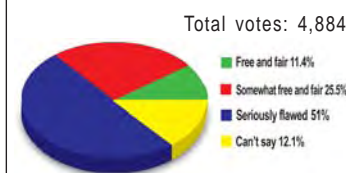


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Q. In my opinion the 10 April elections will be:



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Q. How would you grade the Election Commission's performance so far?

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Mount Olympus

Chomolungma falls victim to Olympic politics

After stopping expeditions climbing Chomolungma from the north side between 1-10 May, the Chinese government is pressing Kathmandu to also ban expeditions from the Nepal side of the world's highest mountain.

Chinese officials reportedly met representatives of the Home, Defence and Tourism Ministries in Kathmandu on Monday to ask for the halt. Till press time Thursday Nepal's trekking and mountaineering companies were trying to negotiate a compromise that would allow expeditions to go up to Camp 3 till 10 May.

"We are hoping for a last-minute compromise at a higher political level," a participant of the meeting at the Tourism Ministry told *Nepali Times*.

Last week, the China Tibet Mountaineering Association sent a letter to expeditions from the north asking them to "postpone" climbing because of "crowded climbing routes and increased environmental pressures".

But the real reason seems to be worries that protesters may try to disrupt a high-profile climb in early May which will take the Olympic torch to the summit of Chomolungma. Tibetan activists want to use the August Olympics in Beijing to highlight their campaign for a free Tibet, and have stepped up protests worldwide this week.

There were even protests inside Tibet on Tuesday with monks taking out rallies at Ganden and Sera monasteries outside Lhasa. Last year, American activists who unfurled a banner at base camp on the Chinese side that read: 'One World, One Dream, Free Tibet 2008' were deported.

The Chinese have been sensitive to the presence of Tibetan activists in Nepal, and have got Kathmandu to crackdown on functions to mark the Dalai Lama's birthday celebrations. Last week, Nepal deported a Tibetan refugee and police baton-charged a pro-Tibetan protest in Baudha on Tuesday.

The Nepal government stands to lose at least 1.2 million dollars in royalties alone if expeditions from the Nepal side are cancelled, and many high-altitude guides will lose their jobs on both sides of the mountain. Last year there were a record 48 expeditions from north and south.

Early May is the peak climbing period on Chomolungma when expeditions establish camps, fix ropes and acclimatise for the final summit push towards the third week of May. Nepali mountaineering firms are trying to get the Chinese to agree to allow expedition to get up to the Western Cwm and make summit pushes only after 10 May.

The question is what will happen if the summit torch is delayed because of bad weather. ●

Reported by Dewan Rai

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RED ON THE INSIDE

Among the things that we can be justifiably proud of is Nepal's track record in nature conservation.

Whether it was during a dictatorial monarchy or a messy democracy, in times of peace or war, our national parks and nature reserves became international show cases. The success story of Chitwan's people-park initiative, the eco-tourism model to fund grassroots development in the Annapurnas and the success in melding trekking with environmental protection in Sagarmatha National Park are now recognised by experts the world over.

Nepal suffered a national tragedy when we lost most of our top environmentalists in a helicopter crash in September 2006 at Ghunsa in the Kangchenjunga area. Among them was Tirtha Man Maskey, the architect of Chitwan's people-park concept, Mingma Norbu, who made the Sagarmatha eco-tourism model work. Chandra Gurung, the man behind the Annapurna tourism-for-development project.

The country will take a long time to recover from that momentous loss. But it is a tribute to the people who masterminded them that the projects worked so well for so long.

Another reason our national parks still have tigers has been the involvement of the army to guard them. The Maoist conflict led to the redeployment of army units from national parks, and resulted in a dramatic increase in poaching and encroachment in the tarai parks.

Since 2003, 165 rhinos have been killed for their horns in Chitwan and another 72 translocated rhinos have been poached in Bardia. No one knows how many tigers have been killed.

In Chitwan, the army outposts closed down during the war have been re-established, but in Bardia, Sukla Phanta and Kosi Tappu this process has been slow.

Another fallout of democracy has been the conversion of the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation into the National Trust for Nature Conservation. The former was run like a royal fiefdom and there is evidence of gross mismanagement in the past. Despite this, the Trust was working to replicate the Annapurna project in Kangchenjunga and Manaslu. (See p 4)

The Trust's name has changed and it has been transferred from the royals to the Maoists who have turned the organisation into an employment centre for the YCL. Saving wildlife and protecting the environment doesn't come easily to comrades who had no qualms about killing human beings.

But here is one area where the Maoists don't have to destroy in order to rebuild. We have proven expertise in promoting rural development not by extorting tourists, but through park fees. We have shown how villagers in the buffer zones can actively help protect nature.

The Maoists are trying to portray themselves as water-melons, green on the outside and red inside. But they shouldn't throw away concrete achievements of the old Nepal for the vague notion of a new Nepal.

Hard vs soft power

Contenders in the US presidential race must respond to a changed world

The fact that the final three contenders in the US election race are a woman, an African-American, and an older man who often challenged his own party suggests that the United States, after a decline in



COMMENT
Joseph S Nye

popularity during the Bush years, retains some capacity to reinvent itself. But the next president will need to recognise that the nature of leadership also is changing.

The information revolution is transforming politics and organisations. Hierarchies are becoming flatter, and knowledge workers respond to different

incentives and political appeals. Polls show that people today have become less deferential to authority in organisations and in politics. Soft power, the ability to get what you want by attraction rather than coercion or payment, is becoming more important.

Of course, hard power remains important too. Hard and soft power are related, because they are both approaches to achieving one's objectives by affecting the behaviour of others. Sometimes people are attracted to others who command hard power by myths of invincibility. As Osama bin Laden put it in one of his videos, "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse."

Hard and soft power can reinforce or undermine each other. Certainly, the US's use of hard power with military and police force was necessary to counter al-Qaeda, but the indiscriminate use of hard power (the invasion of Iraq, the Abu Ghraib prison photos, detentions without trial) served to increase the number of terrorist recruits. The absence of an effective soft power component undercut the strategic response to terrorism.

Those who rely on coercion are not leaders, but mere wielders of power. Thus, Hitler was not a leader. Even tyrants and despots need a degree of soft power, at least within their inner circle,

to attract or induce henchmen to impose their coercive techniques on others. At the same time, except for some religious leaders, such as the Dalai Lama, soft power is rarely sufficient.

Indeed, psychologists have found that too much assertiveness by a leader worsens relationships, just as too little limits achievement. Machiavelli famously said that it is more important for a prince to be feared than to be loved. He may have been correct, but we sometimes forget that the opposite of love is not fear, but hatred. And Machiavelli made it clear that hatred is something a prince should carefully avoid. When the exercise of hard power undercuts soft power, leadership becomes more difficult, as President Bush found out.

Soft power is not good *per se*, and it is not always better than hard power. But it does allow followers more choice and leeway than hard power, because their views and choices matter more. Thus, in an age of flatter hierarchies and empowered knowledge workers, soft power is likely to increase in importance.

Hard power has not become irrelevant, but leaders must develop the contextual intelligence that allows them to combine hard and soft power resources into a 'smart power' strategy. Whoever the next president will be, he or she will need to learn that lesson. ●
(Project Syndicate)

Joseph S. Nye Jr is a professor at Harvard and author of The Powers to Lead.



LETTERS

POLL DRAMA

This election is very crucial to all Nepalis as it will determine the future of the country ('Poll drama', #390). The election must be free and fair, and it will be disastrous if any group uses violence to get their desired outcome. We should not believe the communist rhetoric of a proletarian revolution, as at least up till now they have delivered nothing but bloodshed.

PB Rana, email

● It's very important that the CA elections are free and fair, so Nepal can show that although we are poor we are still able to establish a functioning democracy. It would have been good thing if the electoral commission had made voting compulsory so that all the people's voice would be heard.

Nirmal Ghimire, Spain

DAVID SEDDON

My question to David Seddon, with due respect, is this. Can the CPN-Maoist, which is modelled on Peru's Sendero Luminoso, really conform to mainstream politics to make a modern republic? And if

the answer is yes, how can one reconcile the difference between their ideology and that of multi-party democracy? Maybe it's true that the NC failed to empower the people, but you should be aware that the empowerment that occurred after 1990 was more implicit than explicit, as it allowed ordinary people to realise that change was both necessary and possible in Nepal. I would have difficulty voting for a party whose ideology and policy seem to be conflicting. Even though the Maoists have set an agenda, will they compensate all the people they have harmed while doing so?

