil tankers carrying fuel from Raxaul on their way to Kathmandu.

What election?

MALLIKA ARYAL in BAJHANG

In the crisp morning air in Deuda, a group of young health workers are sipping tea near the village health post. Deuda is on the 110km road to the Bajhang capital of Chainpur which has been under construction for the last five years. In the background, a local FM station announces that only 48 days are left until the constituent assembly elections.

Here in remote northwestern Nepal, there is no fresh election graffiti. Not even Maoist slogans proclaiming Pushpa Kamal Dahal as Nepal's first president.

The party offices are quiet, and politicians from Kathmandu haven't shown up yet. "No one has come to ask for our votes," says Uttam Upadhyaya, a health worker from the adjoining district of Doti.

"Perhaps Bajhang is not a priority area, or perhaps they themselves are confused about the process," says Dipendra Mishra.

In Chainpur, Tej Bahadur Khadka of the Maoists sits outside his office basking in the late afternoon sun. "Who says we are not campaigning? We are holding interactions, meeting locals. We will take it up more actively from next week on," he says.

Khadka says Bajhangis may not know the intricacies of the



SAM KANG LI

LEFTOVERS: Political parties haven't started campaigning yet in Deuda or the rest of Bajhang. Unlike other regions around the country, there is no fresh election graffiti here.

elections, but they know who they want to vote for: his party. Asked about the YCL, he confirmed they would be present at the polling booths. "They're not there to threaten anyone, but to help the

old and disabled vote," says Khadka.

But as he gets up to leave, Khadka adds: "History will not let the CPN-M lose this election."

Local people say they really

want elections but are disappointed that the political parties are once more letting them down. Karna Bahadur Kathayat runs a tea shop on the banks of the Seti River, he says: "If the

same leaders win again how will things be any different?"

Min Bahadur Singh of the UML remembers the hardships people suffered during the war. There were over 50 checkpoints

the Tarai

With the Tarai deal done, the Madhes may get back to normal, but it is not going to be easy. The United Democratic Madhes Front (UDMF) took its struggle for autonomy to the streets and shut down the plains of Nepal for two weeks. While they had genuine demands, there is evidence that royalist relics from within the country and across the border used the movement to spread anarchy so that elections can't be held.

Most people in the plains agree that elections are not possible in the present state. But they are also curious about how, now that a deal has been reached in Kathmandu, the three-party UDMF alliance prepares for elections in the limited time there is.

Till press time on Thursday, people in the Tarai were tuned into their radios waiting for word from Kathmandu. The entire eastern Tarai, parts of Kapilbastu and Nawalparasi, Bhairahawa and Nepalganj have been affected by strikes, street protests and prolonged curfews. People are running out of fuel and food, and frustration levels are high.

While the UDMF has tried to keep things under control, children and youth have often blocked roads, stoned buses, looted hotels and set fire to

government offices. Even ambulances, schools and the media have not been spared. Unrest along highway lifelines has triggered crippling shortages of fuel all over the country.

The police have retaliated with live fire and killed at least four people in the past two weeks. Nearly a hundred people have been injured. Manufacturing units in the Biratnagar area have closed down, and this has had the positive impact of reduced load-shedding.

There used to be 1,700 buses plying the eastern section of the Mahendra Highway every day, but this has slowed down to a trickle with Rs 50 million daily losses to transporters. Even air links were hit, with Janakpur suspending flights after threats.

Some 100 factories have closed down in the Birganj-Simara industrial corridor, throwing thousands out of work. Hundreds of thousands of school students across the Tarai haven't been able to attend schools, and many have moved to India or to the hill towns.

There have been deliberate attempts to provoke communal violence in hot spots like Kapilbastu, Bhairahawa and Nepalganj, but quick reaction by civil society and political parties have stopped unrest

from spreading. In Nepalganj, agent provocateurs used SMS to spread false rumours about a 10-year-old Madhesi boy killed by police. Known personalities with past royal connections, local hooligans and criminal elements have been seen with faces covered at the forefront of communally-motivated attacks.

UDMF officials admit there has been some infiltration, but refuse to take responsibility for it. There has also been a show of support for the Madhes movement by extremist groups who want a Hindu monarchy reinstated in Nepal. In Raxaul, the groups managed to block traffic on the border road to Nepal last week. In Nepalganj, UDMF members went across the border to seek protection and brought back a rally the next day shouting anti-Nepal government slogans.

