Let’s cooperate
Maoist leaders lobby the international community for trust and support

DEWAN RAI

The final results of the 10 April elections now in, the Maoists will be the largest party in a hung assembly and will need help to form a new government. In the past week, Maoist leaders have been engaged in hectic lobbying with the parties. They have also tried to reassure the business community and Nepal’s donors not to be spooked by their radical rhetoric.

Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal and deputy Baburam Bhattarai were invited to a regular monthly meeting of the UN with the Nepalo-based donor community on Thursday. Diplomats quizzed the Maoist duo about the party’s policy on foreign aid, the budget, education policy, army integration and the monarchy.

Seats set aside at the closed door meeting for representatives from China and India were empty. American ambassador, Nancy Powell, was present but didn’t ask anything. The US State Department said on Tuesday that there was no move to lift the Maoist terror tag, but hinted there could be a review.

“We reassured our foreign friends that we are not a doctrinaire party, we are not against privatization and globalization and will pursue a mixed economy,” Dahal told the press after the meeting.

Speaking at a panel discussion on Tuesday organised by Nepali Times, Maoist shadow foreign minister CP Gajurel said his party was going to be much more efficient about using foreign aid. “Unlike in the past when aid did not reach the people because of institutionalised corruption, every penny of foreign aid will henceforth directly benefit Nepal,” he said.

Gajurel was sure his party would lead the next government and stake its claim to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Home Ministry, Finance and Defence.

EDITORIAL
Peace on a war-footing

Also speaking in the panel was Markus Heiniger from the Swiss Foreign Ministry. “The lesson from Nepal’s peace process is that all stakeholders need to be included,” he said, “all the parties must be on board as the government moves towards conflict transformation.”

Gajurel said his party would overhaul the education system, but clarified: “It’s not our policy to close down private schools.”

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Let’s cooperate
**PEACE ON A WAR-FOOTING**

The Maoists will soon be leading a government, and whether or not they do that with inside or outside support of the NC, UML or MJP is not so important in the larger scheme of things. There are many reasons why the result of the 10 April constituent assembly election was a landmark, but the most important is that it was a popular rejection of the status quo. Vijay Bahadur Yadav was something of a shock. Yes, there was blatant and widespread pre-poll intimidation of voters by the VCP, but the media agreed to the election result. There are plenty of lessons for the EC so these times are not repeated in the next general elections. The excesses in the campaign period by over-zealous young communists need to be meticulously documented. Lapsed in pre-poll security has to be studied. There have to be safeguards in place to assure voters that their ballots are secret and sacrosanct. Electronic ballots must be made nationwide next time and there must be provisions for absentee voting.

There are three weeks after the EC declares the results till the time the constituent assembly meets. That isn’t much time to sort out procedural issues like the exact sequence of events in replacing the monarchy with a republican head of state, agreeing on a workplan for the assembly and setting up a new government. There will be strong temptation to be distracted by who gets what ministry, whether or not other parties join in and if so what portfolios they get to keep. We have to get out of the next-seek-ing mentality that has naturally made the division of the spoils all-important after an election.

Much more important this time, if this is truly a New Nepal, is who gets to do what and how well they perform. Is there a proper policy framework guiding them? It would reinforce confidence in the Nepali people if the Maoists stayed above the wheeling-dealing to focus on immediate relief and give the people a tangible peace dividend. The smaller parties must also resist the urge to make political capital out of the Maoist disaffection with the driving seat.

That would be true for medium-term goals like major peace-building through food for work in infrastructure. In the longer-term, we need a more balanced investment climate so investors pour in money to develop hydropower, set up manufacturing bases to exploit Nepal’s comparative advantage. We need peace and development on a war footing, as it were. From what we’ve heard so far, the Maoists seem to broadly know what is wrong with the country but what they need help in identifying what needs to be done, and be strongly supported without making big mistakes.

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ROAD FOR NEPAL

I think that Baburam Bhattarai’s economic ideas are sound and practical (‘The investment climate will improve’, K3N6 and full version on Nepal Times website, ‘Radical democrats’), but I also wish to make a suggestion. Nepal should no longer be a dumping ground for Chinese goods which have been rejected by the rest of the world. It is wrecking our own production base, as anything our small country can make is immediately swamped. I agree with many others of his suggestions, but I think that the families of victims killed by both sides in the war should be recognised and compensated. This is important. Government should be more transparent, and the police force should be both cleaned up and strengthened to provide real protection to Nepali citizens. I think it’s better that Nepal’s revolution will now be a gradual change rather than a drastic, violent confrontation.

Pradiptra Rana, email

Baburam Bhattarai’s interview really depressed me. There is not one iota of new economic thinking in his agenda. What new or different views did he give that NC or UML politicians have not put forward already? Or that’s not in the usual recommendations from the World Bank or ADB? I don’t see any insight in the economic thinking or agenda for the ‘New Nepal’. Anyway, how can we trust a party that calls itself Maoist but is prepared to hobnob with the usual recommendations from the NC and UML politicians have not put forward already? Or that’s not in the usual recommendations from the World Bank or ADB? I don’t see any insight in the economic thinking or agenda for the ‘New Nepal’.

Pradiptra Rana, email

OK Lal’s reference to businessmen as ‘Kathmandu fat-cats and Lalitpur moneybags’ (‘The survival of the weakest’, #396) shows us the apathy that Nepali society at large has towards its entrepreneurs. No economy can grow without the contribution of its private sector. What people like OK Lal fail to understand is that wealth creation is necessary before wealth distribution. A simple mathematical example for you, Mr Lal: zero divided by any number equals zero. It’s a good thing that the Maoists have realised this, or at least are trying to show that they have realised it.

Swagat R Pyakurel, email

The constitutional assembly gives us hope to build a new Nepali nation state. But we also have to seriously consider what might happen if the future political system fails to meet people’s high and diverse expectations. In this time it is crucial that all political pundits look towards true and meaningful democracy. The Mexican anthropologist Bonfil Batalla said that democracy can only work properly if it serves the benefit of all the country, not just a minority or an elite. He also stresses the importance of cultural pluralism. I think this is especially apt for Nepal right now. We need to be bold enough on the agenda of federalism and self-determination both to decentralise power and empower minorities.