Pradipta R, email

WOMEN'S DAY

The article 'Deepa, Pushpa, Sita and Maiya' (#390) on International Women's Day was touching. Thanks for featuring the stories of these four women who have

shown that they can struggle against all odds. They are reminders that we need to do more to help the families that were affected by the war. Many seminars are held on the subject in five star hotels in Kathmandu, but how will they benefit many more women like Deepa, Pushpa, Sita and Maiya out there?

Manoj Aryal, email

ASININE

Much as I admire your Ass, sometimes he can be rather, well, asinine. A case in point, his little rant about the British 'requiring

Nepalis to apply for visas in Delhi' (Backside, #389). Nonsense! Nepali citizens will continue to apply, as now, for British visas at the VFS Global Visa Application Centre in Nag Pokhari, Kathmandu. All that's changed is that, instead of passing the applications to my Embassy for a decision by immigration officers here, the VAC will courier the

documents to our High Commission in New Delhi (at no extra cost to the applicant) where the decision will be made. Applications are turned round quickly and there is no need for the applicant to visit Delhi at any stage in the process. This is all part of a worldwide move to issue all British visas from a handful of regional centres in the interests of efficiency and higher standards of service. And of course, there will always be a warm welcome from the UK to all genuine Nepali visitors.

So, please don't be mulish. Provide your Ass with a decent fact-checker otherwise he will end up talking out of his *derriere* (that's diplomatic speak for.... oh, never mind!).

Andrew Hall, British Ambassador, Kathmandu

CORRECTION

The photograph of the Maoist attack on the Naumule police station that accompanied the translation 'Naumule now' (#390) was inadvertently dropped. It was taken by Chandra Shekhar Karki.



Letter from Kolkata

KOLKATA—Hindus of the Shakta sect believe that those who have recently lost their mothers should visit the shrine of the Goddess Kali in Kolkata. The Celestial Mother is supposed to release the faithful from filial obligations and free her from all worldly bondage. With her blessings, vices disappear and doors of virtue open.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Widows, orphans, the terminally ill, and the poor once thronged to the Kali temple here to make a living from the piety of pilgrims. That changed a bit with Mother Teresa and her unlimited supply of compassion. The Mother changed the lives of the wretched on the streets of Kolkata and her Sisters of Charity continue her work.

There are still some professional beggars around, but the endless rows of fly-infested lepers and shrieking invalids that once lined the temple entrance are gone. However, much to the disgrace of the Marxist government in West Bengal, vulture-like priests still pounce upon vulnerable devotees.

No organised activity in West Bengal is said to be free of party control. Marxist and Leninist minders of the Kali temple must be getting substantial cuts from the extortionist priests at the temple.

The more things change, the more they remain the same is truer of Kolkata than any other city in the region. This is a place where rickshaws are still pulled rather than pedaled and

What if Maharajganj becomes Marxganj and Laincour is renamed Leninchaur?



HOWRAH BRIDGE LONG AGO: Kolkata is marginally less destitute than it used to be.

pushcarts with wooden wheels and bamboo platforms creak along wide avenues under the load of 60 bags of cement. Kolkata was the first city in India to get a functioning metro, but it continues to run trams built in British India.

Ambassador taxis jostle for space with American SUVs on narrow streets which are perpetually dug up to make space for underground utilities. However, unlike the maniacal honkers of New Delhi, drivers in Kolkata don't display road rage and switch off their engines and wait whenever a minor scuffle, a VIP motorcade or a marriage procession holds up traffic.

In the first flush of

privatisation in mid-nineties, Kolkata bid farewell to unannounced power-cuts. But the power shortage is back with a vengeance, making visitors from Kathmandu feel perfectly at home.

Despite challenges from the moderate left, radical right and redundant centrists, leftist capitalism continues to prosper in West Bengal. Intolerance of outsiders is less visible even though there is the same contempt here as in Maharashtra for Biharis. Language-based nationalism did help counter religious extremism in the Indian union, but it has ended up exacerbating latent tensions

between communities. Perhaps there is some justification in the logic that immigrants should make an extra effort to adapt to host communities.

There is a whiff of elections here too. With a populist railway and central budget, the

ruling coalition in New Delhi appears to be preparing itself for snap polls by the year end. Recent elections in Tripura and Meghalaya have shown that the Rahul Gandhi magic isn't working in the north-east. There is resurgent communalism in the south-west with the rabid rightwing politics of Narendra Modi. Regional parties have always dominated the Deep South and the north too is in the thrall of provincial players like Mayawati and Nitish Kumar. So coalition politics is here to stay in India.

Nepal's monarchists may wish otherwise, but the left-orientation of the Indian establishment is unlikely to end despite US pressures. The Indians have learnt to live with Marxist-Leninists. There is no reason for Nepalis to fear the domination of Leninist UML or Stalinist CPN-M in our own constituent assembly. At the very least, once left parties come into power, they are in no hurry to leave.

If Nepal's donors value political stability so much, they would do well to let CA elections produce a left-dominated house. So what if Maharajganj is renamed Marxganj and Lainchaur Leninchaur? ●



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Parking the army

The military base is at the edge of the jungle, overlooking a vast grassland that stretches as far as the eye can see. There is a watch-tower with a sentry manning a machine gun.

Sandbagged pill boxes and concertina wire surround the base.

The Nepal Army at this forward post is not fighting Maoist guerrillas anymore, neither is it deployed to guard Nepal's border with India which is only two kilometers away.

It is here to protect the Sukla Phanta Nature Reserve in the southwestern tip of Nepal from armed poachers. This 305 sq km sanctuary has Tarai's original hardwood jungles and a unique grassland habitat with swamp deer, wild boar, tiger, wild elephant and other species.

Indeed, if it hadn't been for the military, Sukla Phanta, Bardiya, Chitwan and Kosi Tappu would have by now been decimated by poachers and squatters as have some national parks across the border in India.

"There is just too much pressure on land, and cross-border criminal gangs hunting tigers and rhinos are so active that you need a physical military for deterrence," says a Nepal Army officer who mans a base in Bardiya.

"What is the point keeping the army in the barrack, let them guard the national parks."

After 2001, many of the bases in the tarai parks were pulled back and the army's total troop strength at nature reserves was reduced by 70 percent. The conflict also affected the intelligence network of villagers that had been established on the park perimeter to counter wildlife traffickers.

The result was a dramatic surge in poaching. Chitwan lost 165 rhinos in the past five years, and 72 rhinos have been killed in Bardiya, many of them translocated at great expense from Chitwan.

While the count for dead rhinos is fairly accurate because poachers hack off the horn and leave the carcass behind, every part of a tiger can be sold, so there is no trace. In Chitwan, an estimated 30 tigers have been killed in the past five years. Here at Sukla Phanta, a tiger census is in progress but so far only seven tigers have been counted from an original population of about 25.

Chitwan is high-profile and has more resources from tourism, so it has re-established many of the jungle bases that were abandoned during the war. As a result, rhino poaching has all but stopped.

But in Bardiya and Sukla Phanta, there is no budgetary or other support from Kathmandu. Even the army can't do much. Ironically, things have got more difficult since the end of the conflict because the National Parks Directorate at the royal palace that used to command the army in parks has been handed over to the ministries.

"We need at least three more outposts to check cross-border poachers, we need more vehicles for patrolling," says an exasperated army officer here, "what is the point keeping the army in the barracks, let them guard the national parks."

The only hope conservationists here have is that after the polls, there will be enough political stability to bring back the tourism entrepreneurs who abandoned their hotels during the conflict. With tourists will come revenue to fund anti-poaching units.

It is evening when a herd of swamp deer, with wild boars in attendance, come grazing to the base perimeter. They scatter when visitors in civilian clothes appear, but aren't afraid of an approaching soldier.

"They recognise our camouflage fatigues," says the soldier. ● Kunda Dixit in Sukla Phanta, Kanchanpur



GUARDING GRASS: An army patrol stops at Sukla Phanta's unique grassland habitat to look for signs of poacher activity.

KUNDA DIXIT

Maoists behave no differently than royals in Nepal's premier conservation trust

The more things change...

DEWAN RAI

Nepal Airlines, the Nepal Army and our embassies abroad were stripped of their 'royal' prefixes after April 2006. Even the conservation group, King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, was not spared. It had 'King Mahendra' lopped off last year.

