Cold blood

The unrest in neighbouring Tibet is having a direct impact on Nepal. Tourism and mountaineering have been affected, and riot police have been busy breaking up demonstrations by Tibetans in Kathmandu.

In scenes not witnessed since April 2006, police brutally put down rallies and candlelit vigils by monks in Kathmandu. This young monk (above) was hit on his head with a bamboo stick wielded by riot police outside the United Nations office in Pulchok on Monday.

The unrest in Tibet has already hurt Nepal’s tourism industry since Kathmandu is the jump off point for Lhasa. Hundreds of Sherpas are also employed by expeditions climbing the Himalaya from the north.

The protests have been part of an international campaign by Tibetans in exile and their supporters to highlight Chinese crackdowns in Lhasa and elsewhere. The rallies came in the run-up to the Olympics in Beijing in August. The unrest in Tibet has already hurt Nepal’s tourism industry since Kathmandu is the jump off point for Lhasa. Hundreds of Sherpas are also employed by expeditions climbing the Himalaya from the north.

Nepal’s tourism spokesman denied on Tuesday that China had pressured Nepal to ban expeditions from the south side of Chomolungma, but industry sources said many expeditions had already cancelled. Tibet is now closed to tourists, and many who had already arrived in Kathmandu were rebooked to destinations within Nepal, or to Bhutan and India.

Tourists landing here on flights from Lhasa this week said they saw mobs attacking Chinese on the streets and setting fire to Chinese-owned shops.
Conspiracies at the Buffalo Inn

There is now only one person who will benefit from stopping elections

As the D-Day of the Republican Assembly draws closer, political players of all persuasions, from monarchists to Maoists and mainstreamers, all have their favourite conspiracy theories to explain their possible defeat at the polls.

Graffiti-President Pushpa Kamal Dahal beliefs in a UML US-style revolution. Madhab Nepal, UML Gen Sec for Life, has

his own ghost to exorcise: regional parties that resist the cultural hegemony of UML’s priestly politics. Monarchists as usual blame the southern neighbour and even invited KK Rajan from New Delhi to clear the mess left by Digvijay Singh. The Kangres may still fare reasonably well in the first-past-the-post part of the federal structure. The Maoists want these units, or provinces, to be carved out based on ethnicity. The Buffalo Inn will do well not to try to explain their possible defeat at the polls.
TIBET

I wondered about your choice of page 1 coverage on Mt Everest and its unconventional headline (Mount Olympus, #391) but its rationale became clear over the following days as the Chinese government suppressed the Lhasa uprising and banned expeditions. What the Chinese do in their own country is their business. But to arm-twist Nepal to stop expeditions from the south side of the mountain shows that the Chinese can be bullies just like the Indians. So much for China counter-balancing India’s heavy hand in Nepal.

Gyan Subba, Kumanipati

I am a Tibetan who was born and raised in Nepal. I am deeply saddened and angered that lathi-swinging Nepali police have recently been attacking women (including my own mother), monks, and even children, simply for protesting peacefully in support of people who are being massacred in Tibet. I understand that the Nepali government is under pressure from China to restrain the Tibetan protests. But I believe they can meet their objectives without gratuitous violence against Tibetans. We Tibetans are happy living in Nepal, and in turn contribute not insignificantly to the culture and economy of the nation. I call on the Nepali government to better balance the pressure from China with the welfare of the Tibetan community in Nepal. The violence against Tibetans by Nepal police, the shutting down of Everest to tourists, and the fact that Chinese police are operating with impunity on Nepali soil near the border, lead me to believe that Nepal could and maybe should exercise its rights and obligations as a sovereign nation more effectively than it is doing at present.

Tenzin T, Kathmandu

CK LAL’S COMEBACK

Great article (Letter from Kolkata, #391). Nepal has been unstable because of fear of the left amongst the international community, bickering between the left parties themselves and the utter incompetence of the Nepali Congress. I hope the election brings a period of long overdue left-wing government, so the country can be saved from being a playground for selfish regional and global powers.

Kamal Sharma, New York

I quote CK Lal: ‘There is no reason for Nepalis to fear the domination of Leninist UML or Stalinist CPN-M in our own constituent assembly’. Of course there is, as much as the royalists! Whatever the sticker on the bottle, it’s the same old drink.

Marceau Reda, Paris

Now Girija Prasad Koirala has finally announced his resignation from politics after the polls, but strangely he is also a candidate in the upcoming elections. He has of course done a great job for this country: bringing the Maoists into mainstream politics and laying the foundations for elections. But his appointment of his own daughter to a ministerial position shows that he is still not prepared to let go of power completely. I think the new constitution should set a retiring age for politicians at 65. Otherwise, even if Mr Koirala does decide to finally resign, we will still be ruled by another group of geriatrics. Great job, Mr Koirala, but now you need some rest.

