Weekly Internet Poll  # 399. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. How do you feel about the country’s future after elections?

Total votes: 6,654

- Yes: 4,510
- No: 1,124
- Don’t know: 1,020

For more on the Nepal Times, visit www.nepalitimes.com

Weekly Internet Poll  # 398

Q. Do you trust the Maoists when they say they will support a capitalist economy?

Total votes: 6,654

- Yes: 3,246
- No: 3,135
- Don’t know: 273

For more on the Nepal Times, visit www.nepalitimes.com

Great hall of the people

Logistics and legal issues need to be sorted out by 25 May

DEWAN RAI

After the Election commission officially announces the results of the elections with the PR list this week, the 601-member constituent assembly will have three weeks to meet. Besides the logistical problems, there are also legal hurdles that have to be crossed by 25 May.

The Chinese-built Birendra International Convention Centre (BICC) is being requisitioned to serve as the assembly hall and the Parliament Secretariat is racing against time to refurbish it. BICC’s Saguamatha Hall has a capacity to seat 1,004 people, but many of the seats are broken and they need to be fitted with microphones.

An extra 84 seats will have to be added on the main floor so all members can sit together. The nearly 500 seats in the balcony are being set aside for officials, observers and the media. Security arrangements, walk-through gates, administration and information centres need to be in place by 20 May.

However, since UNMIN occupies seven of the nine smaller conference rooms at the BICC, there is no space left for the secretariat and the CA’s various committees. Each political party needs an office, and there are 25 parties compared to 11 in the previous parliament.

“Our secretariat will stay at Singha Darbar, there is just no space at BICC,” said Joint Secretary Mukunda Sharma.

Then there are the legal issues. The new members need to be sworn in before they take up seats, but who is going to swear them in? As a stopgap, the oldest member of the assembly, 73-year-old Kul Bahadur Gurung may chair the inaugural session.

But who will swear him in? The first session of the assembly is supposed to formally abolish the monarchy, but it may be tied up with procedural and legal issues.

EDITORIAL
Snap out of it p2

House speaker Subhas Nembang told Nepal Times his secretariat is drafting the laws, and this will be passed by ordinance at the first meeting. But the cabinet is barely functional, with seven UML ministers having resigned en masse.

Great hall of the people

Logistics and legal issues need to be sorted out by 25 May
SANTA GAHA MAGAR

THINK POSITIVE

In many of his articles C K Lal mocks the Maoist leadership’s promises about bringing about a democratic transformation in Nepal. Among the altruists, #397. It may well turn out to be true that their political discourse is still rooted in their rhetoric, but surely no one imagines that the NC or UML would have made any significant progress to date. We are only a few weeks away from the next election, and the Maoists have a chance to speak. It is now up to the parties to translate this into action. It doesn’t help the party leading the government also has its own army, and the political leadership to rise above the wheels of democracy, and freedom, and need to be condemned, but the Maoists have perpetrated violence, and based on personal convictions and analysis was totally Kathmandu-centric. It shows that they aren’t in touch with the people. 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Kick-starting Nepal

The people of Nepal have voted for radical change. By sidelining old established parties, they have given the Maoists the benefit of doubt. The Maoists now have a historic opportunity to show that they can deliver better governance, better infrastructure, better delivery of basic services and greater social justice.

In their election manifesto and post-election statements, the Maoists have pledged an “economic revolution”. For most Nepalis, this probably had greater appeal than the Maoists’ political and ideological offerings.

Peace and democracy can only be sustainable if ambitious and visible reconstruction and development activities are implemented to create jobs and to give hope to restless unemployed youth. As the newly elected assembly begins to draft a progressive new constitution, it would be wise to draft an equally ambitious and progressive National Reconstruction and Development Plan (NRDP).

Just like the constitution, the drafting of the NRDP could also follow a collective, consultative, multi-party approach under the leadership of the largest political party, but drawing on the ideas contained in the manifestos of other key political players.

It would reassure ordinary people if they see that our newly elected politicians care as much about helping to meet their basic needs, as they care about who gets to power. The following 10 key points can be the core of an ambitious long-term reconstruction and development plan for Nepal:

1. Relief and rehabilitation of IDPs and victims of conflict, and rebuilding and upgrading of the destroyed infrastructure, as immediate peace dividend.
2. Massive expansion of basic social services in education, health, nutrition, sanitation, etc to meet the Millennium Development Goals.
3. In the context of the proposed new federal structure of state, promote targeted interventions to ensure better balanced regional development and to reduce ethnic, caste, gender disparities and exclusion.
4. Some major flagship projects of infrastructure development in transport, communication, hydropower and tourism that will help uplift the economy and change the face of Nepal.
5. Employment generation and skill training both for the domestic market and to enhance the earning capacity and well-being of Nepals working abroad.
6. Strategies to engage young people in nation building, to express their views and voices.
7. Security Sector Reform eventually leading to downsizing of the Nepal Army, reallocation of military budget in favour of development, and deployment of Nepal army and the Maoist combatants for development, disaster relief and peace-keeping purposes.
8. Land reform aimed at making the agriculture sector more productive and efficient.
9. Special efforts to protect Nepal’s fragile environment, including from the impact of climate change.

The program needs to be steered by a high level multi-party National Reconstruction and Development Council preferably headed by the Prime Minister. It would be desirable to have two reference groups to advise it: a national stakeholder’s group comprising representatives of the private sector, civil society, academics and scholars as well as donor representatives.