Prakash Thapa, Virginia, USA

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Prakash Thapa, Virginia, USA

Why are you views still so anti-Maoist? Please be positive. Now that the Nepali people have elected the CPN (Maoist) enthusiastically, please respect that. Do you recall the open letter you wrote to Prachanda asking him questions (‘Dear comrade’, #392)? Your question was very nicely answered by the Nepali people with the election result.

Pashupati Neupane, Sydney

I strongly feel that the CA election was more a populist and propagandist display for the political class of Nepal than any sort of necessity for the nation itself. There are many countries in the world which are peaceful and developed but never had a whole election just to make their constitution. Rather, they preferred a consensus constitution, written by legal experts, representing all political stakeholders of the country. Anyway, hopefully this chapter in Nepal’s history is over once and for all. But who is happy with the outcome? Truly speaking, no one. The Maoists? Just look at the u-turn in their rhetoric on various national and international issues.

Pradeep Sharma, Mumbai

HARDLY SURPRISING

Congratulations to Deepak Thapa for this rigorous and unbiased analysis (‘Hardly surprising’, #396). This election has proved that you cannot survive in politics anymore based on what you did 60 years ago. Nepal has shown that like other countries its politics are not static but dynamic. The people are ready for a radical change. Many NC and UML candidates were known to be corrupt, and this contributed to the parties’ defeat.

Pradeep Sharma, Mumbai

I find it funny when the Nepal media blames the Tarai people for ‘voting along ethnic lines’, as Deepak Thapa did. Didn’t they elect NC and UML politicians time and time again, who in turn always choose to favour their own ethnic mancheste and sycophants? Just look at GP Koirala’s constituency. What has he or any other Pahadi leader done for Madhes or unprivileged people in the Tarai? Now it’s time for change and I hope the media will bear the importance of this in mind in the future.

Vivek Gupta, email

One does not know what to make of so-called experts such as Deepak Thapa. Two months ago, in your sister publication Himal Khabarpatrika, he wrote an article saying there was growing disenchantment with the Maoists and they were victims of their own ethnic politics. Now that the election results are in, Thapa says the Maoist victory is ‘hardly surprising’. His article attributes their success to their organisational skills, as if no one else had guessed this and you need to be an expert to say it. What happened to his claim about Maoists and ethnic politics? I think Nepal Times should start an ‘Expert Watch’ column so readers can decide for themselves who really knows what they’re talking about and who are really just hangers-on and self-styled experts.

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Pooja Belbase, Kathmandu
Nepal Dairy’s river of milk

Nepal’s top private dairy is preparing a new generation of entrepreneurs

Sheere Ng

Each time Nepal Dairy makes a breakthrough, the effects cause a wide ripple in the Nepali dairy industry, ultimately benefiting not only consumers and producers, but also the company’s business competitors. But HB Rajbhandary, the company’s director, is not worried about inadvertently helping his rivals, for him the company’s business and the national interest go hand in hand.

When Rajbhandary set up first private milk company in Nepal 25 years ago, it eased the shortage of processed milk, laid the foundations for subsequent dairy businesses and provided additional income for farmers. The supply of milk is often volatile, and in periods when there is a surplus, some companies stop buying and call for a ‘milk holiday’, which harms many producers who depend on being able to sell their milk.

Yet, Nepal Dairy, which has been selected by Nepali Times as its May Company of the Month, continued to buy even more and ventured into product diversification as a solution. Today, in retail outlets across the country, he sells ice cream, cheese, pizzas and pastries. In the process, ND has created thousands of jobs and given dairy farmers a fair price for their milk.

One difficulty Rajbhandary is currently facing, and this is surprising in a country which is burbling with youth, is a graying workforce. Nepal’s brain drain means many young and middle-aged executives have left and there are only seniors who run the company. In an effort to bring in new blood into Nepal Dairy, Rajbhandary recently opened his doors to college students training them in the processes of the dairy industry. He is now preparing to channel a portion of Nepal Dairy’s profits into setting up a Nepal Dairy Institute of Technology and Management. This is because during the 1970s when the country experienced a shortage of processed milk, Rajbhandary—then general manager of the Dairy Development Cooperation and a PhD in Dairy technology—didn’t have the technicality to solve the problem. “I only understood things theoretically,” he says. He had to seek help from countries like New Zealand and Denmark. Hence, in an industry where many players prefer to keep their methodology hush-hush, Rajbhandary says that helping the younger generation to get hands-on experience is a responsibility that established players should shoulder.

Asked what happens if the students decide not to work for the company upon graduation, Rajbhandary shrugs: “They will probably work for other dairy companies. Nepal needs qualified, competent young people.”

It is this ability to look beyond his company’s welfare to the national interest that sets Rajbhandry apart from many of his peers. He hopes that if the training produces good managers, he can split the company into separate units such as fast food and bakery sections, and expand each one under separate management.

The institute will also train dairy farmers to diversify their products to encourage entrepreneurship in the countryside. Rajbhandary says ND will help with distribution.

At 75, Rajbhandary has the energy, drive and vision of a man half his age. But he is determined to pass the torch to the new generation. When Nepali Times commented that he will be missed, he laughed and said, “Maybe there are people who want to see younger faces.”

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Since 1963
Mission drift

Reading or watching interviews with Marxist leaders these days, one could get the impression that they have won not the boring constituent assembly election but the much shinier general election.

Strictly business Ashutosh Tiwari

Instead of sticking primarily to the task of making a new constitution as soon as possible, and zheeng for general elections to start the process of formally governing Nepal under the agreed-upon rules (which, if I remember correctly is the mandate of the CA), the Maoists are busy with platitudes on how they will address issues affecting Nepal’s all-round development. It could just be a play to the gallery. But if we start to forget what the CA election was for, a worrying start of mission drift is likely to be upon us.