But the change is not just in the name. The Maoists have replaced the Trust's former royal patrons and turned Nepal's best-known conservation foundation into a recruitment centre. Instead of crown prince Paras, the Trust is now headed by the prime minister with the Maoist Minister of Forest and Soil Conservation, Matrika Yadav, as ex-officio chair.

After the Maoists joined the government, they bargained hard to keep Yadav as forest minister. He appointed a new governing board in which almost no one has any conservation experience to oversee pioneering eco-tourism initiatives like the Annapurna Area Conservation Project.

Maoist-appointed member secretary Bimal Kumar Baniya says the new board is more inclusive. "We have members representing women, Madhes and indigenous communities," Baniya told *Nepali Times*.

Manu Humagain, one of the women trustees is a Maoist actually contesting the elections from Kathmandu-3. She is also in a probe committee set up by Yadav to investigate Trust's financial irregularities during its royal days. (See box below.)

Capt Man Bahadur Gurung



and Karma Gurung represent indigenous people, but no one in the environment field has heard of them. Dharmendra Karn, a media representative in the board, is not even known in journalist circles. Only Basundhara Bhattarai is a conservationist.

Baniya says re-staffing was carried out to "enhance efficiency". But he admitted some of those hired were children of "martyrs" and Dalits. He said there is continuity in the Trust's work and it has reopened offices in the Annapurna and Manaslu areas that were closed during the war.

But former employees say field staff in Bhujung, Sikles, Ghandruk in the Annapurnas are Maoist cadre. Staff are demoralised because they have

been appointed over people with years of conservation experience. There is no one from the technical management team to look after forestry and ecology, sections that earlier had seven staff. There is no conservation officer in the Manaslu conservation area after a dedicated officer was replaced with someone his junior.

All this has impacted on the Trust's funding. Only three previously funded projects are left: a rhino conservation scheme under the Darwin Initiative of the Zoological Society of London, a Bagnati River Ecosystem Conservation Project funded by UNEP and the Regional Rangeland Program in Upper Mustang supported by ICIMOD.

The Trust's chapters in Japan and Germany did not participate in two successive board meetings, while the Germans have officially withdrawn partnership. The Canadians were planning to support an integrated conservation project, but have lost interest.

But Baniya doesn't seem to be bothered. "I am not in the least worried about finding donors, they will come," he told us.

Some insiders say the reason for Baniya's confidence comes from the Chinese who see Maoist control over the Trust as a way to monitor the activities of American groups involved in restoring monasteries in sensitive regions like Mustang. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Royals did it too

A secret internal report has listed numerous instances of lavish spending on foreign travel, expensive parties and unaccounted spending in the past 10 years when the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation was headed by Gyanendra and his son Paras.

The exhaustive report goes into meticulous details like, for example, how Rs 5.8 million worth of computers, cars, and other Trust equipment are still being used by the palace. The Trust spent Rs 1.35 million just on alcohol in the period between 1998-2005, made undocumented transfers to banks in Singapore and unauthorised credit card expenses.

"The Trust earned a name in conservation work, but we found that it also spent a lot of money on entertainment for palace cronies," said Ekraj Bhandari, a lawyer in the probe committee. The inquiry is chaired by the Trust's new Maoist-installed member of the board of governors, Muna Humagain.

In addition, millions were advanced to the royal family for, among others, trips to England for Queen Komal's check-up, Gyanendra's foreign visits and Paras' trips to Austria and France where there are said to be no proper accounts.

Bhandari says more worrying than the financial irregularities are the fact that laws were flouted and the Trust was treated like a private fiefdom of the royal family. ●

Kiran Nepal

Global leader

Aashmi Rana has been chosen by the World Economic Forum as a Young Global Leader for 2008. Drawn from a pool of almost 5,000 candidates, 200-300 young leaders are chosen from all over the world as global leaders. Aashmi Rana is managing director of the Himali Pashmina Udhog.

Two for Laxmi

Laxmi Bank has added two new branches at New Baneshwor and Damak, their 12th and 13th Branch. The branch at New Baneshwor will also house a corporate banking unit. Laxmi Bank has added four new branches in the current financial year and intends to add two more by mid July.

Ace and Visa

Ace Development Bank is now an associate member of Visa International. Ace can now issue Visa Debit cards and can also buy and sell American Express traveller's cheques. Ace has banking facilities in Kathmandu, Kirtipur and Birganj.

Banks in Pokhara

Citizens Bank International opened its fourth branch in Pokhara's New Road while Pokhara's Shangri-la bank opened its first branch in Dulegauda in the Tanahu district.

Share deal

Coca-Cola Sabco has sold 22 percent of its shares in Bottlers Nepal to Mutual Trading, a subsidiary of the Khetan Group. However, Coca-Cola Sabco still retains a majority controlling interest in Bottlers Nepal and has also announced the appointment of Saumindra Bhattacharya as its country manager.

Uphill all the way

The hurdles which big business has to face in Nepal

Big businesses are rarely celebrated in Nepal. First, there's the perception problem. Most are seen, often without good evidence, to be corrupt and discomfitingly close to those in power, and to most educated Nepalis in



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

non-private sector jobs, the phrase 'big businessmen' unfairly conjures up images of smooth-talking hustlers or middlemen who make money by fleecing innocent customers and producers.

And second, while almost all political parties are quick to announce various job-creation policies, they remain incapable of understanding that greater good can only come about if the government is confined primarily to the role of enforcing the existing rules fairly, while allowing many competitive small and large businesses in all sectors to play out their sagas under the watch of a fearlessly independent business press.

For the past six years, *the boss* monthly magazine has worked hard to change the negative perceptions surrounding members of the business community. It has chronicled the success of Nepali entrepreneurs, bankers and managers, giving the next generation of businesspeople role models they can look up to.

On Wednesday, the monthly hosted a well-organized and well-attended 5th Business Excellence Award in which Nepali businesspeople, entrepreneurs, CEOs and management students, judged best in their respective categories, were

given trophies.

But besides these perception problems and stories of excellence there remain two major constraints which are likely to hinder the growth rate of most Nepali companies in times ahead. One is the shortage of middle managers. The other is the rise of militant unions.

Shortage of middle managers: Most big Nepali businesses are family enterprises which are slowly learning the value of hiring professional management talent. While senior

as a friend joked the other day, are now found only on Facebook.com!

Some companies are trying to address this shortage by increasing the intensity of their in-house training programs, and by holding on to the productive employees that they already have, but it remains an issue.

Rise of militant unions: These days, almost any sector of Nepali business has one or more labour unions, often affiliated to political parties. True, in many cases, shoddy management practices made it timely for these unions to come up to defend labourers' rights.

But now, drunk on the success of some of their earlier victories, most union leaders could not care less about good or bad management practices, and spend more time building up their own power base. Lip-service for Lenin and Mao masks personal designs, and union leaders view themselves at a rank equal to that of a company's senior management. Needless to say, they are not hesitant to use brute force to get what they want.

Some Nepali companies have tried pleading with their militant unions; others have tried ignoring them. Some have shut down altogether after incurring losses to accommodate union demands.

In times ahead, whatever else happens, learning to engage positively with the unions in an open, fair and communication-intensive manner will remain a challenge for senior management in many Nepali businesses.

Bad perceptions can be overcome by visible success stories. Besides those present at *the boss* awards, these are still too rare in this country. We can only hope there will be more examples for others to emulate in the future. ●

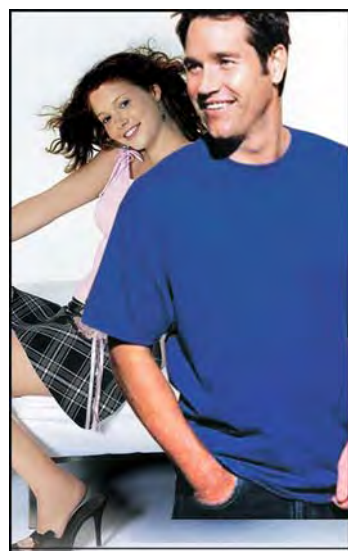


KIRAN PANDAY

LOOK WHO'S BOSS: Padma Jyoti of the Jyoti Group receiving the boss Lifetime Achievement Award from Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat on Wednesday.

managers remain much in demand, there is a severe shortage of middle managers who can carry out day-to-day functions without much supervision.