In Nepal’s current hyper-politicised atmosphere, it is important to guard against populism. The Maoists will need to ensure that their radicalised trade unions, student unions, and YCL do not put undue pressure on the government, industries and employers to take decisions that are economically unsustainable and inefficient. The other parties must also restrain themselves from excessive politicisation.

While the international community is likely to show much goodwill and solidarity for Nepal’s development, the new government can’t expect a blank cheque from it. The Maoists will need to be especially mindful that what sells well with their cadres may not necessarily sell well with the Nepali people or the international community.

In the current euphoria of their election victory, the Maoists must correctly understand the nature of the people’s verdict. It was not a popular endorsement of their ideology, nor was it an acceptance of the use of violence, intimidation and extortion as justifiable political tactics. On the contrary, the people have voted for the Maoists, with the hope that putting them in power will make them forsake such tactics, and bring in change.

Focusing on an ambitious and sensible economic agenda would actually help redeem the Maoists from their controversial past, and establish themselves as a truly progressive force for change. That would be good for the Maoists, and for all Nepals in the long-term.

Kul Chandra Gautam is a former UN Assistant Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF.

Besides the constitution, let’s also draft a new strategy to rebuild Nepal:

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Besides the
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let’s also draft
a new strategy
to rebuild Nepal:
Torch nearing summit

The Chinese took the Olympic Torch to the summit of Mt Everest on May Day itself in an expedition that has been shrouded in secrecy. The Olympic flame arrived in Hong Kong on Wednesday. Another torch was taken to the north Base Camp last week and is said to be making its way to the top. The Olympic flame split in Beijing last month, with the main torch heading to Europe, the United States and Asia on its protest-marked world tour.

Western reporters at the Rongbuk Glacier on the north side of Everest have said there is no information about the torch. The flame will be carried in a lantern, allowing a carefully designed torch using special fuel to be lit in the thin air of the summit area.

Some had speculated that the team hoped to make the ascent March Wednesday, exactly 100 days before the Olympics and amid celebrations in Beijing. The torch may have been delayed because of gale force winds at the summit this week.

There has been Chinese air activity over the mountain during the torch's journey to the summit. The Chinese took the Olympic Torch to the summit on Tuesday and Wednesday which could be a sign of the Nepal government's weakness. "It's China that is holding the Olympics—why should we have to close all these things?" asked Dendi. Trekkers are also unhappy they aren't allowed to use video cameras near Base Camp.

The Rinpoche of Tengboche Monastery has said he was "extremely worried" that the home ministry had sent armed soldiers to Chomolungma. That for Major DB Thapa in Namche, it is clear Nepal can't jeopardise relations with China. He said: "We want the Olympic Torch to reach the top of Sagarmatha successfully."
**Infrastructure blues**

**Roads and power plants can’t build themselves**

NEW DELHI—India’s capital in late April has few violets to attract visitors. Even the residents get out if they can, seeking cooler climes in Shimla and Mussoorie. Unlike our orderliness in Kathmandu, here the potholes are unscheduled, and the whirr of backup generators makes your head spin.

Last week the city introduced a pilot project for a new traffic system, in which buses were restricted to dedicated bus lanes. Many arterial roads came to a standstill. It’s going to take more than new traffic rules to solve Delhi’s infrastructure problem. Globally-aware Delhiites compare their transport chaos to Heathrow Airport’s Terminal 5, but Heathrow’s traffic flow problems don’t affect millions of people every day.

Global construction companies are now eyeing India as a country where massive new infrastructures are due to be built, as opposed to countries like the US where most future work is likely to be rehabilitation and maintenance.

As cranes now loom on every corner of the skyline, the boom is creating fresh challenges for the economy. Firstly, with supply of materials unable to keep up with demand, prices are shooting up which means the cost of infrastructure development is increasing spaces. Public-funded projects are thus draining the exchequer deeper, and private ones are raising their consumer charges.

Secondly, the demand for skilled and semi-skilled construction workers is going to affect labour costs too. In Nepal, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a good mason or plumber as most of the ones with any gumption are taking their skills to the Middle East and India where they will get paid more. The rise in food prices and general inflation will also increase the cost of labour, and consequently cost of capital.

For Nepal, the growing expense of construction work has many implications. A hydro-rich but electricity-starved country will really need to think about how to tackle the chasm between demand and supply. People in power-deprived Bihar will really need to think about how to tackle the chasm between demand and supply. People in power-deprived Bihar and UP will not allow the states to export power to Nepal even if the government in Delhi agrees to it. This also means that Merchant Hydro plants, where developers start building plants without Power Purchase Agreements stipulating the sale of electricity directly to big consumers, may start to make sense.

Any kind of infrastructure, whether it’s power plants, roads, economic zones or airports, requires land. The issue of land acquisition and compensation in Nepal is likely to be a thorny one, and the Maoist government will have to come up with a definitive policy which balances people’s expectations of lighting development with the administrative and legislative frameworks to match them. It took 20 years to build the Kolkata metro because of land acquisition problems. Delhi’s metro system has been built in five years as the policies regarding construction were clear and implementable.