True, the CA elections showed that millions of poor and hitherto neglected Nepalis want their concerns addressed. And the Maoists have wasted no time in suggesting that they have the right answers, even though reaching that ideal state of communism will by their own admission require a century or more.

But what’s forgotten in this assurance game is that, just as Giri’s capstone contribution lay in ensuring the successful completion of the CA election, the Maoists’ biggest contribution ahead should be delivering a new constitution to the Nepali people within a reasonable frame of time. After all, even when everything else is fundamental rules, enshrined in the constitution, can be mitigated, the government accountable yet get on with the business of governance.

If they try to multi-task and be all things to all people, the Maoists risk drawing out the process of constitution-making to interminable lengths. That happens, it creates opportunities for trouble as the can then be potentially abused to consolidate a hold on power for longer periods.

The new government should not forget what it was elected for

The other parties should learn from recent history. Had the interim government focused primarily on getting the CA elections completed by the original date of June 2007, a mere 14 months after the second Jana election, there was for them to make up and enforce what they could. The other parties should do the same thing in the run-up to the election.

The public’s frustration at the government’s drift is growing. This is why the challenge for the people is to get the government on track and keep it there. Constitutions are not something Nepal can ill afford, but the much sexier general election will likely get all our attention, including internationally, was postponed three times until pressure from all quarters, including internationally, was no longer resistible. No wonder its lost focus made the main parties identified with it the Maoists.

This is where the challenge for civil society, the international community, the media and all Nepal’s citizens is to have a steady eye on the new government so that the winners of the CA elections focus on and specify the deliverable task for which they were elected: making this country’s constitution. Constitutions do not just get written, they get delivered. This is why the challenge for the people is to keep the government on track and make sure it delivers.

Do you have different advice for Nepal? Nepali executives are no different than those in other countries. I have worked in 15 to 20 countries and found that human and emotional needs are identical. Integrity and cheating have the same meaning in New York, New Delhi and New Zealand. Right from my childhood I have had a close affinity to Nepal. I have always admired certain great traits of the Nepalis, such as their bravery, loyalty and their ability to overcome adversity. So I am looking forward to visiting Nepal and hoping to see it as one of the top nations of the world with foundations built upon integrity, respect and responsibility.

Management self-help guru, Shiv Khera, is an educator, business consultant and a much sought-after speaker. His clients include Lufthansa, Johnson & Johnson, Motorola, Nestle, Goldman Sachs, Smith\Kline Beecham, Tetrapak, Sanofi Toront, Phillips, Gillette, Daimler Chrysler, HSBC Bank, Carrier, Deutsche Bank and General Motors. He is also the author of the International Best Seller books, You Can Win and Living with Honour. Over 20,000 people have attended his three-day dynamic workshop internationally. Khera will be in Kathmandu next week to conduct a series of training sessions with Nepali executives and managers.

Nepal Times: Tell us about your life so far.
Shiv Khera: My formal education stopped with B Com (Hons) at Shiv Khera: “Win together”...
Nepali cartoonists had a field day during the election campaign and after, lampooning everything from the unexpected win of the Maoists, the bad losers in the other parties and looked forward to the challenges of the parties.

Party Office
I came here to resign because I lost in the election. Is there anyone here who has won and can accept my resignation?

Abin Shrestha in Samay, 24 April

Chair: Country
Spikes: Employment, price hike, economic development, foreign relations, army integration

Dewen in Kantipur, 16 April

I We want the king to step down gracefully.

Rataysan in Kantipur, 20 April

I didn’t listen to us when we say don’t watch tv. It is not that you were defeated. The people are giving you the opportunity to rest!

Uttam Sapkota in Punarjagaran, 22 April

I We will not be defeated in the election, even if we are, we won’t accept it!

Suman Manandhar in Nepal Samacharpatra, 5 April

Fear. Terror.

Basu Kshitiz in Budhabar, 23 March

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2009 Ssangyong Actyon

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Psoriasis

2009 Ssangyong Actyon

Psoriasis

2009 Ssangyong Actyon

Psoriasis
Rainbow assembly

The constituent assembly will be radically different from any elected house in Nepali history. Not only will a third of the members be women, but the sea of faces will also be more representative of Nepal’s ethnic diversity. Tharu, Tamang, Dalit, Magar, Rai, Limbu, Gurung, never included in proportion to their populations in the past, will be present.

To be sure, the ratios will still not be completely proportional, and the smaller among the 103ethnic groups in Nepal will not have a place. Still, most rights activists say it is a vast improvement on the elite-dominance of past legislatures.

After the final results of the elections were announced on Wednesday, the final tally of janajati candidates in the first past-the-post ballot stood at 81. Another 124 janajatis will be selected in the proportional representation segment, bringing the janajati ratio to 34 percent of the 601-member assembly.

This does not quite match the 37 percent of Nepal’s population which they comprise, but it is an improvement on their representation in parliaments in the 1990s, which was never more than 29 percent.

The majority of janajatis who won seats in the FPTP ballot are Maoists, with 51 candidates. Other parties trail behind with 12 janajatis from the UML, 10 from the NC, 4 from the MJP, 2 from the NWPP and one each from the UML, and TMLP.

In constituencies like Gorkha-1 and Bardiya-1, which used to be strongholds of the NC and UML, Maoist women candidates have trumped veteran politicians like Chiranjivi Upadhyay and Bum Dev Gautam.

“In this election people voted for transformation, therefore it is not surprising that Maoist women have defeated these old leaders,” says Sarita Giri of Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Aamandal). Advocate Sabita Bhandari Rural of the Nepal Bar Association agrees that Nepal was desperate for change, and it was the failure of the old and male politicians to realise this that brought their downfall.

High hopes ride on the unprecedented victory of women candidates

Some elected representatives are war widows. Experts on women’s issues welcome this, but also raise the point that since the process of writing the constitution of a country is complicated, it is crucial to have legal experts who understand women’s issues in the assembly.

But Giri isn’t so worried. Women were elected because people trust them to be good leaders, she says, and anyone who says the elected women did not go to school is just trying to discourage them.