The result is that instead of chasing opportunities with potentially high payoffs, senior managers have no choice but to spend time on crossing the T's and dotting the I's on routine tasks. Indeed, it appears that, in the last seven years, most potential middle-managers have left for other countries as either graduate students or professionals, and,



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Drishti, 11 March

While Chairman Prachanda is threatening to capture power after the CA polls, an eleven point circular has been secretly distributed to the Maoist party workers in various districts. The circular directs workers to use force to secure CA elections in their favour. It reads as follows:

- 1. Create a secret emissary in all VDCs to check the daily activities and the roles of various people in the elections. Collect information and keep tabs on the opposition. The area committee should submit all information to the district committee.
- 2. Prepare at least 20 YCL cadres in each VDC. The YCL should follow the directions of the party and try to make the youth pro-Maoist. Try and influence everyone to vote for the Maoists. Make and submit the list of people who are not in favour of the Maoists to the respective authority.
- 3. Make it difficult for NC workers to stay in the villages. Lower their self-confidence and make them unhappy so that they lose the elections.
- 4. Make the oppositional forces fight amongst each other. Sit together to eat and drink but hit them hard when you get the chance. Work to divide the international forces especially India,



SAM KANG LI

- America and European Union so that they cannot monitor our activities.
- 5. Bring the dead to life for the 10 April elections. Make a list of those killed or absent from the village and vote in their names. The security forces and the police are afraid of us so we do not need to fear them. Everyone should vote. If possible forbid the opposition to caste votes.
 - 6. The YCL should keep khukuris, sticks and other weapons of self-defence at secret hide outs.
 - 7. Be very good to the people of the lower rungs of the society. Cajole the middle class and threaten the upper class so that they are unable to play any role in the village.
 - 8. Start the election campaign from mid March without caring for your life. Use all the tricks known to turn the all-important elections in the favour of the Maoists.
 - 9. All activities of the party will be broadcasted regularly as a cultural program on Gandaki FM. Everyone should listen and inform others of the program.
 - 10. Encourage and be nice to nationalist forces.
 - 11. Draw together teachers, intellectuals, social workers and businessmen. Turn teachers, students and youth into full-timers. After a month or two there will be a huge campaign to make full-timers.

Integration

Tilak Pathak in Nepal, 16 March नेपाल

Two days after the agreement between the government and the United Democratic Madhesi Front, army chief General Rukmangad Katuwal has expressed his dissatisfaction. He says that the Nepal army is already inclusive and the government did not need to promise inclusiveness in the army.

Katuwal made his opinion known in a program held at the military headquarters to mark the 43rd anniversary of the National Cadet Corps. According to sources, Katuwal had also pressured the government to reject the UDMF's demand for one Madhes one region, citing that it undermined national integrity.

In the agreement signed on 28 February the government agreed to ensure proportional inclusion of the Madhes and other ethnic groups in the Nepal Army. The government had no choice but to accept after the Madhesi leaders added the demand for an inclusive army at the last minute.

The army is against any kind of reconstitution. Katuwal himself is against the proposed integration of the People's Liberation Army with the NA. At a recent press conference, Army spokesman Ramindra Chettri said: "We will not accept any politically active individual in



KIRAN PANDAY

the army." The prime minister also doesn't look too happy about the army integration. While the army has clearly stated its opinion on PLA integration, views on the inclusion of Madhesi and other ethnic groups have only come out indirectly. This is no doubt due to the fact that the agreement on this was signed by the three main parties currently forming the government.

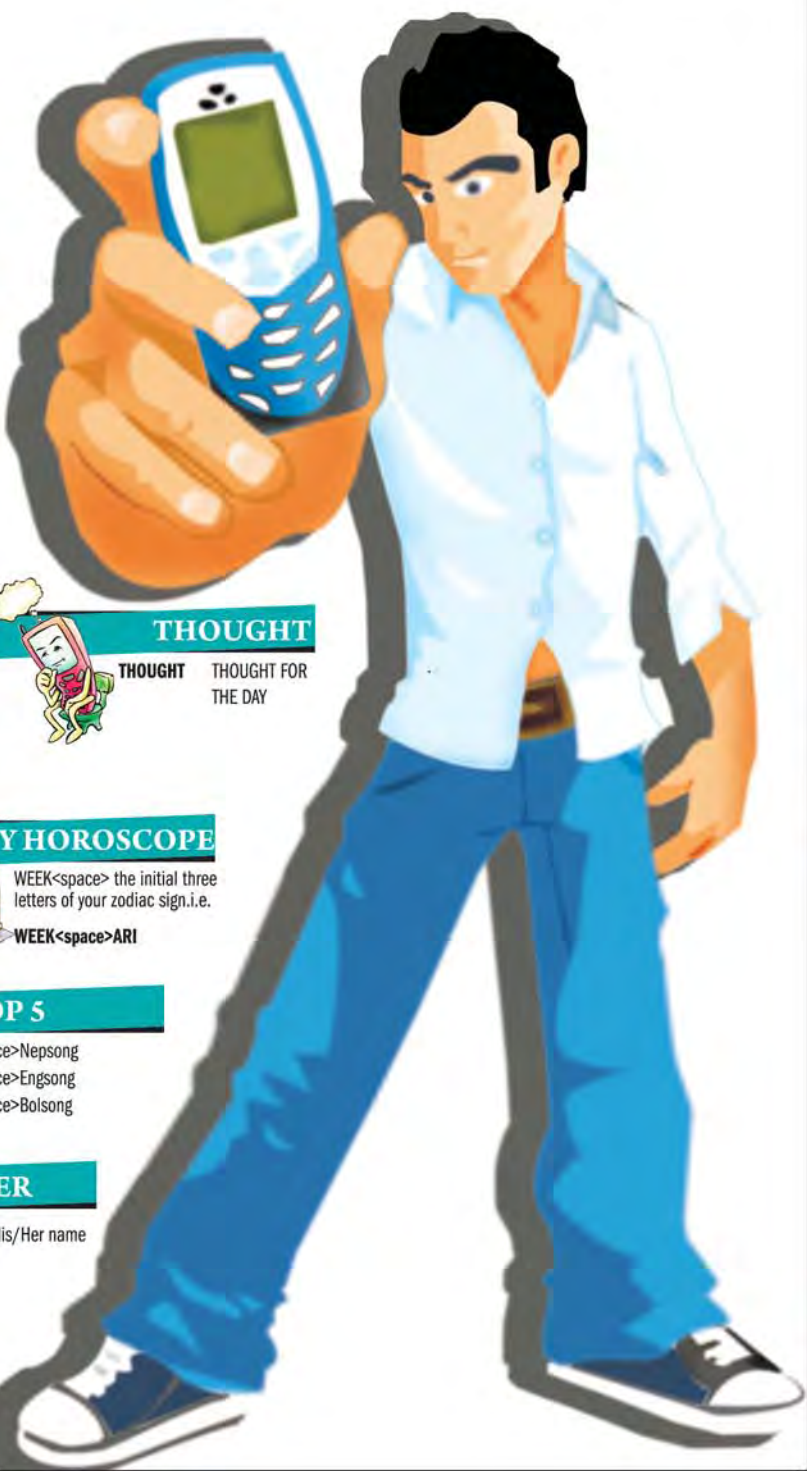
Commitment

Janadesh, 11 March जन्तादेश


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SPO	Sports news
ENT	Entertainment news
INT	International news
LIVE	Breaking news

JOKES



JOKE
JOKE<space>DOC
JOKE<space>SILLY
JOKE<space>LAWYER
JOKE<space>SANTA
JOKE<space>BLONDE

THOUGHT



THOUGHT
THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

STOCK



SHG Top 5 gainers of the day
SHL Top 5 losers of the day
SHH Stock related help

FOREX




FOREX<space>BUY
FOREX<space>BUY
FOREX<space>CURRENCY ID

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE



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WEEK<space>ARI

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DICT<space>the word you want to know the meaning of. i.e.
DICT<space>tut

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The day will be historic in the creation of a modern Nepal. The voting will instruct the government to establish the federal republican Nepal that has been announced in the interim constitution.

As the CA polls near, royalists and foreign powers who are against the nation are worried that the people will choose revolutionary forces in the elections. The imperialists and feudalists have come to the conclusion that now there is no stopping the victory of the revolutionary people in Nepal, and these enemies of the Nepali people are conspiring against the CA polls. There is no doubt that the people will once again foil their attempt.