In their election manifesto and numerous speeches, the Maoist leadership has talked about ‘public-private partnerships’ (PPP), but they need to spell out exactly what they mean by this term and how the proposed partnerships will function, especially in the context of infrastructure development. We don’t want the same experience Delhisites had with their bus lanes on every new infrastructure project in Nepal.

www.arthabeed.com

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**Surya Nepal tour**

Surya Nepal Pvt Ltd in association with Nepal Professionals Golfers Association (NPGA) has launched the Surya Nepal Golf Tour 2008. All professional golf events to be played in Nepal will now come under the umbrella of the Surya Nepal Golf Tour. Six premier professional events have already signed up.

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**Freedom to rock**

Sprite has introduced a new talent hunt called “Sprite band Challenge—Freedom to Rock”. It’s open to anyone aged 18 years who is in a band of between four and six members. The prize is Rs 100,000 and a chance to make your own music video. The 1st and 2nd runners up will receive Rs 50,000 and Rs 30,000 respectively. Registration forms will be available online on cybersansar.com and fumantar.com.

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**Economic sense**

Artha Beed

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www.arthabeed.com
Sky's the Limit: YCL cadre put on an acrobatic display in Gorkha during campaigning. Not all their activities are so peacefull.

Is what happened to Gorkha a sign of things to come?

Damodar Neupane in Kathmandu, 20 April

If the Maoist attacks on other political parties and their harassment of the media in Gorkha in the elections and its aftermath is going to be the pattern in the New Nepal, it does not bode well for democracy and press freedom.

As soon as voting ended on 10 April, the NC and UML complained to the Election Commission about intimidation and threats and boycotted vote counting. I filed a live report on this for Kantipur TV on the morning of 11 April and was immediately accosted by Amrit Upadhya, a local Maoist.

An hour later, Maoist cadres forcibly pulled NC candidate Ramesh Bastakoti from a Kathmandu-bound bus and beat him up. Police took Bastakoti to hospital, but he wanted to return to Gorkha because he felt it wasn’t safe, but the Maoists pulled him out of the bus at 13km and beat him up again.

When we arrived to report, the Maoists ran away and hid in a bamboo grove behind the stadium. The Maoists tracked him down and beat him up again. As soon as voting ended on 10 April, there was commotion outside. Lawyer Mohan Pokharel was leaving Gorkha when a group of Maoists who were attacking him. They said they wanted to exact revenge for “the blood of our 13,000 martyrs”.

Vote counting started on the night of 11 April. There was commotion outside. Lawyer Mohan Pokharel was leaving Gorkha when a group of Maoists who were attacking him. They said they wanted to exact revenge for “the blood of our 13,000 martyrs.”

Pokharel was leaving Gorkha because he felt it wasn’t safe, but the YCL pulled him out of the bus at 13km and beat him up.

On 12 April I got a call. “Not it’s the turn of you journalists,” an anonymous caller said. YCL activists were walking around with iron rods. They stopped people on the streets and forcibly searched their pockets and bags, even taking away wallets and mobile phones. Some NC and UML activists went underground. Gorkha-based reporters were themselves so afraid they didn’t file any of this news.

I stayed at the counting centre at night on 12 April and told Maoist MP Parasuram Ramtel about the beatings and threats. He encouraged him to take that step and take action.

This time they said they would analyse everyone’s election coverage and take action. They threatened us again, saying they’d chase us away “like dogs” if we dared cover it. Chudamani Khadka told us we’d have to walk inside the YCL security cordon. But we feared another attack and left the rally.

By 17 April we thought the situation had returned to normal and went to Manakamana. But on return, the Maoist threats started again. The final results of the PR ballot were also out, but reporting in Gorkha had become hazardous to our health. The police didn’t tell me what kind of threat they received, but on 20 April they put me in a van and drove me to Kathmandu where I am now.

Damodar Neupane is the Gorkha correspondent for Kantipur daily and Kantipur TV.

The Maoists had planned a victory rally for 15 April. The Maoists threatened us again, saying they’d chase us away “like dogs” if we dared cover it. Chudamani Khadka told us we’d have to walk inside the YCL security cordon. But we feared another attack and left the rally.

I had a feeling that if we were harmed the Maoists would simply blame someone else.

The obstacles and threats had actually started during the election campaign itself. When we reported on excesses they accused us of being anti-Maoist. “Kantipur is a capitalist newspaper, the battle of ideas...”

That if we were harmed the Maoists would simply blame someone else.

The man mainly responsible for the threats against the media is Amrit Upadhaya, whose exact designation in the party is not clear but he used to be in college with me and we met underground.

On 14 April it was announced that Babruam Bhattarai had won by 40,000 votes. All three constituencies in Gorkha went to the Maoists. "The Maoists had planned a victory rally for 15 April. The Maoists threatened us again, saying they’d chase us away “like dogs” if we dared cover it. Chudamani Khadka told us we’d have to walk inside the YCL security cordon. But we feared another attack and left the rally."

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The final results of the PR ballot were also out, but reporting in Gorkha had become hazardous to our health. The police didn’t tell me what kind of threat they received, but on 20 April they put me in a van and drove me to Kathmandu where I am now.

Damodar Neupane is the Gorkha correspondent for Kantipur daily and Kantipur TV.

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The obstacles and threats had actually started during the election campaign itself. When we reported on excesses they accused us of being anti-Maoist. “Kantipur is a capitalist newspaper, the battle of ideas...”

That if we were harmed the Maoists would simply blame someone else.

The man mainly responsible for the threats against the media is Amrit Upadhaya, whose exact designation in the party is not clear but he used to be in college with me and we met underground.

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That’s why a republic has been declared so quickly and without following the proper procedures,” said the minister.