Most political analysts across the Tarai believe elements of the UDMF are trying to prolong the agitation, sabotage talks with the government and convert the movement into violence and anarchy so elections can't be held. ●

Reporting by Manoj Shrestha in Biratnagar, Shrawankumar Deb in Rajbiraj, Ajit Tiwari in Janakpur, Rabi Dahal in Birganj and Mukesh Pokhrel in Bhairahawa.

Rolpa is waiting

KISHOR RIMAL in ROLPA

In Thawang, where the Maoist war began 12 years ago, there is peace, and it is hard to tell there is an election around the corner. The men folk are all either in the UN-supervised cantonments or have gone abroad to work. In village after village, there are only women, children and the elderly. Every household has at least one person in the Maoist army.

Thawang VDC is run like a commune and probably comes closest to what the Maoists wanted to establish in Nepal. There is collective agriculture, many villagers share what little they have. Most people say they believe in the Maoist path, and they don't look like they are saying so out of fear.

But everyone here is glad the war is over. Anera Roka Magar, remembers the horrors of conflict. "We used to be terrified of the helicopters, we would all run and hide, even schools were attacked from the air," she recalls.

However, there is no election fever here because there is no competition. Few leaders from other political parties have ventured out to Rolpa's hinterland.

"The elections would have been interesting if there were other parties," Roka Magar admits, "but they haven't dared return."

A police post has finally been re-established, but the force is hated so much because of atrocities during Operation Kilo Sierra Two of 1997-99 that it had to be located in neighbouring Uwa VDC.

Longsuffering Rolpals are like Nepalis elsewhere, they are waiting for the peace dividend. They want better roads, telephones, health care, electricity and education. They think the election will help them get these services.

"With elections, we have a chance to make our lives better," says Mahesh Buda Magar. Many full-time Maoists are now turning to social work and development.

With two years of peace, people are also speaking out more openly in the tea shops. They are apprehensive that the Maoist leaders have sold out. People in Thawang were planning to do the two day walk to Libang to hear Puspha Kamal Dahal speak this week.

Shrish runs a cooperative eatery in Thawang and remembers the struggle of the war years and the hope everyone had for genuine change. She says: "I wonder whether our leaders have also forgotten Rolpa." ●

The king of Talkot

BAJHANG: Narayan Singh (pictured) is the king of Talkot one of the ancient principalities that was fused into a united Nepal 200 years ago.

Every morning, he takes his horse out of the stable for food and exercise. He made a four-day journey across the border to Tibet to buy the horse five years ago. He lives with his wife and three children in his ancestral palace on a hilltop. Villagers still affectionately call him Raja Sahib.

Trained in Ayurveda in India, Singh spends his days studying herbs found in the forests. In the evenings he goes down to the village to talk with his former subjects.

"People have voted in elections before, they know voting will not make their lives easier and they have little expectation from these elections," says Singh, sipping tea.

Singh says the controversy over the monarchy is just another tactic to delay the elections. Singh says in these modern times, it is unreasonable for king Gyanendra to expect to be a traditional monarch.

"I don't think we should get rid of the monarchy completely, especially because people's religious feelings are attached to it," he explains, "but we should take away all his powers, keep him as a figurehead and get rid of him slowly."



SAM KANG LI

Gorkha is on track

In the last few days, election fever has gripped Gorkha. Candidates from seven different parties have registered for the elections, but the talk of the town was the appearance of Baburam Bhattarai. People thronged the CPN-Maoist rally to hear what the son of their soil had to say.

On Tuesday, all the parties set off around the villages for election campaigns. The high attendance at the meetings of all parties shows that people in Gorkha are looking forward to the elections. "Gorkha has always stood up for democracy in the past three elections and this one will be no different," says the NC candidate from ward no. 2, Chandra Prasad Neupane who is related to Bhattarai.

Amidst the excitement about the election there are also some doubts and fears, Lumnath Neupane, headmaster of a local school cautions that the

election staff will have to watch out for booth capture. "Unless people get to vote without intimidation for the candidates of their choice, the elections will not be a success," he adds.

According to Binod Dhakal, a local journalist, people in remote villages have tired of talk about the polls. He cites the constant postponement of elections and the absence of the parties at times when the villagers wanted their voices heard as reasons for their indifference.