Pravesh Saria, email

The Maoists have undoubtedly brought about a massive shift in the political climate of Nepal. In the 1990s all the mainstream parties were against a constituent assembly, but the Maoists brought it onto the agenda. This is a great achievement, but their threats about what they will do if they lose the election do them no favours. Most people are alienated by this kind of macho and belligerent language. I would appeal to the Maoist leadership to be proud of their achievements, but also humble and prepared to accept the will of the people, which will be expressed in the elections. Please do not disregard that.

Aruna Uprety, China

I think Comrade Prachanda must think the Nepali people are fools. He sells false promises (‘In constituency 10’, #391) while simultaneously getting the YCL to beat up his rivals. He must not forget that it was the people who allowed him to come out of the jungle. If he tries to take advantage of them, they could also bring about his downfall.

Abhisekh Bhandari, New Zealand

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EMIGRATION

Wong Shu Yun’s ‘No men’s land’ (#391) has rightly stressed the need to check the youth outflow of the country. Who is going to work for the much-hyped ‘new Nepal’? It’s high time the government addressed the unemployment problem through effective actions and policies.

Sanjeev Karmacharya, Kathmandu
M Murk and murkier
Little to cheer about in the disarray among Madhesi groups

The main enemies of the Madhesi people are the present Madhesi leaders themselves.

It is now increasingly apparent that the second Madhesi movement of January-February happened only to generate a support base and ensure political survival for the three parties. Their demands (undefined autonomy, self-determination) did little to help ordinary Madhesi. The promise of inclusion had already been made earlier, and was only reiterated.

All the three-week agitation did was change Madhesi discontent, and generate a wave. But in less than a week, the Madhesi parties blew it all away.

The weakness of the Madhesi parties, and their possible dismal scenario will be that for both the first past the post and proportional representation seats combined, the TMLP, SP and MJF will be lucky to get 50 seats.

It is largely traditional NC voters who are shifting loyalties to the Madhesi parties, so if anyone benefits from this fragmentation it is the UML. And the UML, with its non-inclusive leadership embodies the worst kind of pahadi conservatism.

So how did the Madhesi parties throw it all away? A large part of the problem is the MJF, which tried to block negotiations during the stalemate in Kathmandu. It has now done its utmost to prevent an alliance. It has a relatively better organisation, brand name, and thus deserves a larger share of the seats, but the Forum has been the most rigid. And this has raised suspicions about who pulls the strings in the MJF.

Upendra Yadav is playing too many games: he has links with the palace, the Hindu right in India, the right-wing in the NC, and the Americans. On the night he flew in from Birgunj to Kathmandu during critical talks last month, he disappeared for a few hours to meet two senior royalists. Bijay Gachhedar’s entry into the party may help the MJF carve out an alliance of Yadavs and Tharus in a few districts of eastern Tarai, but it does show that the party has become the refuge of crooks and royalists.

Sharad Singh Bhandari attends a meeting at K P Bhattarai’s residence to figure out ways to save the monarchy, and the very next day he releases the MJF manifesto declaring commitment to a federal republic. Being a royalist is not a sin, but being so wildly inconsistent is.

Before Upendra Yadav knows it, the MJF will be hijacked by the J P Gupta-Gachhedar-Bhandari combination. What makes the Forum dangerous is that it might emerge as the biggest Madhesi party, but the Forum has been the most rigid. And this has raised suspicions about who pulls the strings in the MJF.

The Sadhabana is a marginal actor. The splits have really ruined the movement of January-February happened only to generate a support base and ensure political survival for the three parties. Their demands (undefined autonomy, self-determination) did little to help ordinary Madhesi. The promise of inclusion had already been made earlier, and was only reiterated.

All the three-week agitation did was change Madhesi discontent, and generate a wave. But in less than a week, the Madhesi parties blew it all away.

The movement has polarised the electorate, but Madhesi may not necessarily vote for Madhesi parties.
Nothing new, nothing about economics

Election fever forgets a thing or two

The cocktail circuit of Kathmandu which so beautifully belches negative after every drink has started to shift its discussions from why the constituent assembly elections will not happen to the inevitable doom that will descend after the constituent assembly elections happen.

The discussions range from taking Nepal back to pre- or post-1990, to Maoist takeover of the nation, to Nepali Congress aborting the process at the last moment. As Nepal has some of the most liberal alcohol sale and consumption laws in the world but no national gambling program, probably these self-appointed Cassandras will never shut up.

The parties seem to be serious about campaigning but, nine years on since the last election, campaign strategies have not advanced much. It’s still all about trailing around door to door, wining, dining, coining funds and generally the same old procedures we first learnt two decades ago. Even our political gurus in the world and different regions have changed their campaigning ways, but we are still happy to assume that our voters are illiterate, easily beguiled, and willing to sell their votes for a few glasses of rakhi or some crisp rupee bills.

The demographics have changed. We have more young voters, who are wired to the world and have different expectations. However, it seems that none of the political parties have heeded this transformation.