The Maoists are responsibly trying to unite the leftist parties, patriots and republicans, and help them work together to make the CA polls successful. However, the UML are siding with the conspiring imperialists and feudal royalists. The people have begun to despise the opportunistic and cowardly nature of the UML. The Maoists are committed to making the people win.

No inclusion
Gorkhapatra, 12 March

Although the interim constitution has clearly spelled out that the political parties should consider the principle of

inclusion while choosing candidates (clause 63, sub-clause 4), this principle has not been implemented in the direct elections.

The candidate lists that have been filed for nomination from 16 different parties clearly show that women, janajatis, Madhesis and Dalits have not been proportionately represented.

The national census six years ago shows that women form 50.1 percent of the total population. But, in most of the political parties, women candidates make

only 10 percent of candidates. The Nepal Workers and Peasants Party has the highest percentage of women candidates at 27.5. The Maoists have 17.5 percent, whereas the UML and NC have 10.8 and 10.4 percent respectively.

Although there is a compulsory provision for including a minimum number of women, janajatis, Madhesis and Dalits in the proportional election procedure, there are no such compulsions for direct candidacy.



Peace...Security...

नेपाल Nepal, 16 March

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



“ Nepali Congress is like the Ganges; people come, bathe and go. If someone takes away a mug of water from the Ganges, you cannot say they have taken away the Ganges. ”

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala quoted in Naya Patrika, 10 March

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PICS KUNDA DIXIT



WONG SHU YUN

A road ru

KUNDA DIXIT in MUSTANG

When Swiss geologist Toni Hagen in 1952 took the famous photograph of porters crossing the Kali Gandaki with Nilgiri in the background, he chose it for the cover of his book, *Nepal*.

For decades, that picture became symbolic of Nepal's sheer beauty and its poor infrastructure. It was also an iconic photograph that introduced the rugged terrain of the deepest gorge on the planet to the outside world.

Hagen, who died in 2003, probably would never have imagined that barely 55 years later, a highway would pass

along the valley where he made the first-ever geological exploration.

The Kali Gandaki is called the deepest scar on the earth's surface. Up the valley at Dana, this frothing river flows at only 1,200m above sea level in between the ramparts of the 8,000m+ peaks of Annapurna and Dhaulagiri which are only 25km apart.

This dizzyingly deep gorge should have been declared a world heritage site, but now it's too late.

It was perhaps inevitable that a river that has cut through the mountains would be the only trade route between Tibet and India. For centuries food and cloth from the south and

salt and skin from the north were bartered in the market towns of Nepal. The motorable road has just followed that old trading route. Once Jomsom is linked to the Chinese border, and the road is paved, one could get from Kathmandu to Lo Manthang in one day.

The sound of dynamite blasting through the sheer rock face at Bandarjung had been reverberating in the narrow valley for the past four months as the Nepal Army tried to clear the last major obstacle to link the two ends of the highways from north and south.

Mindful of the criticism that it just opened the Surkhet-Jumla Highway and left it at that, the army is trying to make sure the



THEN AND NOW: Toni Hagen’s famous picture of Nilgiri from Tatopani taken in 1952 on the cover of his book, *Nepal* (*inset*) and Nilgiri today from the same spot.

Min Bahadur Basnet supervises the blasting of the 200m section of cliff at Bandarjung overlooking the Kali Gandaki gorge near Ghasa as soldiers use pneumatic drills to lay dynamite.

At Timure near Beni, the road has to be literally carved out of the rock face above the Kali Gandaki.



Things will never be the same again on the Kali Gandaki Valley

ns through it

Kali Gandaki road is safe and motorable.

“The highway was delayed by the conflict, then work suffered because of the diesel crisis, but we are also trying to make sure that this is not just a pilot track when we hand it over,” says army engineer Min Bahadur Basnet.

This week, a convoy of four-wheel drives made history by traversing the road from Beni to Jomsom for the first time. Things are never going to be the same again in the Kali Gandaki valley, and there is mixed reaction among locals.

“If it wasn’t built today, it would have been built in five years, we can’t stop it,” says Mana Gauchan who plies a jeep from Beni to Tiplang. He expects a windfall of business with tourists, pilgrims as well as Mustang’s apples and apricots and is planning to add more jeeps to his fleet.

But owners of trekking lodges are distressed. “It’s finished, first it was the war that killed trekking, now it is the road,” says Nara Gurung, who runs a lodge near Tatopani.

Not everyone is giving up on tourism. There are motorcycle taxis already ferrying pilgrims plying between Beni and Dana. In Jomsom, former lodge owners are investing in tractors.

There might even be a trekking boom. Myagdi DDC is

working on an alternative trekking route up the valley on the other side of the highway. Some trekking groups are already planning new hiking itineraries now that the East Dhaulagiri Glacier, Mirsiti Khola and the upper reaches of Annapurna South suddenly become more accessible.

Infrastructure minister Hisila Yami helicoptered in last month on an inspection, and admitted that the highway has been delayed because of the conflict. “We shouldn’t have targeted (the army building the road),” she admitted to journalists. She added, “But the work would have gone much faster if the two armies were integrated.” ●



In Constituency

On the campaign trail with the 'first president'



SUBEL BHANDARI

Electoral violence

With only a month to go until elections, a poll watch group has recommended security and crowd management must be improved to reduce the danger of violence.

Democracy and Election Alliance Nepal (DEAN) in a report issued this week urged that party organisers keep their cadres peaceful.

"Political party leaders should immediately denounce use of violence by their supporters, cadres, and affiliated groups," the group said in a statement.

DEAN's Political-Election Violence Education and Resolution project also tallies instances of violence in the run-up to elections and recorded a dramatic increase in January to 97 wounded in 45 incidents. There were 25 other instances in January of kidnappings and intimidation, clashes between youth groups in which 19 were wounded, 3 killed, and 6 kidnapped. The project relies on a network of 240 monitors in each constituency who report on violence and tension in their communities, and is funded by USAID.



SANTA GAHA MAGAR

BADLY HURT: Deb Shankar Poudel of the UML, who was badly beaten by Maoists in Ramechhap on Wednesday, was helicoptered to Kathmandu for treatment.

No Madhesi wave

Caste and the big parties sideline the Madhesi alliance

PRASHANT JHA in BARA

Umesh Lal Das refuses to accept congratulations for being included in the PR list for elections. Instead, he is angry and hurt and holds forth for an hour on the injustice of politics.

He rails at the casteism of the Yadav-Muslim-Bania combine in the tarai, the myopia of Kathmandu-centric Madhesi leaders, the insult of being confined to the PR list and the tragedy of being a Kayasth in a district of Muslims, Yadavs, Tharus and Pahadis.

"They pushed me into this sheet of paper," he says in Maithili, peeling a banana, "one year of being on the streets for the Madhes movement and I still didn't get a ticket from MJF."

Despite proportional representation and all the talk of 'inclusiveness', Umesh's caste worked against him in an election that is supposed to frame the laws of a new Nepal.

Caste, which was concealed by the broader Madhes struggle for the past year, is back as an election issue. It is determining the way in which the Madhesi alliance is selecting candidates and getting splintered, and it will decide who will win.

To see just how complicated caste is in Bara, just look at how it is divided. Constituency 1 has Yadavs, Kushawas and Kalwars. While most parties are fielding Yadav candidates, TMLP has put up Jitendra Singh who is banking on a split in the Yadav vote to see him through. Number 2 has Yadavs, Muslims and Telis where Congress and UML will see a tough contest. Constituency 3, which includes Kalaiya bazar, has Kalwar, Kanus, Muslims and



AJIT TI WARI

Dalits. Some believe NC will win while others think MJF's Pramod Gupta has a chance.

Constituency 4, with areas like Jitpur and Parwanipur on the highway, has a substantial chunk of Muslims and will see a contest between Farnullah Mansur of the NC, UML's Mahmood Alam, and royalist Yunus Ansari. Number 5 is a Tharu stronghold with NC's Umakant Chaudhary having a head-start while the sixth will see a Pahadi winner, possibly Puroshottam Dahal of the UML. The Maoists will be able to pick up votes in all constituencies, especially the ones with a sizeable Pahadi population, to add to their vote share in the PR.

But hold on. Where is the Madhesi wave for Madhesi parties? Less than a month after the signing of an agreement with the government, bickering within the

Madhesi alliance has eroded its support base. Even Madhesi cadres are annoyed. Ramkishore Yadav of the MJF says testily: "Who do these leaders think we are? They used us to get seats and forgot about the Madhesi cause."