While the political parties might have taken their time to reach out to the villagers, everyone, and especially those directly affected by the war, wants elections. Ram Bahadur Shrestha's daughter was kidnapped by the Maoists for three months, he says: "The country can move forward if there are elections." ●

Srishti Adhikari in Gorkha



BLESS THEE: The high priest of the Gorakhnath temple blesses Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai in Gorkha on Tuesday.

SAM KANG LI

along the way to Deuda, and people couldn't move around freely. "Things are better now, and we are ready to vote," he says.

In Talkot, a group of villagers are gathered on a hilltop near the local health post. Three small buildings stand nearby, but they are all in ruins. "Look at what the war did to this place," says Lalit Joshi, teacher at a local school, "the Maoists didn't have

to bomb this place, they created so much fear that no one wanted to stay here."

Years of neglect by successive governments and the political leaders have convinced people here they have no say in their own destiny. Asks Joshi: "How can you have elections without campaigning, without convincing people that their lives will be better if they vote for a New Nepal?" ●

March sky

Orion the Hunter

Fellow stargazers! I remember when I was a young boy, my grandmother used to show me one of the most brilliant constellations in the sky – Orion the Hunter (known as Tin-Tare in Nepali). In March, it is right overhead just after sunset. If you have children or grandchildren, there is no greater gift you can give them than to pass on the love of the starry sky. Take the little ones out to look for Night Lights and show them this great constellation. Around Orion, you can see the brightest stars of the sky – the stars of the so-called 'Winter Hexagon'. To begin learning about our universe, all you have to do is look up at the

night sky. After all, that's how astronomy began!

During March, you can also enjoy another brilliant constellation in the northern sky—Saptarshi (The Great



STARGAZING
Kedar S Badu

Bear). One of the basic skills in stargazing is to locate the North Star (Polaris) with the help of the pointers of Saptarshi. If you want to, you can easily download finder charts for the North Star from the internet.

Planet observers can enjoy Mercury in the predawn sky as it reaches its greatest western elongation on 3 March. It will be in a good position for viewing about an hour before sunrise. Afterwards, it will change direction and start to head towards the east.

Venus is the bright body near Mercury and on the morning of 5 March the crescent Moon passes very close by both the planets. This promises to be a beautiful sight, as the thin sliver of moon will pass in front of the two planets. Throughout the rest of March, Venus and Mercury race towards the Sun, with Mercury overtaking Venus in the last week of the month.



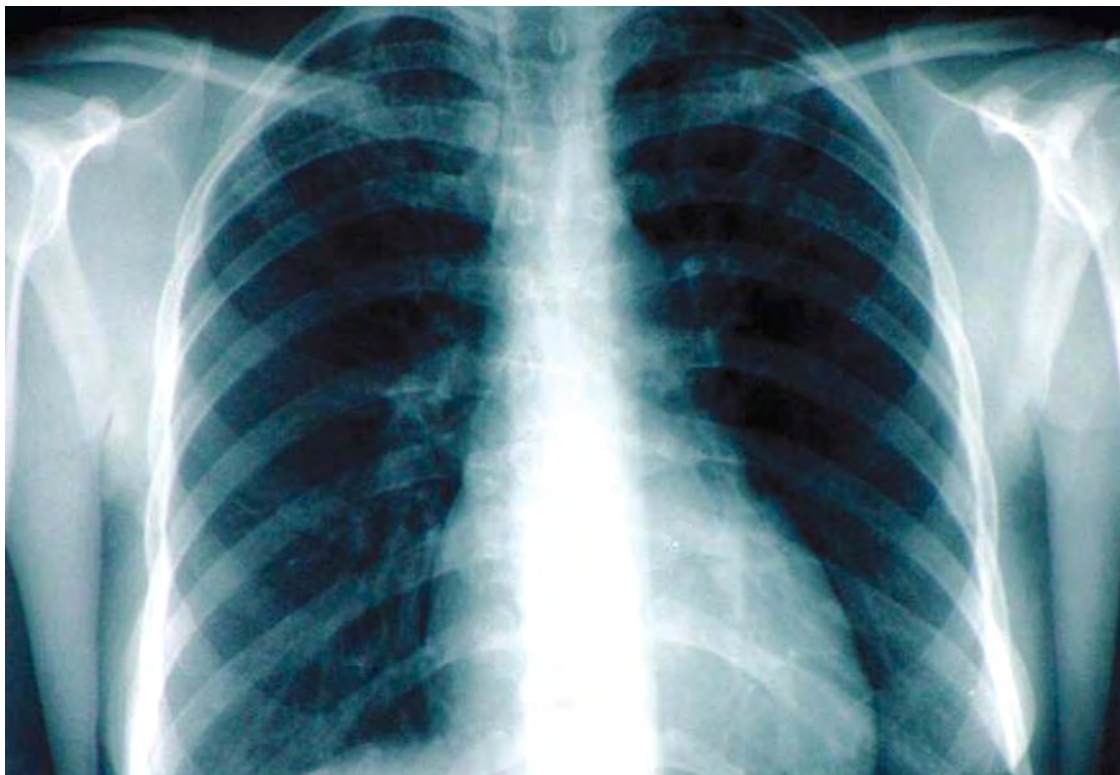
Mars begins March on the eastern edge of Taurus but over the month it moves eastwards and into Gemini, becoming dimmer along the way. Jupiter is in Sagittarius and easy to spot because it is slightly brighter than Venus. Jupiter rises about three hours before the sun.