The agenda for Nepal cannot be political only. What use of federalism if there is no plan for how taxes will be collected be channeled to the various local governments? Who will be responsible for building infrastructure – the centre or the federated states and the autonomous region? Will donors be able to work directly with the regions and states or will they still have to go through the centre? Can different regions have different labour laws or operate special economic zones? Will there be different telecom operators with circle-based licenses or will telecom and IT still be satellites of Kathmandu? Will the states be allowed to give hydropower licenses and have a say over transmission and distribution? Will education and health policies be decentralized? The questions are never-ending.

These issues are important and need proper research from experts in statescraft, history, economics and social sciences, as well as debate in the assembly, living rooms and teashops. But at the moment no one has much of an idea – much less a clear policy – on how economic growth will be achieved, how infrastructure will be built or how jobs will be created. While some members of the business community will probably make it into the upcoming assembly, they will most likely only be those who joined the government during the royal regime.

The election debate needs to shift from vague promises and word games to concrete discussions on how to build the future economy of Nepal. Some people seem to be expecting the elections to achieve little more than the coronation of a new dictator or guarantee of the political succession of ruling families.

Those who are happy to complain and doomsay with their import whiskey or rum in hand should think about something positive they could say for a change. Considering that these are often amongst the most educated and cosmopolitan in the country, why don’t they put their wits into thinking about new paths for Nepal’s future, rather than throwing mud at each other?

Otherwise, for decades any elections we have will come together with the familiar backdrop of power cuts and queues outside gas stations, and parties struggling even to get their manifestos printed in time.

www.arthabeed.com
Renounce violence

Editorial in Kantipur, 14 March

The constituent assembly election is the real test that the CPN-Maoist will have to pass after abandoning armed struggle and joining mainstream politics. The Maoists have got due credit for their contribution in steering the country towards this election, but the Nepali people will scrutinise every move they make as they are new in competitive politics.

This election is not a general election. Because it is about writing our constitution, the very future, hopes and aspirations of the country are pinned on it. It is not about a single party winning or losing, and no party should think that if they win a majority they can run the country according to their party manifesto. The prime minister and the speaker have both stressed the need for cooperation while the constitution is being written. This cooperation is also a test to see if the parties can work together in the future.

Some armed groups have said they will not allow elections to take place in the Tarai. But election campaigning has intensified in the last week, and their threats are now irrelevant. Our state is no more an oppressive one. Many disenfranchised groups have been brought to the table and their demands fulfilled. For the last two years the government has always kept the door of dialogue open, and has proved that it is flexible. Those who still want to use weapons in search of justice in today’s Nepal are out of touch with reality.

The leaders are going outside of Kathmandu, and party members campaigning round the country. Election fever is here and voters are no longer afraid. The Tarai, which has been gripped by violence for the last two years, is also hopeful about the elections. People in the Tarai understand that the constituent assembly elections will help address their demands that surfaced in the Madhes Uprising last year.

These armed groups are now obstacles to the redressing the issues of the Madhes. They have no clear political vision, depend on threats and violence, and are not trusted by the people. These groups, including Goit and Jwala, need to understand that we live in a Nepal where problems are discussed freely. Soon nobody will view them as people trying to change society, but as criminals.

Solutions to democratic differences must be peaceful. Those engaged in armed struggle should take heed of the recent agreement between the government and United Madhes Democratic Front. If they want to maintain any relevance, they will have to change themselves.

Prosperity

Editorial in Gorkhapatra, 15 March

With the entire nation preparing for the constituent assembly elections, it is only natural for the development of some sectors to be temporarily neglected. But in the manifestos of the major parties, the economic agenda and development are prominent.

Without financial prosperity, and together with it proper education, decent health services and gender and ethnic equality, there will be no lasting peace. If these conditions do not exist then people will lose interest in politics.

It has been five decades since the nation embarked on the path of development. During this time, the country has received uncountable amounts of foreign aid but none of it has been properly utilised. We are still in the grip of poverty and
unemployment. Sixty percent of our yearly budget is dependent upon foreign aid, industrialisation has been minimal.

In the new political context, the most important point must be economic development. More employment opportunities, a safe environment to live independently, clean politics with a capable leadership, and proportionally inclusive participation are essential for this to happen. If we do not throw away this opportunity then the nation will leap forward not just politically but economically, socially, educationally, technically and culturally.

Padlocked

When Narayan Phuyal, 35 and Madhab Phuyal, 32 had to flee from south Bhutan 17 years ago, all they had was a certificate to prove that they had passed Grade 10. They dreamt of studying further and becoming doctors one day. Today they live in Hut no.40 at the Jhapa refugee camp. They may not have become medical doctors but they are now both PhD holders. Just last year Narayan received his degree in Refugee and International Law from Bangalore and Madhab got his PhD in English from a university in Hyderabad.