“Sarita Regmi, who defeated UML’s Bam Dev Gautam (17,955 to 13,773) is back in Bardiya, visiting voters in her constituency and thanking them for their support. Regmi has been with the Maoists since 1990, which was never more than 29 percent.

One janajati group will have representation in parliament for the first time. Rama Nanda Mandai who won in Morang-4 is the first ever MP from the Ganagam community. Despite being the three largest janajati groups in Nepal, Magars, Tamangs and Tharus never had proper representation in parliament, and that has changed this time.

Pasang Sherpa, president of Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) says the election results mark a great stride forward for the janajati movement, but adds that simply being elected is not enough. “janajati MPs will now have to raise our issues and lobby to get them passed in the assembly.”

NEFIN’S agenda has long included ethnic and linguistic autonomy with right to self-determination. The Maoists adopted a similar policy for the constitution, proposing 11 ethnically-based federal states.

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Getting a taste of Nepal
Nepali cookbook wins international award

When Jyoti Pathak (pictured, right) went to live in the United States 40 years ago, she did her household chores, spending a lot of time in the kitchen trying to make Nepali meals for her doctor husband and three children.

There were not too many Indian spice shops in the remote corner of New York state where they lived, and Jyoti had to rely on friends and family bringing masala, gundruk, maseura and tama from Nepal.

There were some Indian cookbooks in the bookshops, but nothing about Nepali cuisine. That is when the idea to write a Nepali cookbook first came to her.

Today, nearly four decades later, Jyoti has been awarded the Best Foreign Cuisine book in the Gourmand World Cookbook Award in the US for her book, A Taste of Nepal. Jyoti was in London last week to receive another nomination for her book to be declared the best foreign cuisine book internationally.

There have been quite a few Nepali cookbooks that have come out in the past 15 years. And, matching with these more inclusive times, there are books now on Newari, Sherpa and even Thakali cuisine. Jyoti’s book weaves in Nepal’s history and culture and how the food here has been influenced by Tibetan and Indian culinary traditions.

‘Nepali food is characterised by its simplicity, lightness and healthfulness,’ she writes, ‘a typical meal uses the freshest ingredients, minimal fat and an artful combination of herbs and spices.’

Observing the mountains of rice that people eat on the food stalls along Nepal’s highways, however, one could argue that it is the sheer volume of food ingested that makes Nepali diet unhealthy. Nepalis may have a low-fat diet, but the middle class ODs on carbs and does very little exercise to burn it off.

Jyoti’s recipes include the simple mutton curry, and she uses the elaborate and exotic sounding Dahi Haleko Boka-Khasiko Musa which is guaranteed to make the diaspora Nepal’s mouth water just hearing about it. Then there are the momos and raw marinated water buffalo and even the Basi Bhat Bhaatwa, the ingenious Nepali way to re-use leftover rice for an appetising snack.

A Taste of Nepal doesn’t leave out the ingredients and recipes that make Nepali food different from Indian or Tibetan: Alu Tama, Gundruk Bhatmas ko Jhol, Maseura Alu, Jimbu, Lapsi ko Achar, Kalo Dal. Nepalis abroad may find it difficult to find these ingredients, but with 15 percent of Nepalis now living outside Nepal it is only a question of time before stores spring up stocking up on jimbu and lapsi too.

Jyoti held long-range consultations with her family back home in Nepal and researched the 350 recipes thoroughly: “I used to cook with a pinch of this and a dash of that, but in preparing the book I actually had to go out and measure everything,” she says.

Because it is primarily written for the western audience, the book has made it easy by including the masalas usually found in the ethnic food section of any US or European supermarket. www.tasteofnepalcookbook.com
The first time I came to Nepal I was kind of intimidated by the food. Placed in front of me was a plate piled so high with rice that I feared having to reject half of it, an act which many have told me was one of the worst insults a person can commit in this country. Having managed to eat it all somehow, I had to fast for a day afterwards.

A friend in Kathmandu doesn’t eat rice because she is allergic to it. I am impressed she is able to survive in Nepal. The only places where you can do this are big cities, or ironically, the poorest villages on the Mahabharat Lekh and remotest mountain districts, where people eat dhido or potatoes.

It’s a shame that people look down on alternative staples like makai, alu and kodo, as poor man’s food. All of them are actually more nutritious than polished rice. Many rural Nepalis know this too, but those without khet would still rather sell cash crops and buy rice than eat makai day in day out, even though they remember that they used to be stronger on a maize diet. I suppose rice is more prestigious than maize and the rest, and if you’re eating the same every day, it tastes more interesting.

Nepali cuisine does not have the glamour which is afforded to that of certain other countries. Some people regard it as the poor cousin of Indian food, but this view is ignorant of the subtleties of Nepali gastronomy and is unfair.

The problem is that the most delicious Nepali foods are really hard to explain in translation problems. Part of the reason for Nepali food’s low profile outside of Nepal is translation problems.

Speaking in tongues

How can the glory of gundruk be explained in words?

KHAIRE BHAI
Tom Owen-Smith

I just hope Nepalese food doesn’t sell out, and remains true to its salty, sour, and other tastes that I can’t even name. The world will eventually understand the genius. Let them come.

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Times

25 APRIL - 1 MAY 2008 #397
With elections over, families of the disappeared hope someone will tell them what happened

Mohun Kumar Shakya never thought that she would live to see the day where she would reach a polling booth to vote, and be part of Nepal’s most historic moment. Not in this life.

Late one night four years ago, she was hit by a bullet during the Maoist attack on Beni. The intense battle raged all night. Bombs were going off on the street below, bullets were ricocheting off the walls and hitting metal utensils in the kitchen.

“We had never experienced such a thing in our lives,” recalls Mohan Kumari (left), “we hid under our beds all night.” The 63-year-old didn’t even realise she had been hit in her wrist until she was drenched in blood. Shrapnel wounds covered her face and hands.