Are you ready to take a closer look at the real 'Lord of the Rings'? Then say hello to Saturn as it rises in the east at sunset, climbing the sky dome until it is overhead around midnight. Now is the time for observers and astro-photographers to enjoy Saturn the most!

Also, the Spring Equinox occurs on 20 March at 5.50 PM universal time. On that day the Sun will appear to move from south to north across the equator, and day and night will be exactly the same length. This event signals the start of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, which is how it gets its name.

As the nights are getting warmer, I suggest that you enjoy a stargazing session with your children. If you don't have electricity in the evening due to load-shedding, it's a great opportunity to come out and enjoy the treasures of the heavens, as anyhow the sky looks much clearer without city light pollution.

kedarbadu(at)gmail.com



TB or not TB

Combined with HIV, antibiotic resistant TB can be a global pandemic

SUSAN DORMAN and
RICHARD E CHAISSON

Tuberculosis, one of the most deadly infectious diseases, is back with a vengeance, because patients have developed a resistance to standard antibiotics used to treat it.

Extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) is a difficult to treat strain of TB which attacks where health systems are historically weak, especially in areas of high HIV prevalence. Failure to contain local outbreaks, develop tools and strategies for identifying and treating XDR-TB, and invest in longer-term improvements in TB control could transform our pharmacological magic bullets for TB into blanks.

TB treatment has been shadowed by the spectre of drug resistance since the dawn of the antibiotic era. The World Health Organization estimates that there were 425,000 new multi-drug resistant TB (MDR-TB) cases in 2004, with China, India, and Russia accounting for just over 60 percent.

But it was an outbreak of TB in HIV-infected people in KwaZulu-Natal, that turned the global spotlight on issues of extensively drug-resistant organisms. Of 535 patients who had confirmed tuberculosis, 221 had MDR-TB, a level 10 times greater than in the province as a whole. More alarmingly, 53 of the 221 had a strain that was also resistant to the two most clinically useful classes of second-line TB drugs. Fifty-two of the 53 died in just 16 days.

How did this localised outbreak of XDR-TB emerge? Are similar localised outbreaks going unrecognised elsewhere? More importantly, can XDR-TB be controlled? Resistance to anti-TB drugs arises from selection of naturally occurring mutants with

innate resistance to drugs. Poor adherence to the therapeutic regimen and improper prescribing by clinicians can result in emergence of resistant organisms, treatment is compromised and resistant organisms can be transmitted to other people.

Effective treatment and cure requires prolonged use of a combination of drugs. For the past six years, a global effort (called DOTS-Plus) to treat people with MDR-TB under strict conditions has been underway, reaching thousands with previously untreatable TB. An unfortunate consequence of treating MDR-TB with second-line drugs, however, is the inevitable emergence of further drug resistance. If the same factors that produce MDR-TB remain in play, then MDR-TB becomes XDR-TB.

Addressing drug-resistant TB cannot be divorced from overall TB control efforts. Moreover, TB control strategies targeted at populations with high HIV burdens are critically important.

Enhanced surveillance also is needed. Priorities for XDR-TB surveillance include testing to second-line drugs and incorporating this, together with information about HIV testing,

into existing TB surveillance activities.