When the brothers arrived in Nepal in 1991, Madhab began studying at a school in Birtamod and Narayan was sent to a school in Siliguri. He got his bachelors degree in law from West Bengal University before applying for his PhD in Bangalore. Before studying for his PhD, Madhab had received a bachelor’s degree from Tribhuvan University. The Phuyal brothers say that there are only 10 people in the whole of Bhutan who have a PhD degree and they are proud of the fact that they were able to get so far in their studies while living in a refugee camp. Narayan says that the reason he studied refugee studies is because he wanted to understand the life he led, “If you are strong at heart, even the suffering of being a refugee will not stop you.”

Nepal Pushminto Industry

The minister for forestry and soil conservation, Matrika Prasad Yadav has padlocked the house of his Nepal Army security guards which is attached to his ministerial quarters. However, the lock was broken by the army soon after under the orders of their headquarters.

Eleven army men have been deployed for the protection of the minister. Four days ago the minister asked five of them to accompany him to Janakpur, but they denied they had not received any official orders. The minister then ordered them out of his quarters and left for Janakpur without any security. When he returned to find the army still there, he locked the house.

Talking to Naya Patrika, Yadav said, “If the army is supposed to be for my protection, shouldn’t they follow my orders? They refuse to go along with me where there is no security. Why should I keep them in my quarters if they don’t protect me?”

The minister said that the Nepal Army was conspiring against him, and he would no longer accept security from the army. “I have been informed that the army has broken the lock. I will lock the house again. If they don’t leave the quarters, I will leave.”

He also said that he would keep PLA soldiers for his security. “I have talked to Ian Martin and the party chairman about this. If they don’t agree I will stay under the security of the people, but I will not have the army protecting me,” he said.

The Maoists are participating in the elections but they are threatening to capture booths in order to win. They are abducting people, breaking people’s heads. How can you compare the UML with the Maoists?

Senior CPN-UML leader KP Sharma Oli quoted in Drishti, 18 March

Placard: Election Campaign

“Comrade! This bridge was destroyed during our great people’s war!”

Robin Sayami in Himal Khabarpatrika, 14-28 March

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

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Senior CPN-UML leader KP Sharma Oli quoted in Drishti, 18 March
Winter is supposed to have gone, but with temperature at 8 degrees on Monday morning, it didn’t feel like it.

We were walking down to the bus stop on our way to work. Holi was still five days away, so we weren’t on red alert yet. Then, “Splat.”

Cowardly sniggering boys let up a cheer at the direct hit. No explanation necessary: it’s Holi.

The rites of spring are here. Although Holi is celebrated only for a day in the Valley (on Friday), the warmup begins long beforehand, and this year it has begun a full week before. The water scarcity in Kathmandu seems to make no difference. If there is no clean water, water from the drain will do just fine.

Although Holi is celebrated only for a day in the Valley (on Friday), the warmup begins long beforehand, and this year it has begun a full week before. The water scarcity in Kathmandu seems to make no difference. If there is no clean water, water from the drain will do just fine.

The streets of Asan are already spattered with plastic bags which have missed their targets. The choks are packed with huddles of boys waiting to ambush unsuspecting female passersby. The streets of Asan are already spattered with plastic bags which have missed their targets. The choks are packed with huddles of boys waiting to ambush unsuspecting female passersby.

The country is preparing for elections that will have a proportional representation for women. Nepali women’s groups may be battling for legislation to punish domestic violence, but the message hasn’t got through to the street’s brat packs.

Holi isn’t fun anymore because it’s not voluntary. Women are attacked, tourists are forced to join in, it has become a dreaded and hostile ritual. Why do you think this paper is coming out one day early this week?

And the teenagers on terraces aren’t just dropping balloons anymore; they are throwing rotten tomatoes, big plastic bags with stinky water, and even eggs.

Holi is about ushering in spring. The colours used to symbolise rebirth and rejuvenation. But the powders used are poisonous, using chromium and other heavy metals that can be lethal if ingested. The paints contain lethal doses of lead. In any other country holi would come with a health warning, or be banned.

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Up close and personal at rare 1974AD reunion

It has been 14 years since 1974AD first performed, and the Nepali rock sensation group is performing at the courtyard of the Patan Museum on Saturday to mark the anniversary.

The concert is also made possible because all band members are currently in Kathmandu. Sanjay Shrestha has returned after a year in Australia, where he studied drums and toured with his band, Stupa. Manose Singh has been touring the world for the past two years, with back-to-back concerts with Deva Premal. He is back in Nepal only for March.

“The energy within the band when we are all together is magical,” says Sanjay Shrestha, “we wanted to do a concert as much for ourselves as for our fans.”

The concert on Saturday will re-interpret some of 1974AD’s old favourites and will focus on hit ballads. The venue will also mean that the concert will be more intimate and the acoustic numbers will be unplugged. “This will be different than playing in the stadium,” says Ninkar Yakthumba, who is on bass guitar. “Patan Museum will allow us to share more of ourselves with our audience. We want to get up close and personal.”