The big parties are therefore back in business, but fielding Madhesi candidates because they know the Madhes Street will not accept Pahadis. They have the experience in electoral politics, the organisational strength, the traditional loyalties and the money. In the 11 constituencies of Bara and Parsa together, the NC and UML may take as many as eight seats. The elections may actually strengthen the hand of Madhesi radicals who can now point to poor representation of the new Madhesi parties in the constituent assembly to show that nothing has changed. ●

10

SUBEL BHANDARI
in PHARPING

The road to Dakshinkali is usually quiet. But last week a convoy of seven Boleros were raising a dust storm as they roared through with all the bandobast of a Gyanendra entourage. This wasn't the king going to Dakhinkali, though, it was Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the self-styled first president of the republic of Nepal.

The SUVs roared through forests and fields below Chandragiri, past monasteries, temples and the ghostly relic of an abandoned cement factory. In accordance with the electoral commission's orders, the YCL have been white-washing wall slogans, but the paint is thin and anyone can still read the 'Prachanda for President' letters underneath.

This is Kathmandu's Contituency 10 which stretches for 25km south of the capital and is the second seat Dahal is contesting apart from his stronghold in Rolpa. At Pharping, Comrade Chairman was greeted by

five maidens, and adorned with red tika and marigold garlands. Party flags fluttered in the fields, banners were strung from rooftops.

Tsering Lama, a monk at a nearby monastery was waiting to shake Dahal's hand. "I take his visit as a good sign. No one else has come here yet," he told *Nepali Times*. Lama says he isn't interested in politics but is willing to give Dahal a chance. "Let's see if he can prove himself," he said, "all the previous leaders who won from here never came back."

Gopal Lama, a shopkeeper, is more skeptical. "I can't depend on these politicians. I just hope they will just give us an opportunity to work in peace," he said. But even Lama says he will vote for the Maoists, not because he has great hopes of them, but because they are the only fresh thing on the menu.

At a dusty school playground, Dahal went to the mic to address a crowd of 700 people waiting in the bright sun. "I am ecstatic to be here," he began, "the Nepali people have never won in the true sense. The politicians always won, but the people lost. This time it will not be me who is winning, it will be you the people."

Dahal, and Nepal, have come a long way. Less than two years

ago, he was the most wanted man in Nepal with a price on his head and even sought by Interpol on terrorism charges. He represented a party that killed people who didn't agree with it. And here he is, on the campaign trail, asking for votes like everyone else.

Dahal said his main focus would be on education, public health and employment for all. He proposed a four-lane highway from Kathmandu to Hetauda via Dakshinkali, and even promised a railway link from Tibet to Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Lumbini.

Not everyone was impressed. Twenty-three-year old Sanu Kancha Tamang was also skeptical: "Him as the future president is a stupid idea. This election is about writing a new constitution, not electing a president."

Prakash Thapa, a local schoolteacher said, "He is like the others, blaming everyone but himself. We wanted to hear what he will do for us."

As the shadows lengthened, Dahal walked to his dust-covered SUV to return to Kathmandu for the release his party's manifesto that has his picture on the back cover with the caption, 'First President of a New Republican Nepal, Chairman Comrade Prachanda'. ●

Arughat remembers Dahalsir

Villagers recall a school teacher who became a revolutionary

SHEERE NG in GORKHA

In 1976, when Pushpa Kamal Dahal picked up his suitcase to leave Arughat, the villagers came out to see him off. At the bus stop, a crowd stood round him, many weeping.

Two years earlier when he arrived in this village in Gorkha, Dahal was a fresh graduate from the Rampur Campus in Chitwan, and came to teach agriculture at Arughat's Bhimodaya High School.

"A talented teacher," recalls Satrugan Shrestha, an ex-student, "he never had to refer to the textbooks and would tell us interesting stories to keep our attention on the subject."

"He gave us a lot of homework," recalls another student, Krishna Kumar Shrestha, "and after dinner he went door to door to make sure we were doing it."

No one ever saw him lose his temper or raise his voice. He chose patience over punishment. During the two years, Dahal taught at the school, it achieved an unprecedented 100 percent pass rate in agriculture.



BLAST FROM THE PAST: Pushpa Kamal Dahal (*left*), with former colleague Ganesh Kumar Shrestha (*right*) and an unidentified friend.

Students say they respected him, but he also maintained friendly relations outside school hours. "When he caught us peeking at him swimming in the river, instead of reprimanding, he would call for us to join him," recalls Shurendra Prasad, now a retired grandfather.

It has been 32 years since Dahal left Arughat to lead the Maoist movement and became Comrade Prachanda. Dahal was a strong believer in education, locals remember, and he taught illiterate adults in the evening, four days a week.

During his free time, he would go down to the fields to demonstrate modern farming techniques to improve harvests. He was also the first to teach villagers how to build outhouses and chimneys. Honest, helpful and responsible, that is how most people here remember the man.

But more difficult to believe may be that the Maoist chairman was an avid dancer, and choreographed performances that won the village first place in two local dance competitions. Ganesh Kumar Shrestha, a colleague, admitted that Dahal wasn't the best dancer in the world. "But he was very creative," he hastened to add.

Just about everyone in the neighbourhood knew that Dahal detested the monarchy. "He was against the caste system, and used to stress the importance of equality," said Bhuban Pasad Shrestha, Dahal's former landlord in Arughat.

When cleaning Prachanda's room, Bhuban once chanced upon a stack of communist books, including *Das Kapital* and others by Mao and Lenin, which he had been hiding under his bed. It being the Panchayat era, political parties and communist literature were banned.

But villagers remember that Dahal was quite open about his beliefs. Sukbahadur Nepali, who attended Prachanda's night classes, said that the literacy lessons were sometimes more like communist sermons. Another man, who had joined the dance competition, realised later that the tune, *Najau Bides*, chosen by Prachanda, was actually a communist song.

Dahal doesn't seem to have tried to foist his ideology on the young minds at school. None of the former students interviewed was aware their teacher was a communist. But a passing comment he once made to a colleague perhaps hinted at his political aspirations. "If I want to be a minister of the country, I can easily achieve that," he had said.

With elections around the corner, no one is predicting which way the vote will go in Arughat which suffered from the brutality of the war years. But if Dahal was a candidate here, he may have a good chance of winning. ●

Borderline militancy

In Bihar, Madhesi extremists wait and look at Ranbir Singh's right foot, which is shorter than his left one. A clash with Maoists in Saptari a few years ago left him with a bullet injury.

He was treated in Bihar's Darbangha, and Singh says with a mixture of pride and self-pity: "Look, there are eight screws here. The doctor says don't walk too much, but in my line of work I have to."

Singh is the Madhes sarkar pramukh of the Jwala faction of the militant JTMM and number two in the hierarchy. A former Sadbhabana activist, he was in the original team that defected from Jai Krishna Goit.

Singh calls the eight point agreement a 'bhram', an illusion. "Where is the united Madhes, autonomy? Where is right to self-determination? Where is a full PR system? The government is fooling people."

Chandrashekhar, head of the group's intellectual front, chips in, "Mahant Thakur is the biggest enemy of the Madhes. Girija has sent him." The JTMM is angry at the Madhesi parties for not acknowledging its role in the movement, and not being consulted before the Kathmandu agreement.

But the extremists are now fighting for political survival. If elections happen, they risk getting marginalised. If they step up violence, the public may turn against them.

"This is the lull before the storm," says Chandrasekhar, "there is no way the Pahadi sarkar can hold elections in the eastern Tarai." Jwala's group has also warned of violence in Kapilbastu and Banke and says it is has laid land mines in parts of Saptari and Sunsari. In the coming weeks, it threatens to capture candidates, set off bombs and kill election officials.

"The ground activists are ready. We are just waiting for instructions from the leadership,"

says Sunsari incharge, Krish, who is on the run for having allegedly killed Shekhar Koirala's brother-in-law in January.

But the militant groups know that the people want elections, and admit that they will ultimately have to work with the Madhesi parties. Some extremist cadres are even involved in poll campaigning for Madhesi candidates.

"In certain seats, we may support some candidates if they are committed to the Madhes," says one leader, "the assembly won't give us any rights and the Madhesi parties will come to us for help. And we will lead the next movement."

The Militants are now running scared of the Indian authorities, and have become more careful while they go back and forth between Bihar's border towns where they live with sympathisers.