It was only in the afternoon of the next day that it was safe to come out of the house, and Mohan Kumari was rushed to Pokhara Hospital. Now, four years later and thankful to be alive, she says she will support the Maoists even though they had started the war. “They’re our fellow villagers,” she explains. “They must be given a chance to prove themselves.”

She adds: “Innocent people like me have suffered because of their war. Now the Maoists have won the elections they shouldn’t go back to their old ways.”

The Maoist candidate who won in Myagdi, Govinda Paudel, blends easily into the crowd and looks like any other man on the streets of Beni. But when talking politics the soft-spoken man radiates energy. He passionately explains that it was his despair at Nepal’s economic disparities and social injustice that led him to join the Maoists.

“He’s simple and sincere, nothing fancy, that’s why he is popular,” says manager Shiva Paudel. “He speaks our language,” says teacher Roshan Rana, “he came to my place for tea and when we sat and talked, he listened and understood.”

Paudel’s rented home in Beni bajar is austere. His house in his village was destroyed by the army and he himself was tortured in the jungles. Sitting on a sukul in a narrow balcony, Paudel says his sacrifice and those of his comrades were worth it because Nepal now has a chance to prosper. “Their blood will not be wasted,” he says, “the killings will stop now, we do not want to fight on. To get something, you have to lose something.”

Paudel admits that the people’s expectations are very high. “It will be a challenge to change things overnight, but things will change even if it takes time,” he says. The Maoist plan for Myagdi is to tap the district’s biodiversity and hydropower wealth for economic development.

“We don’t just have natural resources, we also have people, he says, “many people in Myagdi work abroad and bring back experience. We can be a Switzerland.”

GOPAL DAHAL in SUNSARI

“They say the two armies are going to be one now, maybe that is why no one ever comes to ask about us anymore,” says 30-year-old Hari Bahadur Magar, who hasn’t seen her husband since soldiers came to the house and took him away one night five years ago.

Hari’s 70-year-old mother, Padamkumari, watches television all the time just in case her son appears on the screen. She goes to all Maoist rallies hoping to catch a glimpse of him.

Harimaya’s son Nishan was born after his father disappeared and has never seen him. The five-year-old says: “Daddy has gone to Dharam, he will bring me clothes and biscuits.”

Machindra Limbu lives next door from the Magar household and his only son, Uttam, was taken away the same night as Hari.

After five years with no answers, Machindra joined the
Maoist-affiliated Limbuwan Liberation Front and was fully engaged in campaigning during the elections. “I campaigned for the Maoists because I wanted them to win, so they’d let me know what happened to my son,” he told Nepali Times.

Machindra is also the secretary of the Society of the Families of the Disappeared in Sunsari. Uttam’s mother Dhannamaya attended all the Maoist campaign rallies, not so much to show support but hoping for hope that she may catch a glimpse of her son.

Besides Hari and Uttam, at least 19 other young men from Sunsari were disappeared during the conflict. Only six of them are known to have been killed.

Families of the disappeared have nearly given up hope, but many just need to know whether their sons and husbands are alive or dead. With the Maoists’ election victory, they hope they will finally be told.

Officially, there are 1,100 cases of disappeareds all over Nepal, but human rights organisations say the number may be double that. Activists and families are both worried that despite talk about a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the warring sides will try to sweep past atrocities under the carpet.

“We have gone and staged sit-ins in Kathmandu, we went to the army, we went to the Maoists, no one has shown any interest in finding my son,” says 82-year-old Mankumari Bhandari, whose son Pushpa was a Maoist trade union activist in Babarai before he was disappeared in 2003.

Most of the disappeareds were also the sole salary earners of their families who are now destitute. Besides their psychological trauma, many now face economic hardships.

“For many of these families, it would actually be a relief if they were told that their relatives died,” says psychiatrist Pramodnath Shrestha, “without closure, they are forced to grieve every day.”

Sunsri Thapa is with the human rights group, INSEEE, and says there is no exact figure for the total number disappeared in the eastern region. He says: “The fact that the state and the former rebel forces have shown no interest in telling the truth proves they are guilty of human rights violations.”

Out of control

“You dirty dogs, eat all of these,” shouted the YCL cadre at NC supporters at a campaign rally in Pashupati VDC of Rupendehi on 6 April.

Rama Aryal Sharma was singled out because she is the leader of the women’s wing of the NC. About 40 Maoist youths came in two jeeps, ravaged through lunch packets that Sharma and her colleague had brought, scattered the food and tried to force them to eat it off the floor.

“This area is under our control and you dare hold a meeting here,” they said. Sharma argued that nobody owned the place and that everyone had the right to be there. She tried to reason with them, but it was obvious to her they wanted to disrupt the meeting.

The YCL pulled her by the hair and neck and pushed her into their truck while the other women tried to get her out. The police came shortly, and chased off the YCL with tear gas and black fires.

The threat has not gone away with the news of the Maoist win in the elections. On 14 April, Maoist leaders demanded the release of 31 YCL cadres who were held under probation by the police at Rupendehi for carrying weapons.

“If we are not afraid of them,” says Sharma, “we are prepared to face them again.”

Wong Shu Yun in Rupendehi

Ex-Gurkhas are worried about Maoist policy on recruitment

The Maoist sweep has been not altogether unwelcome here in eastern Nepal, but veterans of the British and Indian armies are worried that the new Maoist government may terminate Gurkha recruitment.

“Shameful activities like the employment of Nepalis in foreign armed services like the British Gurkhas need to be stopped. All Nepalis should take up valuable and useful jobs inside the country itself. Necessary steps will be taken to create the proper environment,” says the Maoist election manifesto which has a Prachanda-for-president photo on the back cover.

The Gurkha Army Ex-Servicemen’s Organisation has taken strong issue with this. “If the Maoists stop recruitment, it would be a great loss for the country,” says Gajendra Isbo of GAESO. “The Gurkhas do not earn peanuts. The money they would get, keeps our economy going.”