Effective advocacy for a more vigorous response to the global TB epidemic cannot be overstated. New drugs are not enough. On the contrary, introducing them into settings where treatment compliance is not assured and where drug susceptibility testing is not available would likely contribute to even more resistant organisms.

Ultimately health systems must be strengthened to enable health care providers to find TB that is present in communities with more sensitive and specific diagnostic tests, treat TB according to the class of the organism with the latest and most potent drugs, and prevent TB among those who are at risk. These steps may very well ensure that XDR-TB does not engulf the advances made in the past century in the global fight against TB. ● *Project Syndicate*

Susan Dorman is a professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins University. Richard E Chaisson is professor of medicine, epidemiology and international health and Director of the Center for Tuberculosis Research at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.

Nepal's 'national disease'

In Nepal, almost half of the over 25 million population are infected with TB, leading some doctors to call this Nepal's 'national disease'. Infected people carry the bacillus, but don't have the symptoms. However, they can pass it on to other people.

Of these, up to 90,000 people have active TB and there are 44,000 new cases of the disease every year. But Nepal is also one of the success stories in using DOTS to reduce TB mortality. The number of people dying from TB has plummeted from 18,000 in 1994 to about 11,000 today.

But multi-drug resistance is also growing. In 1999–2002, based on 755 patients with no history of previous treatment resistance was 5.4 percent for isoniazid, 8.9 percent to streptomycin and multi-drug resistance TB was 1.9 percent. These figures are estimated to have gone up in recent years.



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Artistic duty

Actors all over Nepal are mobilising to spread the word on elections

TOM OWEN-SMITH

There are now barely six weeks left until the constituent assembly election scheduled for 10 April, but barely 67 percent of people have heard of it and only 21 percent actually understand what it is and how it will work. (See 'Pre-poll poll', #386)

Despite the efforts of the political parties, the media and international groups, understanding of the key political issues facing the country is still low in many areas.

Now, stage actors are trying to address this by organising a nation-wide election awareness raising campaign. Nepalis will be voting for the first time since 1999, and for millions of young people it will be their first chance to vote.

The campaign is being spearheaded by the drama collective Aarohan Gurukul, whose recent production *Ghanachakkar* has been regularly packed in Kathmandu, and also went on tour to Delhi and Kolkata.

They plan to raise awareness about the elections mainly in districts where access to media is limited, and many people are still illiterate and unable to read election literature. To present the issues to these people they plan to use the medium of street theatre.

Over the last few weeks, members of Gurukul's 14 regional pods have been gathered at Purano Baneswor. Each local group has sent two representatives, and they have

come from all parts of the country, from Humla to Jhapa. In the evening time the canteen was rowdy, ringing with the tones of different accents from all over Nepal.

The young actors are here to receive special training for the information campaign. This includes detailed instruction about the election process, the constituent assembly and its workings, and on participatory street theatre techniques.

The street plays will have no script but will be a 45-minute improvisation, according to a plan based around the major issues of how to vote and what voting means. They will be interactive, allowing the audience to even join in the play in its later stages.

"Each performance will be followed by a discussion about the issues covered in a play," says Sunil Pokharel, Gurukul's artistic director, "the discussions should be longer than the play itself.

When the local group members return home, using this plan as their starting point they will each develop a play with their own group, tailored to the environment of each place.

The plays will feature locally-specific issues, use local props, and where appropriate local languages, including Maithili, Tharu, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Tamang and Limbu. All of these aspects are intended to make the plays as relevant and engaging as possible to the public in each area.

Gurukul member Prabin Khatiwada explains: "We won't



GURUKUL

just go to the district capitals, because people there are usually quite aware anyway. We will tour the villages, as this is where the people really need this information."

Gurukul themselves plan to perform in Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Bhaktapur, Sindhupalchok, Kabhre, Nuwakot and Rasuwa, and together all the local groups

hope to cover 42 districts of the country. Still more districts will be covered by two other drama groups Sarwanam and Kusum, both partners of Gurukul. In total the three collectives and their regional groups hope to reach 73 out of 75 districts in Nepal.

"Lots of people are confused about the difference between the

constituent assembly election and the parliamentary election. The people in the villages need to understand how the elections actually work," says Sunil.

