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Times nepalnews.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 39.6%
No 55.1%
Don't know 5.2%

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

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

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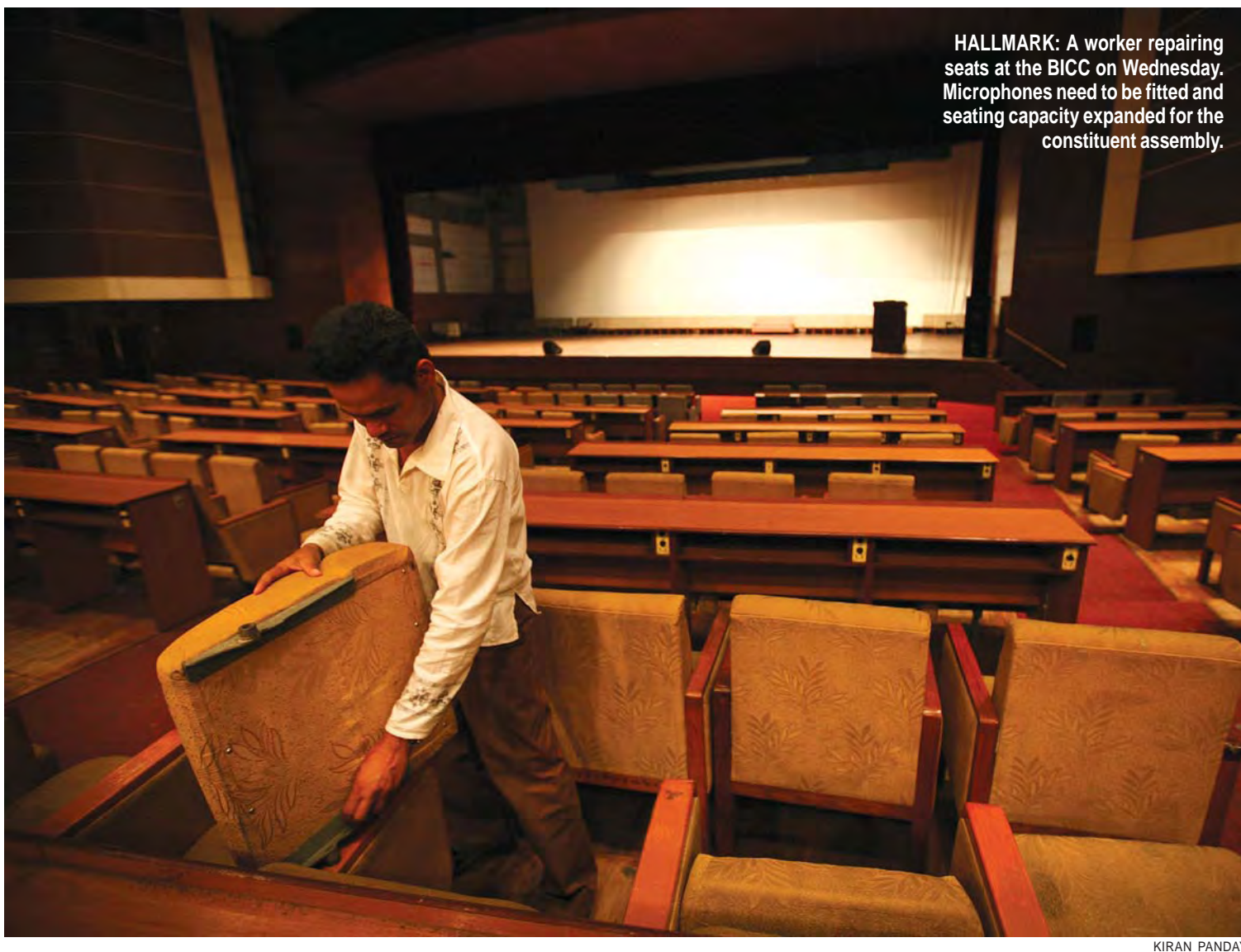
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KIRAN PANDAY

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 Sagarmatha 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 *Nepali 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. ●

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SNAP OUT OF IT

Two millimetres. That is how fast the human nail grows in three weeks, judging by the progress of the indelible ink on our fingers.

The UML and NC have been sitting in the corner in a deep sulk ever since their humiliating defeat in the elections. Three weeks is enough time for these two parties to snap out of it. Their silence, sense of hurt and their blame game is self-indulgent and counter-productive for the task of nation-building that lies ahead.

Before the election, Madhab Kumar Nepal gave Pushpa Kamal Dahal some sage advice: "The Maoist party must learn to be good losers, democracy has its ups and downs." That was very good counsel and it would be prudent for his own party and the NC to follow it.

The sky hasn't fallen, the Nepali people have done the NC and UML a favour by giving them a wake-up call. Now the parties have a chance to infuse young blood and re-invent themselves. The Maoists may be the largest party but they can't form a government on their own. The Madhesi parties have been voted in sizeable numbers, reflecting the aspirations of the Tarai and also taking some of the wind out of the sails of the militant groups.