6.30 PM Saturday, 22 March
Patan Museum
Tickets Rs 550 available at Moksh, Himalayan Java, Bakery Cafe, Jai Nepal and Kumari Gremna
984130007

Silent beauty
A new career path for Bhairawa’s deaf and dumb

A midbroken pieces of protecting paper, crumbs and small piles of brown dust, Sabitri Gurung is hard at work. She selects a tile from the pile beside her, cuts it into shape using pliers and smoothens out the rough edges with sandpaper. She looks down at the half-finished mosaic of a gecko, unable to decide where to place her piece.

Nineteen-year old Reena notices her and walks over, and with hand motions, explains to Sabitri what she should do. Sabitri is speech-and hearing-impaired.

She nods in agreement, and then turns back to her gecko.

“I want to earn my own money,” says Sabitri, who left school in grade one because she had difficulty understanding the teacher. She went to Kathmandu for a one-year vocational course in sewing and learned to stitch, sew and darn. She even got herself a sewing machine. But after the course, she couldn’t find even one person who would hire her.

“The hearing-impaired are taught tailoring and sewing but that doesn’t help them because no one wants to go to a deaf tailor,” says Philip Holmes, whose charity, the Esther Benjamins Trust, has been supporting the local deaf school here since 1999.

“Mosaics and art work are a better alternative,” in Kathmandu, many speech- and hearing-impaired apply to the Bakery Cafe chain as waiters, but there is no such option in Bhairawa.

“There used to be a garment factory where our graduates worked,” says Dal Kumari Gurung, principal of the school. “But now, even that has closed down.”

It is only few weeks since Holmes started the course and there are already 26 participants, mostly female. The teachers, Reena, 19 and Manju, 20 are from Holmes’ Kathmandu-based Himalayan Mosaics, a non-profit organisation which employs girls rescued from Indian circuses (see ‘Artistic healing’, #341).

Reena and Manju are both former circus children. Just a year ago, they were the ones learning to coordinate colours and cut shapes but now, they’re doing the teaching. “I’ve become independent making mosaics and now I want others to learn what I know,” says Manju.

What started out as above all ‘Artistic healing’, #341 has mushroomed into a full-fledged business. Himalayan Mosaics employs 17 young women and 20 more are in training at Holmes’ former residence in Godavari. In addition to making mosaics, the girls are now learning pottery and sculpting. Once the hearing-impaired in Bhairawa complete their training, they too will become part of Himalayan Mosaics, earning a commission for every mosaic they make.

The Bhairawa workshop is bright and specks of dust hang suspended in the sunlight filtering through the windows. Talk is muted between the two teachers and the only other sounds are the splapping of pliers and the clink of bathroom tiles.

Himalayan Mosaics is conducting a sale of the mosaics at the Summit Hotel, 22-23 March, 10AM-5PM. www.ebtrust.org.uk

Himalayan Mosaics

Don’t miss our sale of distinctive hand-crafted mosaics at The Summit Hotel

Friday 21st March 6-8 p.m.
Saturday/Sunday 22nd—23rd March 10 a.m.—5 p.m.

For further information contact
Philip Holmes on 9851105996
or by e mail at
philip.holmes@ebtrust.org.uk

Smile, and the country smiles with you

Photographer Pushpa KC has always been fascinated by the various faces of Nepali politicians. He says although the public may have seen them in the heat of the moment, giving elaborate speeches, protesting on the streets, sitting outside Singh Darbar, very few have seen that these politicians also have a lighter side to them.

Gallery 32 @ Dent Inn has collected these rare moments from KC’s lens where the leaders are smiling and put them together for their Smiling State exhibition. The organisers hope that more politicians show their lighter moments after the elections.
Virtual medicine

Prem Bahadur Pun is a senior surgeon at the Om Hospital in Pokhara. But he is originally from Nangi, and is often on the internet with the health post in his home village advising the health workers there about how to treat patients.

Working through a webcam, Pun can examine a patient who is in a room two day’s walk away. For roadless areas of Nepal where people have poor health services, telemedicine may be the most effective way to save lives.

“Look at me, sitting here in Pokhara, I am able to ensure good treatment to people who live in my native village,” Pun told Nepal Times this week.

He is part of a wireless network established in 20 villages in Myagdi, Kaski and Parbat districts by Nepal Wireless Network Project, a brainchild of Mahabir Pun who has tried to use better internet connectivity to improve service delivery in health and education. Prem Bahadur Pun says telemedicine saves lives because many patients can’t be moved and local health workers at times lack medical knowledge to deal with complicated illnesses.

The project is now expanding to Makwanpur, Palpa and Dolakha. Doctors at the Model Hospital in Kathmandu regularly consult patients and health workers at the Gaurishankhar Hospital in Dolakha via webcam.

As a surgeon, Pun speaks with community health workers about their patients over the internet, and sometimes directly to the patients themselves. He is on-call most of the day in Pokhara via both his office and on mobile phone. The most common ailments are fractures, full injuries, dental problems and diarrhoea, dehydration in children. If patients need x-rays or operations, Pun advises them to come down to Pokhara.