Remittances have increased in the past few years because of the British government raising the salary and pensions of Gurkhas after protests by ex-servicemen. Ex-Gurkhas now also have the option of settling permanently in Britain (see ‘Aein Gorkhaliharu’, #391).

Much of Dharan’s economy survives on remittances that soldiers serving abroad send home. Ex-servicemen form a vital part of the city’s society and have strong political clout. After the manifesto came out, influential ex-Gurkhas made a lot of noise, putting pressure on the Maoist-affiliated Limbuwan National Liberation Front, many of whose own members are ex-servicemen.

The agenda is not new. The UML has also been against Gurkha recruitment, but that never stopped Dhawan from being a UML stronghold.

The British started recruiting Nepalis into their army in 1815, and Gurkha soldiers fought for them in various insurrections in British India and during both world wars. After India’s independence in 1947, under a Tripartite Agreement between India, Nepal and the British government, Nepalis were formally integrated into both the British and the Indian armies.

This almost 200-year history of Nepalis fighting for foreign countries has become a tradition as well as an institution. For many of the so-called ‘martial races,’ like Rai, Limbu, Gurung and Magar, it is a matter of pride and prestige to become a ‘lahure’. Every year thousands of young men aged between 17 and 21 try out for the Gurkhas.

“Right now it is impossible to stop recruitment,” says Rani Nanyaundung, an ex-British Gurkha who is researching a doctorate in British-Nepali relations. “It would not solve anything, in fact it would only complicate matters.”

The Maoists probably realise this, and say they will not implement the provision in the manifesto.

“On behalf of my party, I have made clear that there will not be an immediate closure of recruitment,” says Akkal Bahadur Manangbo of the Limbuwan Front and Maoist PR candidate.

Manangbo himself was a British Gurkha and says it is indeed “shameful” that Nepalis serve in foreign armies and that it needs to be stopped. But not immediately. “We want to scrap the unfair tripartite treaty. After that, if the youth still want to go into foreign armies we will let them. But as our economy becomes stronger, we will not need this kind of slavery,” he told Nepali Times.

Many here will be relieved that the Maoists do not intend to enforce their agenda. “Many Gurkhas voted for them,” says Parfait Rai, instructor at a local training institute for British Gurkhas. “But if they stop recruitment, we will kick them out in the next parliamentary elections.”

It doesn’t look like the Gurkhas will give up without a fight. Says aspirating British Gurkha, Salli Thakuri: “Just let them try.”

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“Just let them try”
Stars over a New Nepal

In May, there will be three interesting celestial events heralding the arrival of a ‘New Nepal’. We have a meteor shower at the beginning of the month, Mercury will be gleaming bright in the evening sky, and the crescent moon will cross the red planet Mars.

In May, we see the sky moving into its summer phase. A couple of hours after sunset, the brilliant star Vega will be rising in the east, an event which signals the arrival of summer. The most prominent constellations from east to west will be Hercules, Bootes (with the bright star Arcturus), Leo the Lion and Gemini the Twins. The great Saptarshi (Big Dipper) will be dominating the northern sky. If you are in a really dark location, you will also be able to see the fainter constellations of the northern sky, like Draco the Dragon, and the Little Dipper which contains Polaris the North Star. (See star chart.) Unfortunately the pre-monsoon sand haze from the desert has reduced visibility.

Among the planets, Mercury is a great sight this month. On 14 May, it reaches its greatest eastern elongation and will set an hour and a half after the Sun. If you have children, don’t miss the chance to show them this elusive little planet with the help of binoculars. Look towards the western horizon about an hour after sunset.

Venus will be rising less than half an hour before sunrise but will be difficult to see this month. Mars will be rising from Gemini to Cancer and will dim slightly as it reaches aphelion – its greatest distance from the Sun – on 13 May. Jupiter, in Sagittarius, is high in the southern sky at dawn. You cannot mistake it for anything else. Saturn is sitting in the midst of Leo and is overhead after sunset.

Can’t embrace him, can’t reject him...

India’s Dalai Dilemma

As the world reacts to China’s crackdown in Tibet, one country is conspicuous by both its centrality to the drama and its reticence over it. India, the land of asylum for the Dalai Lama and the angry young hotheads of the Tibetan Youth Congress, finds itself on the horns of a dilemma.

On 10 May, the Moon passes very close to Mars and will be visible crossing the red planet at 8PM. Don’t miss this great celestial spectacle. It’s also best viewed with binoculars. Celestial fireworks will entertain us in early May, when the Earth passes through the centre of a debris trail left by Halley’s Comet (which last visited us in 1986). The Ela Aquarids meteor shower will begin in the last week of April and climax on 5 May with a peak rate of up to 30 meteors an hour. Look towards the constellation Aquarius in the eastern horizon at 3AM.

On the other hand, India has been cultivating better relations with China, which has humiliated India in a brief border war in 1962. Though their bitter border dispute remains unresolved, and China has been a vital ally and military supplier to India’s enemies in Pakistan, bilateral relations have grown warmer in recent years.

China has now overtaken the US as India’s largest single trading partner. Tourism is thriving. Indian information technology firms have opened offices in Shanghai, and Infosys’ headquarter in Bangalore recruited nine Chinese this year. India has no desire to jeopardise any of this.

India’s government has attempted to draw a distinction between its humanitarian obligations as an asylum country and its political responsibilities as a friend of China. The Dalai Lama and his followers are given a respected place but told not to conduct “political activities” on Indian soil.

When young Tibetan radicals staged a march to Lhasa from Indian soil, the Indian police stopped them well before they got to the Tibetan border, detaining 100. When Tibetan demonstrators outside the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi attacked the premises, the Indian government stepped up its protection for the Chinese diplomats.

The Dalai Lama’s curious position has complicated India’s diplomatic dance with China. He is simultaneously the most visible spiritual leader of a worldwide community of believers, a role that India has no choice in the matter. It supports to those who would challenge that status.

The stark truth is that India has no choice in the matter. It cannot undermine its own democratic principles and abridge the freedom of speech of Tibetans on its soil. Nor can it afford to alienate its trading partners, a neighbour and an emerging global superpower, which is known to be prickly over any presumed slights to its sovereignty over Tibet. India will continue to balance delicately on its Tibetan tightrope.