What will happen after removing the king is something no one has considered. No one has researched the political repercussions of such an action. It should not be forgotten that Sikkim and Afghanistan lost their kings, and subsequently their sovereignty and independence.

Many people are aware of this but lack the courage to say it openly.

Staying on

Hiral Kafle/Nepal Times, 28 April-13 May

On 18 April UNMIN chief Ian Martin visited the prime minister’s residence with a congratulatory message from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. During the visit Martin stated that UNMIN still has a lot to do in Nepal, and that their role will remain the same. PM Koirala said he needed to discuss the matter with the other parties.

Martin told reporters, “UNMIN’s role is to bring the peace process to a logical conclusion, including army integration.” However, on the same day the Maoist foreign affairs spokesman CP Gajurel said that the peace process is on course and there is no need to extend UNMIN’s mandate again.

In fact, the Maoists have quite clearly said they do not want UNMIN to stay. The NC and UML, who supported UNMIN’s role in the past, also sound disappointed with them now. UML leader Pradip Gyawali, who played a key role in the peace process, has said that UNMIN did not monitor the elections properly.

UNMIN’s central office is in Kathmandu but they work in all five development regions. Arms monitors are present in all seven Maoist cantonments, the army barracks in Chauni, and in each district of the country.

The comprehensive peace agreement states that UNMIN is to monitor the demobilization of arms and help in the process of integrating the NA and the PLA. Therefore, it doesn’t seem like the mission will pack up and leave the process half-way through. The seven-party government and the Maoists both sent letter to the UK’s secretary general to invite the mission to Nepal two years ago. Their mandate was initially one year, but was extended by six months in January and is due to end in July.

Observers believe the mission will stay on. No commission has been set up to oversee the army integration thus far. Even when it is set up the bureaucracy will take several months just to get started.

Bad losers

Editorial in Naya Patrika, 27 April

At a time when the meeting between the seven parties has been unnecessarily delayed, some Congress leaders have started claiming that the NC should head the new government, as the Maoists don’t have a two-third majority. If this is really the belief of a party which got 21 percent of the vote in the PM ballot and 16 percent in the FPTP, we could be forgiven for thinking that they do not have much of a concept of representative democracy.

Senior leaders Sher Bahadur Deuba, Ram Chandra Poudel and Gopal Man Shrestha have cited the Maoists’ lack of two-third majority and the pivotal role played by PM Koirala as reasons why the NC should head the new government. While both the interim constitution and the people expect the parties to work together, no one expects a party which lost the elections to lead the government. By questioning the legitimacy of the majority party to lead the government, the NC shows that it is not ready to learn from its loss in the elections.

If opposition parties start to challenge the lack of two-third majority even before the first meeting of the constituent assembly, the assembly is sure to fail. And the NC leadership should think about what impact this would have on the NC itself.

The nation did not choose the republican path just to begin a new dynasty, and no party has special privileges to go against the will of the people. If these leaders really believe in what they are saying it is a shame on them and the nation.
Il attention was on the constituent assembly elections on 10 April when the Bardiya National Park here in western Nepal staff left for polling duty at various voting centres.

Wildlife poachers seemed to have prepared well for the period of lax security at election time. They killed a rhino at Thakur Dwar on 3 April. Early next morning the national park officers found not only a dead rhino with the horn taken out, but also the body nearby of a soldier killed by the poachers.

The army says the soldier, who was off duty and going home, was killed by an assault rifle wielded by the poachers because he happened to be a witness. This is the first time that an SLR has been used by poachers in Bardiya, and the army suspects international poaching syndicates are getting more organised and getting guns left over from Nepal’s conflict.

Five rhinos have been killed in the park in the last six months. From 1986 to 2002, over 83 rhinos were brought in from Chitwan National Park to Bardiya. But a rhino census last June showed that there were only 31 rhinos left in the park, and another count in February showed the number was down to 22. Last year four rhinos were killed just before Dashain, and three of them were found in the buffer zone surrounding the park.

Under the comprehensive peace agreement, the army is not allowed to patrol the buffer zone with arms, and conservationists say this is the reason why poaching has increased in the last few months. (See also: ‘Parking the army’, #391)

“Under the comprehensive peace agreement, the army is not allowed to patrol the buffer zone with arms, and conservationists say this is the reason why poaching has increased in the last few months,” says Col Sunil Singh at Bardiya.

Chief Warden of the park, Phulchandra Kharel is concerned that if present trends persist and given the fluid political situation, rhinos may become extinct in Bardiya. He says that...
at election time has in rhino poaching

the park officers are not armed, and the army hasn’t been able to stop poaching. “Even if you put an entire battalion in charge of the park, the situation will not change. We have to re-evaluate what the army, which carries modern weapons, are doing to protect the park,” says Kharel.

It is clear that there is no coordination between the park authorities and the army that has been deployed to protect it. Worse, they seem keener pointing fingers at one another than in trying to solve the problem together. The poachers have simply taken advantage of the confusion.

During the war, Nepal Army security units inside the park were dismantled, and the park’s anti-poaching intelligence network in the buffer zone broke down. But the conflict prevented free movement so poachers were scared. It was during the political transition of the past two years that more rhinos have been killed for their horns.

Apart from the three people arrested in Chisapani while trying to smuggle rhino horns across the border in September 2006, no one else has been caught. Between July 2006 and May 2008 the army may have arrested over 100 people with shotguns, but they were either for poaching deer, or illegally felling trees.