The wireless internet is also helping schools in the three districts. Assistant principal of the Himalaya Secondary School in Tolka, Ananta Subedi says “From the internet I am able to provide my students free supplementary study materials,” although new technologies can help deliver education as well, it will have to be the government that will need to replicate this nationwide with public-private partnerships.

Thomas Gregkjer Nielsen in Kaski

WONG SHU YUN in MYAGDI

Many others who have won major international awards rest on their laurels, bask in celebrityhood, or go into early retirement. Not Mahabir Pun.

After he won the Magsaysay Award for his pioneering work to bridge the digital divide in Nepal’s remote mountains last year, Pun has thrown himself with renewed vigour to enlarge his native region.

“We have been trying to scale up income-generation,” says the soft-spoken 53-year-old, “we want to expand IT services so it helps agriculture, education, health and tourism in even more remote villages.”

Pun’s village of Nangi is located on a forested mountainside at 2,250m and requires a seven-hour vertical climb on foot from Beni. A computer engineer in the United States, he did something unusual for a Nepali: he came back to Nepal after graduation. And even more unusual, he returned to his home village.

“Web pioneer”, #360

Pun set up the Nepal Wireless Networking Project in Nangi in 1997, where there was no electricity, no telephone lines, no roads, no health posts and few schools. Pun believed that by leapfrogging technology with computers, solar power and wireless connectivity, he could help lift his village out of poverty.

It worked. The literacy rate shot up as children used computers and the internet to broaden their horizons. The health post used telemedicine to treat patients. Families in the surrounding villages who have above 22 years old (the youngest recorded member) have savings in one of these cooperatives:

Rachana Banest, mother of three, borrowed Rs 20,000 from her cooperative (Probashit Women’s Saving and Credit) four years ago to set up a grocery shop. She paid off the loan within six months and has shifted her business to a larger premise she recently built. Rachana now has her household, earning 50 percent of the total income, while her husband is working in Macau.

But the women’s exploration...
women go to school

of new roles comes at a price, as Mahabir Pun proves that there is life after a Magsaysay award.

A generation has passed since the winner Mahabir Pun proved that there is life after a Magsaysay award. It seems that the reason that spurred local women to form groups working for the wider community, although the solar light and solar lantern for light. Earlier, she used to spend Rs 400 a month to buy kerosene for lighting, and although the solar light and battery cost Rs 2,200 it has already paid for itself. Off the grid and far away from any roads, Danda Gaon with its 17 households is becoming a model eco-village. Money for the alternative energy sources came as soft loan from the government with support from Practical Action Nepal and villagers chipped in with labour.

Gorkha’s eco village lights the way

Kul Bahadur, a teacher at Toman Danda Primary School, prepares class work by a solar-powered light which runs for seven hours using daylight charging. In nearby Luprang, 43-year-old Lal Bahadur Chepang is working on the tomato field which he fertilises with the rich slurry oozing out of his biogas plant. The digester not just supplies methane for cooking but yields rich fertiliser that has boosted vegetable harvests, increasing income.

“Since using this manure we don’t use chemicals anymore,” says Lal Bahadur who now earns up to Rs 30,000 a year from selling tomatoes. The villages around Brumichok are now getting ready to declare themselves a successful renewable energy VDC. They have wind and solar hybrid systems, biogas, solar lamps, smoke hood chimneys and are now getting ready to install a micro-hydro plant.

Dhruve Simkhada in Gorkha

of new roles comes at a price, as Mahabir Pun proves that there is life after a Magsaysay award.

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Dhruve Simkhada in Gorkha
Nepal is too heterogeneous for ethnic federalism to work

Nepal is a country that is truly a ‘mosaic’—the word that appears in the title of both books. For example, while ‘only’ nine languages are spoken in Kalikot, Morang is home to as many as 96 of the country’s 103 ethnic groups. This country is truly a ‘mosaic’—the word that appears in the title of both books.

The map books illustrate simply and elegantly just how complicated Nepal’s diversity is. While Kalikot is home to only 34 caste or ethnic groups, for example, Samsari, Moming and Jhua have as many as 96 of the country’s 103 ethnic groups. This country is truly a ‘mosaic’—the word that appears in the title of both books.

Rimal starts off with maps depicting the 12 different sets. Sharma’s book also highlights the mobility of Nepal’s ethnic groups. Fifty years ago, for example, 99.6 percent of all Limbus lived in the eastern hills. Today that figure is down to 72 percent.

The main concept behind both books is that a visual representation of Nepal’s diversity will assist policy makers and the stewards of the country’s 103 ethnic groups. Fifty years ago, for example, 99.6 percent of all Limbus lived in the eastern hills. Today that figure is down to 72 percent.

Rimal hopes the maps will help “in the process of restructuring the state and in taking judicious decisions.” It’s a point well made and well taken, but one which presupposes that the obstacle to implementation is an absence of facts rather than a lack of political will and commitment.

A country like Nepal? Sharma’s answer is that it is possible to demarcate ethnic provinces, but no ethnic group will have a majority in any one of them. Nepal’s future federal units must, by definition, be multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic and not regions exclusive to one community who promote a vision of ethnic purity that likely never existed.