Unlike the mainstream Madhesi parties, Jwala's group is more inclusive of all Madhesi castes. The top leaders include a Dalit, Yadav, Brahman, Kushawa, while the district chiefs include a Musahar, a Dom, Brahmans, Rajputs, Muslims, and even, it is said, a Sikh.

But the extremist groups deeply distrust each other over money, dealings with the media and attitude towards talks. Prime Minister Koirala personally spoke to a JTMM leader on the phone in January, inviting the group for talks with his daughter. While one faction was keen on it, Jwala Singh vetoed the idea.

Koirala's hardline statement this week, however, has weakened this faction's effort within the armed group. Says Ranbir Singh: "We are not against talks. Our preconditions are release of activists, withdrawal of cases, calling off STF operations, and a unilateral ceasefire by the state." ●

Prashant Jha in North Bihar

Ae Gorkhaliharu

Britain's gain is Nepal's loss

As anyone who follows the British media will know, Prince Harry, third in line to the throne, was on secret military duty in Afghanistan. Apart from his pride and joy at being able to 'muck in' as one of the lads, Harry expressed his respect and admiration for the Royal Gurkha Rifles in which he served. He is also happy with the khukuri they have given him as a present.

Meanwhile, back in Pokhara and Dharan lots of new villas are coming onto the market as more and more ex-British Gurkhas and their families are leaving Nepal to settle in the UK. It's not just real estate—Nepal is apparently losing Rs 5 billion a year to lost remittances that are now staying on in England.

After many years of campaigning, ex-British Gurkhas won the right to apply for UK citizenship in 2004, and to settle there permanently with their families. So now many young Nepalis are now able to live the dream of going abroad without having to spend

all that time studying for IELTS or queuing at the manpower agencies.

The British Army has been recruiting Gurkhas since the Anglo-Nepali War

in 1816, and although the size of Gurkha regiments has been reduced drastically from more than 100,000 in the Second World War to some 3,500 today, they are still indispensable to the British Army—a fact which many officers admit without hesitation.

Why do they still hold the Gurkhas in such high regard? More or less for the same reasons that they first recruited them nearly 200 years ago. The civil and military bureaucracy which administered British India classified many of the hill peoples of Nepal as 'martial races', by which they were supposed to embody certain military virtues such as bravery, self-sufficiency, stoicism, loyalty, and honesty.

Though of course the terminology of the 19th century British Raj sounds somewhat ridiculous nowadays, one could guess that it is these same beliefs the British still have about the Gurkhas, the 'myth of Gorkhali', which to some extent motivated the British government to give citizenship rights to retired Gurkha servicemen. As usual, Britain reaps benefits.



Let me explain. In contrast to Nepal, which is burgeoning with youth, the UK's population is growing old. The demographic shift is becoming so serious that the country cannot replenish its workforce from its own birth rate alone. In this situation, although many in the country try to deny it on various emotive pretexts, Britain needs immigration in order to keep the economy functioning properly. And who are more obvious candidates than those the British Army Brigade of Gurkhas webpage calls "the closest of friends and bravest of allies that Britain has known"?

Nepali Gurkhas must be one of the most attractive groups the British government can hope to recruit en masse to join the UK job market. They are used to hard work, they have comparatively very few networks of organised crime or fraud (well, every country has some...), they have been trained in a variety of skills, have been long acclimatised to the British way of life, and generally have a positive view on Britain and British society. If some of the ex-servicemen are getting on a bit, there are always their children, hence bringing the family along is also a bonus.

Old men are happy when Gurkhas buy them drinks at the pub, old ladies like it when they help them get on the bus. The politeness with which all Nepalis, Gurkha or otherwise, treat strangers makes them model citizens in Britain, with its unspoken but rigidly-observed codes of courtesy and gentility.

All the waves of immigrants into Britain have enriched and benefited British society, but the settlement of Gurkhas and their families is something that many people especially welcome. They are a compliment to the country both economically and socially.

But although it is easy to understand their decision to leave war-weary and still struggling Nepal, it is also a loss for the country that some of its most able and progressive citizens are leaving for good, and with them their plans, dreams and capital which could have been a help for building a brighter future in Nepal. ●



KHAIRE BHAI
Tom Owen-Smith

Dharan is far from election frenzy

All quiet on the eastern front

PRANAYA SJB RANA in
DHARAN AND KAKARBHITTA

At Bhanu Chok, three shopkeepers sit on wooden stools outside their shops. They discuss politics wearily, as if beleaguered with the constant talk of coming elections. A Chinese pocket radio crackles to life beside one and suddenly all three jump out of their seats. A goal has been scored in the ongoing Buda Subba football tournament.

While election fever sweeps the rest of the country, it is football fervour that hangs in the air here in Dharan. With the Buda Subba tournament in full swing, political parties have yet to bring out their best game.

The streets are strangely devoid of party slogans and graffiti. Besides a few Maoist slogans and crudely drawn Limbuwan messages, the walls are clean and paint-free. There are no messy election symbols, not even Prachanda for president.

"We are still in the final stages of preparation," says Tilak Rai, secretary of the Nepali Congress' Dharan chapter. He says the NC will start aggressive sloganeering and step up their campaign from 16 March. "Right now, we're concentrating on letting individuals know who our candidates are."

"Our party workers have been deployed in the surrounding VDCs and peripheral areas to spread awareness," says Mukshamhang Manejangbo (Mukesh), secretary of the Maoists' Limbuwan National Liberation Front. The Maoists have been conducting community programs, fielding their inclusive candidates. But no mass rallies yet and no poll sharing, says Manejangbo. "If smaller parties come to us then we will of course take them in, but we will never link up with the NC or UML."

Rather than expectation and excitement, the mood in Dharan seems to be one of indifference. "We are certain that the elections will happen but since none of the parties has shown any strong initiative, we're not really bothered," say doctors at Dharan's



SUPPORT LINES:
In Dharan this week, football banners are more prominent than election posters.

ANUP PRAKASH

BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences.

Pairs of policemen linger at choks and major intersections and the police station seems to be holding more men than usual. "But we have nothing to fear," says comrade Manejangbo. "Come poll time, we will mobilise 200 youth volunteers to maintain the peace and ensure free and fair elections. It is the people's duty to help the police keep control," he adds. While the Maoist volunteers will mostly be minors below voting age and a few adults who are unable to vote for undisclosed reasons, the NC too will be fielding their own men, a hundred youths, who will vote and maintain order.

Although Dharan is traditionally a UML bastion, Tilak Rai is certain his party will pull through. "We have the only female candidate in this region, so the women's vote is secure," says Rai confidently. The normally haughty Maoists seem subdued, content to say that if given a chance, they will change things. Says Manejangbo: "We are a new party and we are young. Why vote for those same old tired

faces? Just give us a chance to prove ourselves."

There is slightly more action in Kakarbhitta. UML graffiti is smeared across temple walls and the customs office, Maoist slogans adorn other vacant spaces and a motorbike draped with the Nepali Congress flag speeds past. Party flags fly high on bamboo poles at strategic intersections.

"Although there haven't been any big rallies or mass meetings, the parties have started campaigning," says Inspector Deepak Giri, at the area police station. "I have already been visited by candidates from all the three major parties," says Hem Limbu, a convenience store owner.

All the parties seem to be on best behaviour, and Inspector Giri seems confident that everything will go off without a hitch. There has been no trouble as of yet, and even the agitating Limbuwan groups seem peaceable at the moment. "It doesn't matter how many people the parties deploy," says Giri, "there will be enough security forces to make sure nothing untoward happens and that no one is hassled." ●

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Once is not enough

An anti-musical romance

John Carney's *Once*, aptly named, is quite a singular film. Although a musical, it is very different from both the Bollywood and the increasingly frequent Hollywood varieties. Here we have intimate, simply crafted songs that are naturalistic as opposed to flashy, showy numbers that are fantastical. The musical sections are not moments of escapism with costume changes and orchestras. Instead they emerge believably from the characters



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

(who are musicians), and entrance the viewer with their intimacy. In *Once*, instead of melodrama, there is quiet melancholy; instead of idealistic declaration of love, a rarely-voiced affection and the gritty realism of circumstance. Yet you will be hard-pressed to find a more satisfying romance from recent times.