Warden Kharel is worried by poachers now using advanced weapons, and wonders how these are getting inside the park.

CLEAN PLATES: The restaurant at Pithauli before opening hours.

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We have spacious bedrooms with private balconies for your comfort, extra large garden and lawns for your leisure, and Nepalese cultural dance show (every evening) for your entertainment. In your next visit, stay with us and enjoy, Pithauli is its finest.

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HIMAL REQUIRED: DESK EDITOR

Himal Southasian is looking for a person who seeks to build a career as a Desk Editor. The position’s responsibilities include offering both support and leadership for the editorial team in all aspects of the monthly magazine’s production, from editorial communications by research and image selection, to overseeing fact-checking and proofreading. However, the primary skill required is the ability to edit “full-length” articles of the kind carried in review magazines such as Himal. Applicants will need to have the ability to turn around full-length article drafts, on a wide range of topics, according to the magazine’s in-house style. Besides footwork competence in English-language editing, applicants must have a strong grounding in the social sciences and a keen understanding of Southasian history, economics, culture and geopolitics. Above all, they should appreciate the role of the desk editor in the world of magazine journalism.

Work experience: Substantial editing, reporting, research and writing in mainstream media, though with academic journalism is also relevant.

The position is based in Kathmandu. Salary will be commensurate with experience and application.

Application process: Send CV and cover letter to editorial@himalmag.com

Deadline: 25 May 2008

www.himalmag.com, subscription@himalmag.com
The bonhomie was visible in the weekend’s India-Nepal conference in Patna. “We have backed this process and built trust and confidence with all actors,” said one senior official. “It’s an effort to build a new power reality in Nepal. Their attitudes and decisions will play a critical role in the future politics in Nepal and in the Tarai,” said a senior official.

And that is where the Madhes is significant. A Delhi-based Nepal analyst told us: “India needs some strategic space. And Madhesi groups can provide us that leverage to work with Kahantri if the Maoists ever get too belligerent. I am not saying support armed groups, but Delhi must use Madhesi politicians for its geopolitical interests.”

People power to the border

Nepali Times: Are you worried about the Maoist win in Nepal?

Nishit Kumar: Why should I be worried? We welcome the election results and look forward to working with the new government. The Maoists have come the democratic way and are a legitimate party. Their links with Nepal are never been proven. It is mere speculation and we have no reason to believe they will support such activities on our side. This is the verdict of the people and we honour it.

Madhesi leaders met you recently to ask for support for their struggle. What do you think about the Madhes issue?

Nishit Kumar: That is a problem that has to be solved within Nepal. There is a constituent assembly now. Madhesis have representation within the house. They, like others in Nepal, have legitimate demands which can be addressed in the new framework. This is not a mandate for one-party rule anywhere. From what I understand, the message from the people of Nepal is that all their political leaders should work together. Everyone, including the Madhes, must be taken together in this process.

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Revolution to development

A Nepal-India conference in Bihar zeroes in on water resources

Mitra Frenzy: Hisila Yami is mobbed by Indian media in Patna on Saturday, with her on the podium is Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar and State Minister for Commerce, Jairam Ramesh.

Tarai armed militants are reported to be based in Nepal, with her on the Saturday. with her on the programme are next door to a country of one billion, growing at eight percent with which you have an open border,” he said, “Nepal is not India-locked, it is India-open.”

Participants said India-Nepal economic cooperation has suffered because Nepali nationalism is often defined by its own walls, ignoring its own people. For example, even as the constitution is written it must set up and strengthen a nationwide network of autonomous user-owned institutions through local ownership and institution-building.

What are the key areas in which you would like to co-operate with the new government in Nepal?

Water management is one of the key areas. Can you imagine a situation where there are floods? So much of my work goes to waste during these periods. The roads get destroyed, we have to spend巨lafferty 10 billion dollars a year. Thakur said.

The new government must follow a twin-track approach: even as the constitution is written it must set up and strengthen a nationwide network of autonomous user-owned institutions through local ownership and institution-building.

The Maoists have not跟我 pull back on that nationalist agenda, and India shouldn’t try to play pawns and bishops in Nepal.”

Seven years ago when India’s Power Trading Corporation’s Tantam Narayan Thakur came to Nepal to explore electricity import prospects, he remembers Nepali officials assuring him that Nepal could export 150MW by 2007. “Today, Nepal is buying power from India,” Thakur told the conference.

But he said India’s demand for power would grow to 200,000MW by 2018. If Nepal could fast-track projects to generate just 10,000MW in ten years, consume 2,000MW itself and export the rest to India it could earn $2 billion a year, Thakur said.

Foreign investors in Nepal, however, say they need to feel that they are not wasting their time. Dhubar India is one investor which has stuck it out in Nepal through the conflict years. Its CEO Yudhan Gunguly said: “Nepal needs to create the right atmosphere for investors by resolving labour issues, violence and insecurity. Unless swift action is taken, the few investors that remain may decide it’s not worth it.”

Comment

Bihari K Shrestha

The role of money in competitive politics, most politicians were soon up to their necks in the quagmire of corruption.

Gajurel was asked how his party would meet the aspirations of thousands of its cadre. He said there had to be massive job creation for Maoist youth, and he asked for donor help. It left many wondering whether the Maoists would use the resources as ministry appointments centres as the UML and NC did post-1990. Gajurel’s reliance on donors also shows that the Maoists may fall into the same old dependency trap. Nepal has been receiving development aid for more than 50 years and part of the goal was poverty alleviation through job creation. Despite this, unemployment (13 percent) and underemployment (47 percent) are at all-time highs. In fact, this was a factor that enabled Maoist recruitment.