Shashi Tharoor, a novelist and commentator, and former Under Secretary General of the United Nations.
As the Maoist landslide has unfolded, Kathmandu’s petit bourgeoisie has riled quietly in an identity crisis. No one says it, but they are scared, unsure what this victory may mean for their life-sustaining predilections. Never mind the vital differences our home-grown revolutionaries may have with the original Maoists, the more paranoid minds may have already conjured up images of a Chinese or Russian-style purge of the bourgeoisie.

Suddenly now, the class lines which affect everything from membership of the intelligentsia to the peace process are becoming uncomfortably apparent. Where, in these nail-biting times, is a petit bourgeois to find some solace, and see his core values reflected and vindicated? If cinema can do the trick, allow me to recommend the perfect nerve-soother: Dai Sijie’s *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress*.

Adapted from the bestselling semi-autobiographical novel written by director Sijie himself, the movie will transport you to the maelstrom of China’s notorious Cultural Revolution in the early 1970s. Our heroes Luo (Chen Kun) and Ma (Liu Ye) are two city boys whose refinement and bourgeois ways have displeased the Party, and who are subsequently sent off for ‘re-education’ to a remote village in Sichuan. In what must be these sons of urban professionals’ worst nightmare, they are condemned to four years of hard labour heaving spattering buckets of human manure, their passion for Mozart and connoisseurship of high art sacrificed at the altar of peasant revolution.

But don’t be alarmed yet. Indignant as the city boys may be at the repressively ‘bad-mannered’ and ignorant ways of the revolutionaries, the film is ultimately about the triumph of civility. The urbane charisma of Luo and Ma is an object of mild curiosity for most villagers, but for one particular granddaughter of a local tailor, our nameless Little Chinese Seamstress (Zhou Xun), it is a matter of profound fascination. The boys woo her by reading her Balzac from a stolen stash of banned books, stirring in her desires and dreams unthinkable within the dull confines of the village.

In the midst of a ‘revolution’ which enforced conformity and monoculture, Sijie dares to imply that true liberation comes from the discovery of art and literature, and individuality. And he does so very touchingly. In fact, *Balzac* is one of the most tender and persuasive defences of the power of art you will ever see.

Quite expertly, Sijie manages to identify his love for French literature with the universal condition of being human. There is a point to be made here – something which I think even Karl Marx himself would have admitted despite his copious writings on cold, hard dialectical materialism. It is art which moves us above the sheer drudgery of subsistence, and brings us closest to our nature. For Marx, this insight came from an attention to human labour; for Sijie, it comes from an idealism of middle class life.

Thank God, the Nepali Maoists of the present day barely resemble the Chinese ones of the early 1970s. But the Kathmandu petit bourgeoisie, still reeling from the election result, may still find in the travails and yearnings of Luo and Ma some comfort that they are not alone, and there are people out there who hold their values dear.

**BALZAC AND THE LITTLE CHINESE SEAMSTRESS**
Director: Dai Sijie
Cast: Chen Kun, Liu Ye, Zhou Xun.
2002. 111 min.
EXHIBITIONS
- Double vision photographs by Nepali and international students, until 27 April at New Delhi, Patan. 5522708
- Masks – Expressions Wear an exhibition by Soo Jin Oh, from 20 April-5 May, 10AM-6PM at the Gallery 32, Dent Inn.
- Collection One paintings by Amir and Anup Chitrakar, until 10 May, at the Saturday Café, Boudha. 985106626

EVENTS
- Abako Nepal an exclusive program by Anshar-Gurukul with paintings by Kiran Manandhar from Dhara heights, street plays Mithila Naita Parashad, classical music by Sukarma, poetry recitation by renowned poets in Dharaarahar, Sundhara from 10AM-6PM on 25 April.
- KJC concert Series III by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, 26 April at 7PM in the premises of Gyanodaya College, Jhamshikhel.
- to be held at Have, live screening by Candid Society, 27 April at 6PM at Alliance Francaise.
- Annual Spring Fair at Kathmandu International Study Centre (KISC), Pande (Ashay Kapoor) and Pooja (Kahena Kapoor), a girl who can’t be trusted. The three of them are on a dangerous journey across India, which will alter the course of their lives in more ways than one. And to top it all, there is the evil eye of Bhagiy (Anil Kapoor), a maverick gangster who enjoys killing people as much as he enjoys speaking English.

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

ABOUT TOWN

MUSIC
- A funky reggae party with Pachhok at Moksh on 25 April. 5526212
- Paleti with MP Gurung from Shilton, 25 April, 6PM at nepa-vaya’ r sala, Kalkisthan, Rs 65. 4412469
- Sundance music festival, a weekend full of live music, great food, camping, accommodation and plunge pool at the Last Resort from 3-4 May for Rs. 2000. Tickets available at Moksh, 5526212 and The Last Resort, 4700525
- Rudra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212
- Suli music by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.
- Yankey and friends live acoustic music every Friday at the Bourbon room Resto-bar, Lal Darbar.
- Anil Shahi every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 8PM. 5521408

DINING
- The Kaiser Cafe open now at the Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, open from 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- Sunday Jazz brunch design your meal with pastas, salads and lunch with jazz by Mariano and band, at the Rox Garden, Hotel Hyatt Regency. 4489361
- Steak escape with Kathmandu’s premier steaks available for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- Bourbon Room Resto-bar now open for lunch and dinner with a wide selection of cocktails, Lal Darbar.
- Cocktails and grooves with jazz by Inner Groove at Fusion-the bar at Dwarika’s, every Wednesday, at Dwarika’s Hotel.
- Cocktails, mocktails and liquors at the Aashi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- Continental and Chinese cuisine and complimentary fresh brewed coffee after every meal a Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.
- Split BBQ with barbequed wild boar and lamb, salads and dessert, Rs. 650 plus tax at The Summit Hotel on 25 April.
- Ily espresso coffee at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktail.
- International buffet at the Sunrise Cafe, and Russian specialties over a 100 cocktails, Lal Darbar.
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and more at Roadhouse, Bhaktapur 4425627, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4260187.
- Dine and dance with live music, cocktail party at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 660.00 nett per person, at the Shamshabari Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Dhulikhel, 9841290619
- Lavazza coffee Italy’s favourite coffee at La Dolce Villa, Thamel, Roadhouse Cafe Pulchok and Thamel. 4700612
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