Set and shot in Dublin, *Once* is a simple story of two characters. One, an Irish busker, strums his guitar for a pittance when he's not helping out at his dad's vacuum-cleaner repair shop; the other, a Czech immigrant, does odd-jobs to support herself and her family while harboring a talent for the piano. This pair, down-trodden and semi-tragic, and offset by the trendy retail stores and bustling crowds of metropolitan Dublin, are two individuals evidently out of step with the



mainstream society around them.

Glen Hansard's character (who, like his counterpart played by Markéta Irglová, remains nameless, the credit roll simply identifying them as 'The Guy' and 'The Girl') is nursing his wounds from a break-up with his girlfriend who has moved to London, while Irglová's more complicated home-life — estranged husband, a toddler — pushes their developing relationship into uncertain territory. This premise ties together a songbook of Indie pop-rock.

Once is a chaste romance, and at the same token quite convincing. Glen Hansard's character is bumbling and earnest in his pursuit of the forward, cheeky yet evasive character of Markéta Irglová. Their attraction, charged as it is, is sublimated into a creative collaboration, which to both themselves and to the audience is a delicate metaphor for a relationship that isn't named. She is the catalyst for his ambition to record an album which is the product of a

relationship, and the eventual impetus for him to leave Dublin for London. The actor Hansard is the lead singer of the Irish band The Frames, and Irglová like her character is a pianist-songwriter, so their talents easily lend themselves to the musical requirements of the film, which they pull off with real verve and feeling.

The filmmaking, like the characters, has a scruffy charm which impresses both in its modesty and ambition. The film wears its thin budget on its sleeve. Eschewing sets, it uses public spaces for many of its main scenes. Here the camera is unobtrusive, keeping its distance and rarely crowding the characters, and passers-by seem oblivious to the fact that a movie is being shot at all. Yet, it does not shy away from cinematic flexing, with flourishes such as a several minutes long mis-en-scene trailing 'The Girl' walking to her neighbourhood store trying out the lyrics she's written to some music by 'The Guy', which she's listening to on a Discman.

In an altogether unassuming manner, the film shows up many bigger-budgeted productions, and its tiny imperfections make it possibly more endearing. The melodies and characters of *Once* will linger sweetly long after the film ends. ●

Once
Director: John Carney
Cast: Glen Hansard, Markéta Irglová.
2007. R. 88 min.

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Petals** paintings by Neera Joshi Pradhan, 11AM-5.30 PM, until 23 March at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Double vision** prints by Nan Mulder, Gea Karhof, Seema Sharma Shah and Ragini Upadhyay, until 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

- ❖ **Francophonie week** with Recontres a multidisciplinary exhibition with 10 Nepali and French artists, at the Alliance Francaise, starting 14 March at 6PM. 4241163
- ❖ **Nepal Malaysia Education Fair** organised by Google Educational Foundation, 14-16 March, 11AM-6PM at Hotel Malla. 4420457
- ❖ **3rd Tewa Carnival** at the Birendra International Convention Centre, 15 March, 10AM-7PM, Rs 100.
- ❖ **Breathless** a film by Jean-Luc Godard, screened by Cine-Sankipa, 17 March, 5.30 PM at the Rimal Theatre, Gurukul. 4466956
- ❖ **Weekly human rights** film screenings with *The Syrian Bride* a film by Eran Riklis at the Sama Theatre, Gurukul, 5PM on 16 March. 4466956
- ❖ **Toastmasters** a communication and leadership program, organised by Kathmandu Toastmasters Club every Wednesday 6PM at Industrial Enterprise Development Institute (IEDI) building, Tripureswor. 4288847



MUSIC

- ❖ **23rd Yala Maya Classic** with Dhrubesh Chandra Regmi and Pramod Upadhyaya, 15 March, 5PM at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 5553767
- ❖ **1974AD Unplugged** tunes from 1994 to 2008, 22 March, 6.30 PM at the Patan Museum. 9841320007
- ❖ **Yankey and friends** live acoustic music every Friday at the Bourbon room Restro-bar, Lal Darbar.
- ❖ **Anil Shahi** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 8PM. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **St Patrick's Day** with green beers and silly hats, 17 March at Kilroy's Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Jalan Jalan Restaurant** with a new Italian menu, Kupondole. 5544872
- ❖ **Bourbon Room Restro-bar** now open for lunch and dinner with over a 100 cocktails, Lal Darbar.
- ❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- ❖ **Continental and Chinese** cuisine and complimentary fresh brewed coffee after every meal at 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.
- ❖ **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

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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The big event of this week is a sudden rise in temperature, marking the real beginning of spring. The satellite picture on Thursday morning shows two opposing fronts in action – first, a southerly front pushing warm air from the north Indian plain towards the central Himalaya, and second, a northerly front crossing the western Himalaya to pour cold air over into Afghanistan and western Pakistan. Currently the low pressure sitting over northern India and Nepal is sucking in clouds from the surrounding areas. However, the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean are calm, which means the fragmented clouds will not produce much more than thunder and drizzle. Expect the mercury to keep rising up until early next week, when the current system is likely to reverse temporarily.



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KIRAN PANDAY

BE GOOD: Election commissioner Bhoj Raj Pokharel takes cabinet members through the code of conduct for the CA election.



DEWAN RAI

EVER WATCHFUL: The eyes of Boudhanath loom over Tibetan refugees' demonstration to mark 49 years since the 1959 uprising on Monday. Police stopped the demonstrators at Chuchepati on the road to Baluwatar, where they planned to hand a memorandum to the Chinese Embassy.

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Nepal's first republican emperor

Given the tectonic forces pushing the Indian landmass relentlessly from the south and the Eurasian continent **squeezing** us from the north, it is easy to understand why Comrade Prithvi Narayan the Great likened Nepal to "a sweet potato between a rock and a hard place".



It is geology that pushed Mt Everest to its present height but it is geopolitics that is making the Chinese really **antsy** about Tibetans using the Olympics to get into the news. Now comes word that the highway built to Sagarmatha base camp on the Rongbuk side won't be used for a while because no expeditions will be allowed on the north face till 10 May.

Not just that, the Chinese have leaned on us not to allow expeditions from the south side either till that time. That is why there are only four expeditions from the Khumbu this spring compared to 25 last year. Can understand why they're worried. Wouldn't want any pro-Dalai Lama demos on the summit just as the Olympic **torch** being carried up the northeast ridge is being beamed live to the world now, would we?

The real question the Ass has is how they are going to keep the Olympic torch from being blown out by the jet stream up there at 8,848m.



From the land of a dead Mao to the land where Mao is alive and kicking came Chinese vice minister of foreign affairs He Yafei. He met our Supreme Commando and apparently told him in comradely fashion that he shouldn't be using the Great Helmsman's name in vain because it was tarnishing Mao's name.

After all, the CPN-M is no longer strictly speaking a Maoist

party but a **Stalinist** one.

Actually the Maoists should rename their party CPN-L since they have now abandoned Maoism to adhere to **Leninist** traits. Hearing the First Emperor of a Republican Nepal go on about "capturing" power and "taking over" if his party loses the constituent assembly elections must remind people of Vladimir Ilyich and how he staged a military coup when the Bolsheviks lost the constituent assembly elections in Russia 90 years ago. Which must be why the building that houses the Maoist unions at Tin Kune is called Lenin Bhaban.

As elections approach, **cash-starved** politicians are indulging in all-party extortion. A phone call from a prominent politician these days can only mean one thing: "You scratch my backside, I'll scratch yours." The only difference with the Maoists is that when they come by these days and ask you for "one" they mean "one karod" and not "one lakh" as one businessman found out to his **chagrin** last week.



Seeing Comrade Makunay erasing Maoist election slogans in Rautahat this week is proof that the Election Commission's Code of Conduct is being enforced

strictly. And after the Ass' expose last week about dummy candidates, even the Fearsome One has withdrawn the 17 fake candidates his party put up in Constituency #10. Yes, given the way he is cracking the whip on the party leadership Bhojraj Pokhrel is wasted in the Election Commission. Bhojrajji for President!

He got ministers to agree not to use white plate vehicles for election campaigning. Now, how about yanking in political parties using ministries under their command as **recruitment centres**? Comrade Yummy, any particular reason your sis and

bro now have jobs in your ministry?



Young commies in **tracksuits** beat up a UML cadre in Ramechhap so badly he had to be helicoptered out. Surya Bahadur Thapa's election entourage in Dhankuta, was attacked and warned not to come back unless he wanted a hasty departure to kingdom come. Why is the YCL is trying its level best to sabotage its parent party from winning this election?

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