In order to do things differently and effectively, the Maoists must realise that employment creation as well as other development undertakings have never been a function of money alone, but building people’s institutions. Only then can local development also generate employment opportunities in the process.

Unfortunately, while the donors are good at doling out money, their record is tardy at best in building institutions resulting usually in the wastage of scarce resources. Take the Ministry of Local Development (with its interesting acronym, MOLOD) which has spent a budgeted sum of Rs 38 billion in its nearly 30 years of existence. This does not include the vast sums spent by donors directly to micro-manage projects that they fund.

Despite all this, the rural landscape is characterised by grinding poverty, decreasing productivity, environmental degradation, unemployment and an exploding population. All of this fuelled the combustion of the insurgency during the last decades.

An example of good institution-building is Nepal’s community forestry success. At the heart of the achievement was the government’s decision to introduce forest user groups in 1988, an innovation deriving from the Panchayat-era Decentralisation Act of 1982. It had taken us 30 years from 1957, the year when forest was nationalised, to steadily destroy it. It took 10 years to resurrect it. Our forests now not only meet the need for fodder, fuel and timber, they also generate money for local development including employment opportunities. Besides, the hinterland is also dotted today with user-owned coops and saving and credit groups that are also doing marvellous work in self-help economic and social development.

Unfortunately, the so-called Local Self Governance Act of 1999 written with generous financial and technical help from the UNDP and DANIDA (which fiercely competed against each other to exercise and together lured government professionals into abdication) practically removed the user group concept. This set the stage, however inadvertently, for the colossal wastage of resources.

Nepal’s new bosses, the Maoists, must recognise that donors are good only as donors, the basic social function of the state must be assumed by professionals and predicated on the dispassionate assessment of our successes and failures. The elections may have been for an assembly to write the new constitution, but the two years that it is estimated to take is far too long given the urgency of the cause of the poor and hungry in the villages.

The new government must follow a twin-track approach: even as the constitution is written it must set up and strengthen a nationwide network of autonomous user-owned institutions through which all development projects must be implemented on a countrywide and priority basis.

Bihari Krishna Shrestha is a freelance writer on development issues and politics.

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IT'S DEVELOPMENT: Maoist senior, CP Gajurel, at a panel discussion on post-election development delivery arranged by Kathmandu-based donors and academics last week.

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The world economy is being battered by sharply higher energy prices. While a few energy-exporting countries in the Middle East and elsewhere reap huge profits, the rest of the world is suffering as the price of oil has topped $110 per barrel and that of coal has doubled.

Without plentiful and low-cost energy, every aspect of the global economy is threatened. For example, food prices are increasing alongside soaring oil prices, partly because of increased production costs, but also because farmland is being converted from food production to bio-fuel production.

No quick fix exists for oil prices. Higher prices reflect basic conditions of supply and demand. The world economy—especially China, India, and elsewhere in Asia—has been growing rapidly, leading to a steep increase in global demand for energy, notably for electricity and transport. Yet global supplies cannot easily keep up, even with new discoveries. And, in many places, oil reserves are declining as old oil fields are depleted.

For developing countries to continue to enjoy rapid economic growth, and for rich countries to avoid a slump, it will be necessary to develop new energy technologies. Three objectives should be targeted: low-cost alternatives to fossil fuels, greater energy efficiency, and reduction of carbon-dioxide emissions.

The most promising technology in the long term is solar power. The total solar radiation hitting the planet is about 1,000 times the world’s commercial energy use. This means that even a small part of the earth’s land surface, notably in desert regions, which receive massive solar radiation, could generate large amounts of electricity for the rest of the world.

Perhaps the single most promising development in terms of energy efficiency is plug-in hybrid technology for automobiles, which may be able to triple the fuel efficiency of new vehicles within the next decade.

Global cooperation on energy technologies is needed both to increase supplies and to ensure that energy use is environmentally safe, especially with man-made climate change looming on the horizon. This would not only be good economics, but also good politics, since it could unite the world in our common interest, rather than divide the world in a bitter struggle over diminishing oil, gas, and coal reserves.

Jeffrey Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.
I was around 2001 that a new awareness briskly entered Bollywood. After several slow years at the box office, an insurmountable war with the pirate industry, and an increasing dependence on the global market, filmwallas realised that ‘puraney formula ab nahin chalega’.

Across the board, they called for ‘films of substance’, films with an international panache (urf Hollywood). And, stepping into the breach, the twenty and thirty-something freshmen of the industry were entrusted to ‘modernise’ Bollywood.

The wide celebration of new and young directors as the embodiment of a new-found originality in Bollywood is in a way yet another gimmick. They too look to and reproduce the West for the same reasons that previous filmmakers did. They are the new faces of the old quest for modernity that is the very logic of post-independence India, and of which Bollywood is a vital embodiment.

The focus of the latest phase of Bollywood has in fact hardly been about ‘substance’ but rather about appearance. Or ishtyle in filmi lingo. Take last week’s directorial debut of Vijay Krishna Acharya (a.k.a. Victor), who belongs to the coterie of Yash Raj Films, as evidence. His film Tashan literally means style.