The rationale is that they are racially and historically the same group. This may sound like common-sense, but it is based on the proposed ethnic provinces. When counted together, Bahuns and Chhetris outnumber ethnic groups even in the provinces the Maoists have demarcated for Limbu, Kirat and Magar. It is only in the Limbus and the population.

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MUCH has been said about the role of the media in turning public opinion against the American engagement in Vietnam, as images of the war’s atrocities were streamed daily on the evening news. Of course, the television coverage didn’t cause the war to end immediately, but in America’s present engagements in the Afghanistan and Iraq, no doubt with the power of images of war in mind, there has been an effort to manage the video coverage that gets on television screens. Perhaps in reaction to this, we have now seen a spate of critical documentary pieces on George Bush’s ‘war on terror’, including two Oscar nominees – Taxi to the Dark Side and No End in Sight.

Alex Gibney’s Taxi to the Dark Side gets its title from the episode of an Afghan taxi driver, Dilawar, who died in custody after interrogation, torture and beating by the American army. His story is Gibney’s departure point (the documentary continues through Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo) for investigating the uses and excuses for torture by the American government.

Highlighting the efforts of two New York Times reporters investigating Dilawar’s case, the film is a testimony to the importance (and perhaps the limits) of the free press. Much like in Gibney’s previous work Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room on the Enron scandal, Taxi is more impressive for the appalling, damning material it uncovers than for its filmmaking. Gibney chooses to use post-mortem photographs of Dilawar, naked and bruised. The images are shocking and, against expectation, humanising.

Interestingly, the sympathies of the film also extend to the soldiers who were ultimately charged in the case of Dilawar.

Charles Ferguson’s No End in Sight (on which Gibney is producer) is a taut, polished and engaging documentary that gives a walk-through of the immediate aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, a period of time which saw massive looting in Baghdad, and Paul Bremer’s brief and disastrous tenure as the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority. As the somewhat chunky tagline ‘The Inside Story from the Ultimate Insiders’ indicates, No End in Sight relies heavily on talking heads, a trait which is often the bane of documentary films. But the lineup of former military and administrative officials makes for a very engaging commentary on the downward spiral of events in Iraq. It is a gallery of articulate, cool and wronged individuals, who tersely relate the dismissal of their knowledge and experience by their ideologically rigid bosses, who began and persisted with giddy idealism in the face of mounting failures.

There’s a growing sense of horror as the events unfold, even as you know the outcome. They don’t make spy thrillers this thrilling. Or this maddening.

Two films examining the ‘war on terror’

Taxi to the Dark Side
Director: Alex Gibney.

No End in Sight
Director: Charles Ferguson.
2007. R. 102 min.
EXHIBITIONS

- Himalayan Mosaics: a sale of handmade mosaics, 21 March, 5-9PM and 22-23 March at 10AM-5PM at the Summit Hotel, Sanepa.
- Smiling state: a smiling portfolio of Nepali leaders by Pushpa KC, at Gallery 32, from 23 March-10 April, 10AM-6PM. 4041942
- Petals paintings by Neeva Joshi Pradhan, 11AM-5.30 PM, until 23 March at Park Gallery, Lazoanpat. 449305
- The Unspoken paintings by Madan Chitrakar, until 3 Apr, 11AM-6PM at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. 4281048

EVENTS

- Weekly human rights film screenings, Hotel Rawa: a film by Terry Gote at the Sama Theatre, Gurusuki, 5PM on 23 March. 4466956
- Once a film by John Carney, 6PM, 23 March at the Lazzimpat Gallery Cafe.
- Journey through Nepal Art, 5-8PM and 22-23 March at 10AM-5PM at the Summit Hotel, Sanepa.

MUSIC

- Baja Gaaj: playing funk, jazz and rock at Mohit, Pulchok, 21 March, 8.30 PM onwards. 5528212
- Unexpressed melody: a performance by Santosh Bhakha Shrestha on sitar and Narabar Gurung on tabla, 22 March, 6PM at the Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Disha, Rs. 500.
- Yankey and friends: live acoustic music every Friday at the Bourbon room Restro-bar, Lal Dastar.
- Anil Shahi: every Wednesday and Rasmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex. 8PM. 5521408