When asked about what made him take up this campaign, Sunil replies: "This is an important moment for the new Nepal, and it is our duty as artists to contribute." ●



WAVE

NO 147 MARCH 08 (PUBLISHED) APR 25 MAY 22

Sultan of the Strings
Anil Shahi & his guitar

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Matter of weight

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EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **photo.circle xv** at the Sundhara Bakery Café, 1 March, 9.45 AM.
- ❖ **Superlatives through lens** photographs by Sugat Ratna Shakya at The Art Shop, Darbar Marg, 29 February-7 March, 11AM-9PM. 4427840
- ❖ **Double vision** prints by Nan Mulder, Gea Karhof, Seema Sharma Shah and Ragini Upadhyay, 2-15 March at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited.
- ❖ **Tibetan Lhosar photographs** by Daniel Collins at the Saturday Café, Boudhanath stupa, until 31 March.

EVENTS

- ❖ **A People War** photo exhibition tour, 29 February and 1 March, 9AM-5PM at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal.
- ❖ **School Bullying** a talk program by Niti Rana, 29 Feb at The New Era, Battisputali. 9851023958
- ❖ **Leaving Microsoft** to change the world a discussion lead by John Wood, Kanak Mani Dixit and Khagendra Sangraula, 1 March, 2.30 PM at the Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka.
- ❖ **Cine Sankipa** showing of Kathmandu Odyssey and December Blues, documentaries by Shekhar Kharel, 1 March, 3PM at Gurukul, Old Baneswor. 4466956
- ❖ **Opening food**, fashion and jewellery in the New Orleans Coffee Shop, Patan, 5-7PM, 1 March. 5522708
- ❖ **Weekly human rights** film screenings with *The Road to Guantanamo* at the Sama Theatre, Gurukul, at 5PM on 2 March. 4466956
- ❖ **Managing Stress through Hypnotherapy** a talk by Bina Gopal, 6 March, 5.30-7.30 PM at the Shankar Hotel. Registration fees Rs 200. 9841346202
- ❖ **Toastmasters** a communication and leadership program, organised by Kathmandu Toastmasters Club every Wednesday 6PM at Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI) building, Tripureswor. 4288847

MUSIC

- ❖ **Concert series II** of the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory on 1 March, 1PM at the Gyanodaya School, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. 5013554
- ❖ **Anil Shahi** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 8PM. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **The Kaiser Café open now** at the Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, open from 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Steak escape** with Kathmandu's premier steaks available for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- ❖ **Continental and Chinese** cuisine and complimentary fresh brewed coffee after every meal a Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Pan Asian evenings** every Wednesday at The Café, Hyatt Regency with food from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. 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, 12.30-3.30 PM. 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
- ❖ **Little Britain coffee shop** fresh organic coffee, homemade cakes, WiFi internet, open all day, everyday. 4496207
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

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

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Jodhaa Akbar is a sixteenth century love story between the great Mughal emperor Akbar (Hritik Roshan) and a Rajput princess, Jodhaa (Aishwarya Rai Bachchan). Akbar marries Jodhaa to strengthen his relation with the Rajputs but gets more than he bargained for when he starts to fall in love with her. The daughter of King Bharmal, Jodhaa is a fiery Rajput and Akbar's biggest challenge will now be winning her love.

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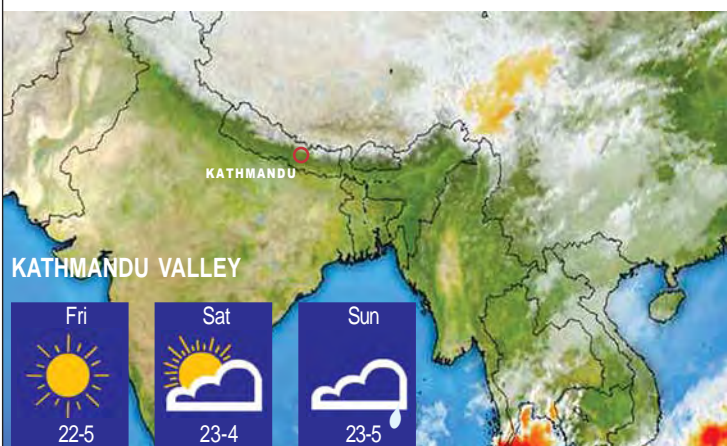
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The current satellite picture shows a very active anticyclonic movement over Siberia. The cold waves of this system are extending over Kazakhstan and Afghanistan, and affecting the western parts of India and Nepal. They are also moving eastward towards central Nepal, bringing chilly breezes. Since another high pressure system is also prominently visible over China, chances of any more winter rainfall are small. A low pressure system is gradually developing over the Indian Ocean, and the tug of war between the cold waves from Siberia and hot waves from the south east is likely to cause some turbulent weather.