Secret siren Pooja (Kareena Kapoor), anglophile gangster Bhaiyaji (Anil Kapoor), English-muttering call-center dude Jimmy Cliff (Saif Ali Khan), and Kanpuria goon Bachchan Pande (Akshay Kumar) are caught up in a swindle affair involving 25 crores. The film has the slick gloss of a Tarantino-esque thriller, and the climax scene features martial arts combat on a scaffold. But at heart Tashan is a tired tale of that well-worn Bollywood theme—vengeance, and a faulty one at that.

Anyhow, that is the least of Victor’s concerns. His mind is more focused on the glamour value and stylishness of the project, and on that ground he does okay. The film is generally a showy affair. Kareena’s bikini is not just a matter of silly titillation: on it hangs the very raison d’être of Victor’s project, and in a weird way, also the logic of Bollywood’s newfound modernity. Yet Victor needs to learn that there is more to film style than just being faddish and catching the audience’s eye with sharp costume changes.

Tashan’s westward, maverick, cowboy scheme is not an unconscious one. On the contrary, Victor keenly engages with the East-West binary he creates through ongoing wrangling between his characters. The scenes with Anil Kapoor trying to improve his hopelessly funny English with accent-coach Saif provide more than a few gags. But Akshay Kumar as the boor from UP, Saif’s counterpart, ultimately steals the show.

The film is fairly entertaining at times, showing a trace of irony that even its successful forerunners Dhoom and Dhoom 2 (which Victor wrote) didn’t have. But its ‘life mein chahiye ishtyle’ message doesn’t have much to offer to Bollywood’s yearning for ‘substance’. •

TASHAN
Director: Vijay Krishna Acharya.
EVENTS

- Ski Night a tribute to legends at Garden of Dreams on 2 May, 7PM onwards. Rs. 599 inclusive of welcome drink and dinner.
- Don’t worry, be happy spring concert by the Kathmandu Chorale, 3.30 PM and 6PM on 3 May at the British School, admission free.
- Children of Heaven a film by Majid Majidi, 6 May, 6:30 PM at Lazimpati Gallery Café. 4248659
- Reineke the fox a drama performed by Studio 7 at the Naga Theatre, Hotel Vaja, open from 8 May, 7.30 PM.
- Tantric Dance of Nepal presented by Kalamandapa, every Tuesday, 7PM at Hotel Vaja and every Saturday 11AM at Patan Museum.

MUSIC

- Sundance music festival a weekend of live music at The Last Resort, 3-4 May, Rs. 200. 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 Mendron, Gakama, 4401212
- Sufi music by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.
- Yankai and friends live acoustic music every Friday at the Bourbon room Restro-bar, Lal Darbar.
- Anil Shahi every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, B.P. 5521408

DINING

- The Kaiser Café open now at the Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, open from 9AM-10PM. 4450341
- Sunday jazz brunch design your meal with pastas, salads and barbeque, with jazz by Manimo and band, at the Rox Garden, Hyatt Regency.
- Bourbon Room Restro-bar now open for lunch and dinner with over a 100 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 liqueurs at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- Continental and Chinese cuisine and complimentary fresh brewed coffee after your meal at a Zen Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.
- Illy espresso coffee at the Galleira cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails.
- International buffet at the Sunset Cafe, and Russian specialties at Chimney, Hotel Vaja and Yes. 4248999
- Roasts and red wine roasts and red wine at the Ritz Restaurant, Hyatt Regency, 10 April-6 May. 4448961
- Jazz in Patan with coffee, food, drinks and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 8.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- Saturday special barbeque, tequila, mimos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Winny Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday, 9441208484.
- Dice-icious brunch at Kali, Socialite Cinema 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. 4237999
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and more at Roadhouse, Bhaktapur. 4408587, Pulchowk 5521755 and Thamel 4260187.
- Retro Brunch Barbeque with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3 PM at Le Mendron-Kathmandu, Gakama, 4401212
- Nepali Barbeque Dhakama Nepali style barbeque with pan-Indian fusion at Splash Bar and Grill, Hotel Radisson, Rs. 1399, 7PM, every Friday.
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841205619
- Lavazza coffee Italy’s favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, Roadhouse Cafe Pulchowk and Thamel. 4706012
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4245215

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

EXHIBITIONS

- photo.circle xvii election special, 3 May, 9.45 AM at the Sundhara Bakery Gate.
- Art Freedom, a group painting exhibition from 4-6 May, 10AM-5PM at NAFA Bambalarto, Nath, 9413418180
- Musha - Expressions We Wear an exhibition by Soo Jin Oh, until 5 May, 10AM-6PM at the Gallery 32, Dent Inn.
- Impressions of Nepal painting exhibition by Mohamed Al Bhatti until 9 May at Siddharta Art Gallery, Bambahral Rewalat. 4248654
- Solo Painting Exhibition by Susman Maharjan from 9 May at Kathmandu Gallery, Thamel-Check.4248659
- Collection One paintings by Amir and Anup Chitrakar, until 10 May, at the Saturday Café, Boudha. 9851106266

ABOURED TOWN

- Suji Night a tribute to legends at Garden of Dreams on 2 May, 7PM onwards. Rs. 599 inclusive of welcome drink and dinner.
- Don’t worry, be happy spring concert by the Kathmandu Chorale, 3.30 PM and 6PM on 3 May at the British School, admission free.
- Children of Heaven a film by Majid Majidi, 6 May, 6:30 PM at Lazimpati Gallery Café. 4248659
- Reineke the fox a drama performed by Studio 7 at the Naga Theatre, Hotel Vaja, open from 8 May, 7.30 PM.
- Tantric Dance of Nepal presented by Kalamandapa, every Tuesday, 7PM at Hotel Vaja and every Saturday 11AM at Patan Museum.