DINING

- Easter at Kilroy’s: Kriol with chocolates and the Easter Bunny, 21 March, 4205446
- The Kaiser Cafe: open now at the Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarka’s Group of Hotels, open from 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- Steak stock: with Kathmandu’s signature steak available for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- Anil Jain: Jain Restaurant with a new Italian menu, Kupondole. 5548472
- Bourbon Room: Restro-bar: now open for lunch and dinner with specially selected cocktails, Lal Darbar.
- Cocktails and grooves: with Inner Groove at Fusion-the bar at Dwarka’s, every Wednesday, at Dwarka’s Hotel.
- Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- Chinese and Continental: cuisine and complimentary fresh brewed coffee after every meal at a Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.
- Illy espresso coffee at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails.
- International four course buffet at the Sunshine Cafe with a range of Boris’ signature dishes at the Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4048999
- Pan Asian evenings every Wednesday at The Cafe, Hyatt Regency with food from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. 4491234
- Jazz in Patan with coffee, lunch and dinner at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 11.30 AM-10PM. 5527028
- Saturday special barbeque: sekuwa, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Wirly Hills, Nagphat every Saturday. 9841250848.
- Dice-licious brunch at Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50 percent discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30 PM. 4273999
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and specialty coffees at Roadhouse, Bhuddatari. 4486807, Pulchok 521755, and Thamel 4200167.
- Starry night barbeque at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 699.00 nett, per person, at the Shambari Garden, every Friday 6.30 PM onwards. 4412999
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- Caulkta’s rolls, biyani, kebabs Indian cuisine at Baawarchi, Bluebird Mall Food Court. 9741000735
- Lavaza 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. 4486907

Cocktails and grooves

Pizza

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com
EURPE IS WATCHING: The European Union Election Observation Mission was launched on Tuesday. The government invited the European Union to monitor the CA election on 10 April.

FLAG WEAVING: Tailors in Bhairawa were busy last Friday sewing Nepali Congress banners for the election.

BOND OF TRUST: Santa Bahadur Lama (right) writes on behalf of blind student Ram Gopal Karki for the latter’s SLC examination in Patan on Monday.

KOREA PATH: Thousands joined the queue in Tripureswor this week to get a registration form for the Korean language exam. Proficiency in Korean language is a prerequisite to get a job there.
The nearer we get to elections, the more it looks like the Prachanda Jugend are doing their damnedest to damage their chairman’s chances of winning in elections. Badgers are beginning to panic that their leaders may actually lose, hence Uncle Dahal’s tirade against Uncle Sam last week.

He alluded to a mysterious foreign conspiracy led by American imperialists and Indian expansionists to prevent him from winning in Rolpa. (If that is so then why is His Fierceness going to India before elections?) Actually, Comrades Lotus Flower, Cloud and Jit Bahadur don’t need any foreign conspiracy to lose. The YCL will do very nicely.

Extracting campaign finances with telephone threats has become so common that it is impossible to locate anyone on the phone these days. Businessmen, traders, doctors, senior civil servants have all switched off their mobiles and disconnected landlines.

On Shivaratri a bunch of street urchins had pulled a rope across the road to extract money from passersby near Pashupati. Among Uncle Dahal and Uncle Sam the people forced to cough up a Rs 1 donation were a bunch of YCL in grey racksuits. This is what happens when the Nepali Jungvolk are more powerful than the Prachanda Jugend that inspired them.

The YCL was at the receiving end of a technique it regularised, but it has long been perfectly acceptable to forcibly demand money in the name of deity in Nepal. This is what the Maoist use of the tactic not only acceptable but somehow sacred and acceptable in the Nepali public sphere.

The former subterranean comrades are showing themselves to be no different from their mainstream counterparts with the revolutionary nepotism in the Ministry of Metaphysical Planning and mass recruitment of cadre in the Ministry of Jungles. The Maoist election manifesto whitewashes even willful defaulters by adding a small clause about NPAs that reads: ‘borrowers can be pardoned if they have good intentions’.

Right. The guy stole a billion bucks from a public bank, but it’s all right because he is well-intentioned. Irony of the month: the biggest supporters of the crookiest capitalists in this country are the communists.

One week after tourism minister Prithbi Subba Gurung told NYT there was pressure from China to close off Everest till 10 May, his ministry spokesman has denied it outright. The statement reads exactly like the China Tibet Mountaineering Association press release, saying expeditions will be doing their climbs only after 10 May because of “overcrowding” on the mountain. How is there going to be overcrowding if no expeditions are allowed? It will be crawling with PLA, stupid.

There is nothing unusual about our guys buckling under Beijing’s pressure, but did the Chinese also tell our riot police to beat nuns holding candles like they were rag dolls? And not a peep from our heroic human rights activists yet.

So the Election Commission has got the Press Council to finally haul up Gorkhakopatra and warn it to follow the Code of Conduct. The Maoist mouth-organ is so loyal to its masters that it printed Comrade Dahal’s entire election manifesto as a special supplement. But the warning seems to have worked because the paper then started printing the manifestos of all the other parties as well. It wouldn’t have helped boost the paper’s declining circulation, that’s for sure.

Kingi’s name is not on the voter’s list, so he can’t even vote himself out of power. There isn’t much for him to do these days, so he sits in the palace googling himself and probably contemplating another interview with sympathetic media like perhaps the North Korean News Agency, Yonhap, this time.

Just exactly why is KingG looking so unperturbed even as his kingdom is nearing its last throes? Does he know something we don’t?

Is he planning to publicly expose the secret deal between him, the eh-maleys and kangress in the palace on 23 April, 2006 that would have ensured his safety and the continuity of the monarchy in return for not holding out against street protests?