THE FILM TELLS THE STORY ABOUT CALL CENTRE EXECUTIVE JIMMY CLIFF (SAI ALI KHAN), GANGSTER BACHCHAN PANDE (ASHAY KAPOOR) AND POOJA (KAHENA KAPOOR), A GIRL WHO CAN’T BE TRUSTED. THE THREE OF THEM ARE ON A DANGEROUS JOURNEY ACROSS INDIA, WHICH WILL ALTER THE COURSE OF THEIR LIVES IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE. AND TO TOP IT ALL, THERE IS THE EVIL EYE OF BHAGAY (ANIL KAPOOR), A MAVERICK GANGSTER WHO ENJOYS KILLING PEOPLE AS MUCH AS HE ENJOYS SPEAKING ENGLISH.

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

Italy’s favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NRINCOME TAX THIS YEAR NRIS WHO ARE NOT TAXPAYER WILL PAY 17% INCOME TAX.

CITY

WEATHER

KATHMANDU VALLEY

This pattern is expected to continue because there is very little moisture in the air for mountain convection systems to trigger storms. High mountain valleys will see some brief local showers, some of the sunlight, so it should’ve actually been hotter this week.

The dry spell is likely to continue in eastern and central Nepal with hot, dry wind blowing in from the southwest. This is also bringing hot, dry wind blowing in from the southwest. This is also bringing in wind-blown sand up to an altitude of 3,500 m. The haze filters hot, dry wind blowing in from the southwest. This is also bringing in wind-blown sand up to an altitude of 3,500 m. The haze filters

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30-14  29-14 29-15

STORM IN 14 CITY

The film tells the story about call centre executive Jimmy Cliff (Sai Ali Khan), gangster Bachchan Pand (Ashay Kapoor) and Pooja (Kahena Kapoor), a girl who can’t be trusted. The three of them are on a dangerous journey across India, which will alter the course of their lives in more ways than one. And to top it all, there is the evil eye of Bhagay (Anil Kapoor), a maverick gangster who enjoys killing people as much as he enjoys speaking English.

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

CITY

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TRICK OF THE WIND: Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal flanked by deputy Baburam Bhattarai (face in flag), UNMUN chief Ian Martin and UNDP’s Robert Piper speak at a press conference at UN House in Pulchok on Thursday morning.

OLD GUARD: PM Koirala shakes hands with army chief Rukmangad Katawal at an army display at Tundhikhel on Wednesday, Loktantra Day.

FRIENDLY GESTURE: Maoist leader, CP Gajurel (left), speaks at a panel on Tuesday to discuss foreign aid and development. The other speaker was Markus Heinziger from the Swiss Foreign Ministry (middle). The session was moderated by Kunda Dixit, the editor of Nepal Times, which organised the program.

DROPPING OFF: Sher Bahadur Deuba (left) was feeling tired at the Loktantra Day reception at Shital Nibas on Wednesday. The prime minister seemed more alert.

LOADSHEDDING? There’s always LIGHT and lots of food at WELCOME FOOD PLAZA

Barbar Nag (above Kashmangand Bazaar) Tel: 2337201
Prachanda pratapi bhupati

On earth has been briefing the UN Security Council on Nepal? In New York this week Dumisani Kumalo asked “all political parties in Nepal to accept the elections results,” Get outa here. Hasn’t UNMIN told him yet that parties here accept the results? By the way, how come UNMIN is still adding staffers, vehicles and planes when it’s time to pack up?

First it was the Eurocopter illegally touching down on top of Mt Everest three years ago and marking the highest-ever chopper landing in world history. Since the manufacturers, EADS, didn’t have official permission to land on the summit, the feat was never officially recognised. That didn’t stop Eurocopter from putting a video of the landing on their website, though (www.eurocopter.com/everest/).

If we are to prevent future alien aerial invasions, we need an air force pronto. And maybe anti-aircraft batteries on the Western Cwm.

You must hand it to the comrades, they are leaning on the Oily Corporation to raise petroleum prices right away, before they come to power. They also have an astounding ability to be everything to everyone. Comrade Awesome told Kantipur in an interview in 2005: “Even if we come to power through a constituent assembly, we will not be trying to be president or prime minister we will send younger comrades to government. We will display statesmanship.” At least he got that part about winning the CA right.

At a public hearing at the Khula Munch last week, Comrade Dina was grilled by his own YCL and asked to clarify why the party wasn’t allowing them to say “Down with American imperialism and Indian expansionism” anymore. His reply: “The context has now changed.”

After Fearsomeoness addressed Big Business the other day and basically came out of the closet to say that he has always been a secret admirer of Ayn Rand his disciples weren’t too surprised. They seem to have been in on it all along. But it did get the UML comrades muttering under their breath at the Shitall Nibas Loktantra binge: “They went to war and had 15,000 people killed, for this?”

So how come Kamred Laldhoj is not living in the Pistachio Palace anymore and has moved in with Ananta at Quiet Corner? Has co-habitation ended even before it began? All has not been well since PKD found out that if he became the first president of the Republic of Nepal and BB became prime minister, he’d just be a ceremonial prez while Jit Bahadur would be chief exec. Even if the interim constitution is amended, the head of the state will still be a figurehead.

In a few weeks, Nepal will go from being a quasi-kingdom to a capitalist people’s republic. And in the palace, Sri Ek is supposed to be trying to cut a deal in the backroom: he’ll step off the throne in return for a timetable to vacate Nayanthiti, his assets will not be confiscated, guaranteed a privy purse, get to go to any temple he likes.