MUSIC

- Sundance music festival a weekend of live music at The Last Resort, 3-4 May, Rs. 200. 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 Mendron, Gakama, 4401212
- Sufi music by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.
- Yankai and friends live acoustic music every Friday at the Bourbon room Restro-bar, Lal Darbar.
- Anil Shahi every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, B.P. 5521408

DINING

- The Kaiser Café open now at the Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, open from 9AM-10PM. 4450341
- Sunday jazz brunch design your meal with pastas, salads and barbeque, with jazz by Manimo and band, at the Rox Garden, Hyatt Regency.
- Bourbon Room Restro-bar now open for lunch and dinner with over a 100 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 liqueurs at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- Continental and Chinese cuisine and complimentary fresh brewed coffee after your meal at a Zen Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.
- Illy espresso coffee at the Galleira cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails.
- International buffet at the Sunrise Cafe, and Russian specialties at Chimney, Hotel Vaja and Yes. 4248999
- Roasts and red wine roasts and red wine at the Ritz Restaurant, Hyatt Regency, 10 April-6 May. 4448961
- Jazz in Patan with coffee, food, drinks and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 8.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- Saturday special barbeque, tequila, mimos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Winny Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday, 9441208484.
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The film tells the story about call centre executive Jimmy Cliff (Saif Ali Khan), gangster Bachchan Pande (Akshay Kumar) and Pojja (Kareena 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 Bhagyani (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
HAPPENINGS

THE TWAIN MET: A soldier at Singha Darbar climbs a flagpole on Wednesday at a ceremony to welcome five new foreign ambassadors to Nepal. The rumpus was caused when the Afghan flag, being lowered, became entangled with the Icelandic flag on the way up.

HOLY SMOKE: Hailing from India, kitchen god Sylvester Gomes whips up a divine Nepali-style barbecue that has infusions of North Indian spices, at the Radisson Hotel last Thursday.
Narayanhiti Party Palace

Among all the brilliant ideas about what to do with royal assets, the one to turn Narayanhiti Palace into a party palace is probably the most pragmatic.

If the seven parties need a palace, then this one should do fine. And at the rate party palaces are coming up in every neighbourhood this current mating season, ‘Hiti has all the attributes that a proper marriage venue requires: capacity to take thousands of guests, ample parking, generator, garden venue, security, a military band and even a flashing strobe on the turret. Narayanhiti would give stiff competition to the Garden of Dreams across the road and the formerly-royal Army Club on Tundikhel which raked it as if there was no tomorrow this marriage season.

It may just be a coincidence, but just as the time arrives for Narayanhiti to be vacated come reports that Comrade Awesome is planning to leave the Pistachio Palace. The Ass’ mole at Nayabajar says the reason given is that the building is not big enough to accommodate all the dignitaries who troop there every day and the limos have to park on the narrow lane outside. The Ass hereby places this pro bono rental ad on behalf of El Presidente: Presidential Palace Required A newly self-appointed executive president of the republic requires a spacious private residence inside the Ring Road, preferably in Bhaisepati or Mandikatar with enough parking for 20 SUVs and limos, basement with secret passageway to street outside, barracks for 25 PLA, 32 YCL, 108 ANNFSU-R and three Rottweilers, high wall with concertina wire, landmined perimeter and helipad on roof. Should be able to withstand tectonic and political earthquakes.

Meanwhile over at The Palace Built on Sand in Baluwa Tar, the prime minister is looking increasingly like the fall guy for his party. The NC Central Committee meeting has singled out Koirala and Sitaula for blame in the ignominious defeat that the kangresis suffered in the elections. Member after member has accused Girjau of being a dictator, appeasing the Maoists, not providing enough security to NC candidates, etc. But the usually short-tempered Koirala is reportedly not at all ruffled. Kangresis are at a loss trying to figure out what has come over their generally grumpy leader. Some think he is secretly into vipassana, others speculate he has already attained nirvana. But the most-plausible explanation is that the man now actually thinks he has a chance to get the Nobel Peace Prize this year for having steered Nepal’s peace process to a speedy end. Koirala is said to be suddenly obsessed about his legacy and is behaving himself. Jim Boy got the Nobel for the Mideast Peace Process even though there is still a war going on there, so it doesn’t seem to matter to the prize committee whether a candidate has actually brought about lasting peace. It’s the thought that counts.

True to their Supreme Commander’s instructions, the YCL remained Gandhian just for a week. They are now back to their usual tricks, thrashing anyone who utters a peep. Next time, we will also need post-election observers.

So the last of the election observers have now left. Their numbers really boosted tourist arrival figures for April, which according to Nepal Tourism Board saw a 17.5 percent increase over the same month last year, kept hotel occupancy rates at 100 percent and Thamel bars full. Some of the observation reports pronounced the elections “free, fair and peaceful” which goes to show just how observant the observers were. Apparently some of these sanitised reports are now being rejected even by the agencies that funded them, and one European envoy even threw a tantrum because it glossed over voter intimidation. Over at the EC there is a feeling of resignation because the commissioners decide everything by consensus and there is always a comrade to veto any statement that has the initials Y, C or L in it.

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