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SUBEL BHANDARI

WHAT'S SO FUNNY: UNMIN chief Ian Martin cracks up at something Indian Ambassador Shiv Shankar Mukherjee said at the reception hosted by the Prime Minsiter at Shital Nibas on Democracy Day, 19 February.



KIRAN KRISHNA SHRESTHA

UNDER EXPOSURE: Baburam Bhattarai pauses at the photograph of Lamjung teacher, Muktinath Adhikari, who was killed by Maoists in 2001. The picture was part of the exhibition tour, 'A People War', which visited Gorkha this week.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

HOLD THE LINE: Nepali Congress candidates pose for the cameras after their nominations this week. Party faithful also turned out in force.



SAM KANG LI

IN MEMORIAM: Villagers in Ghyampesal, Gorkha, commemorate the 12th anniversary of the death of schoolboy Dil Bahadur Ramtel, who was the first casualty of the People's War.

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Bloody country

The less said about the ongoing shortages of everything, the better. But on last week's Backside list of shortages, please add blood.

Yes, this bloody country has even run out of blood. The Central Blood Bank's refrigeration unit has packed up, and the Nepali people are in **no mood** to donate any more corpuscles.



There is no point complaining about shortages. It's just not original anymore. Let's look at the **bright side**. Here is the Ass' updated list of why we should be upbeat:

1. Because there is less fuel to burn, the air pollution level in Kathmandu is down considerably
2. The diesel at the pumps is pure because there is no kerosene to adulterate it with
3. Nepal has met its commitments to contain greenhouse gases way ahead of the Kyoto timetable
4. With motorcycles off the roads, there are fewer of them hitting Babasan's ingenious concrete dividers
5. Children watch less tv because of load-shedding
6. Parents are also enjoying the lack of tv, so expect a baby boom around December
7. Amateur astronomy is enjoying a comeback because of the darkness



So Upendra Yadav finally got to ride a **night-vision** helicopter on Sunday night, something he hadn't been able to do when he was a Maoist and later when he defected to the royal camp. Anyway, the other Madhesi leaders were already nearing a deal after midnight, but Upendrabhaiya got a call on his mobile and said the whole thing was off. Can we scramble Nepal Telecom to figure out where that call came from and whether it has a +91 prefix?



Wonder why all these Madhes talks are nocturnal? Are they hatching dark plots? Why can't they all meet at more **civilized hours**?

They say it's easier to wake up someone who is asleep than someone who is just pretending to sleep. Girjau pretended to be asleep on Tuesday night while the Madhesi leaders were kept waiting downstairs in Baluwatar from 3PM onwards. Sitaula and Shekhar kept going up and down, telling the UMDF leader to watch some more television (there is no loadshedding in Baluwatar). By 9PM, they'd had it, and stomped out, fuming. Unfortunately there were no **soundbites** and no flashing cameras because the reporters waiting outside were so fed up they decided to boycott the news. Even when the home minister came out to placate them, the reporters registered their protest by not asking him any questions and not taking any pictures.



The Ass wishes KP Bhattarai many happy returns of the day, but the man should just flut the suck up unless he wants to spoil the chances of his own party in polls by proclaiming the Nepali monarchy will be around for three more centuries (why only three, why not five?).

Apparently there was a **council of war** at Bhaisepati the previous day to plan for the Himalaya Hotel bash which Kingji and Paras Sircar also attended. At this rate, the kangresis are headed for another split between the Royal Congress and the Republican Congress. With Gachhedar and Sharad Singh already defecting, there are enough frustrated kangresis out there who didn't get tickets to opt out in disgust. Is that why The Sher is drowning his sorrows in Old Smuggler, or is the man celebrating?



Four thousand Nepali students go to Australia to study every year and a much larger number to Britain for studies and family visits. The Australians started it, now the British require Nepal's to apply for visas in Delhi.

If Shital Nibas had any **gonads**, it would tell the Brits and the Ozzies to stuff themselves for discontinuing visas in Kathmandu. And in the spirit of reciprocity, we should cancel visa on arrival for nationals of these two countries and ask Australians to apply for Nepali visas in Suva. And Britons can get theirs at our embassy in Cairo.



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