The NC and the UML have an even more responsible role now. They shouldn't be putting up unnecessary obstacles in government-formation, a political deadlock now could have deadly consequences. They need to be defenders of pluralism and democratic principles to balance off a party that has come out of the jungles and whose ideological and behavioural traits are still suspect. Even after elections, Maoist young communists haven't stopped threats and violence against candidates and supporters of other parties. The NC and UML may be bad losers, but the YCL is a bad winner.

It is now up to the mature parliamentary parties to be the whistle-blowers for democracy and freedom, to speak out and protect it in the constitution drafting process. So far the Maoists have paid lip-service to pluralism and multi-party competition, their words need to be translated into action. It doesn't help the transition process that the party leading the government also has its own army, and the prime minister may soon be heading two armies as well as a violent vanguard force. This abnormal state of affairs must now be brought to closure.

For the past two years, the world has looked at Nepal's conflict transformation with amazement. It is now up to the political leadership to rise above pique and pettiness to repay to the Nepali people the debt they owe them.



SANTA GAHA MAGAR

Waiting for Goit

The man could have been an asset in the formation of an inclusive and federal Nepal

PATNA—Biharis are flummoxed by the fact that Nepalis across the border have put their faith in the hands of Maoists.

Naxalites have been active here in Bihar and Jharkhand for nearly 40 years. But when violent revolutionaries in India have entered the electoral fray their



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

performance is so poor, that people here have a wait-and-see approach. Perhaps there is a lesson from the Nepali Maoists for Indian Naxals, but don't bet on it.

For Goit, former Maoist leader and the founder of the Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha peaceful polls in Nepal seems to have been a disappointment. Despite dire warnings from various armed group Madhesi voted in overwhelming numbers.

Voters in the Tarai taught mainstreamers and Maoists the fundamental lesson of identity politics: beware the fury of the spurned. Promises about peace and prosperity are all fine, but

for the marginalised, identity and respect matter more. Goit should have taken it as a reaffirmation of his faith, but he

looks uncomfortable at the rise of Upendra Yadav, a junior to him in the class war as well as in ethnic mobilisation.

We meet Goit in a modest apartment in an ordinary locality of Patna. He claims to have travelled by train to keep our appointment. He has his bag of books and articles within close reach, there are no visible armed bodyguards. He sits stiffly in a wooden chair and talks like a man obsessed. For Goit, Mahanta Thakur is more important for the cause of Madhesi than Upendra Yadav. Even when in the NC, Thakur has been consistent about issues of concern to common Madhesi.

The man who came out of the Maoist fold to raise arms for the rights of Madhesi shows his fundamental differences with Madhes-centred parties espousing the same cause.

"We prefer the term Tarai over Madhes, do not consider ourselves Nepali citizens, detest being described as people of Indian origin, believe in armed struggle, and are working for the liberation of Madhes rather than creation of a new federal democratic republic of Nepal," Goit says.

The tools to achieve those gains are straight out of the Maoist strategy handbook: guns, pens, songs and paintings to make people rise against the old order. The fact that people of the Tarai may have found better methods to achieve nobler aims escapes 'revolutionaries' schooled in the ideology of all-or-nothing.

Preference of the Tarai over Madhes is a matter of choice. Madhesi not being "Nepali citizens" is hardly a new argument, it has been the position of every political party following the Mahendra Path of

unitary identity. But there is a possibility of all Madhesi being equal citizens of a new entity yet to be created, the identity of being a builder of Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, can't be dismissed as easily as Goit does. It may appear to be a noble and unachievable goal at the moment, but it's a lot less impractical than dreams of creating an independent Tarai state.

Guns can forge nations, but the result is seldom better than what can be achieved through peaceful struggle, sincere negotiations and honourable settlements that are honestly implemented. Goit's resentment against the "Indian origin" tag is understandable. How about "Indic origin"—a politically neutral term that describes belongingness to a shared South Asian civilisation?

The problem with Goit is that he is too deeply committed to his cause to accept dissent. That is the paradox of armed revolutionaries: they want to listen and refine their strategy but can't use guns without a sense of finality.

After over two hours of heated conversations that went around in circles, we leave Goit to his books in the sparsely furnished apartment. He admits that he isn't keeping well, but is in "better condition than Girija Prasad Koirala".

Had the politics of Nepal not gone haywire, people like Goit could have been a great asset for the formation of an inclusive and federal Nepal. Sadly, he too will probably wilt like the fiery and fearless Ram Raja Prasad Singh.

Perhaps Goit realises the futility of his dreams but refuses to wake up. Should he choose to we all will benefit from his erudition and energy. ●

LETTERS

THINK POSITIVE

In many of his articles CK Lal mocks the Maoist leadership's promises about bringing about dramatic changes in Nepal ('Among the alchemists', #397). It may well turn out to be true that their performance does not live up to their rhetoric, but surely no one imagines that the NC or UML would have made any significant changes to Nepal. Were we really just going to hand them another opportunity to do the same they've been doing for years? I am a regular reader of State of the State, but I am surprised and somewhat disappointed to read in his column such perpetually gloomy forecasts for Nepal's future under a Maoist government. Yes, the Maoists are not perfect, but they have been the only party to seriously face the issues of Indian proxy-rule, elitism and king-centred court politics in Nepal. Please don't try and predict the failure of our new government before it's even started.

Tanka Prasad Pandey, email

● I agree with CK Lal that the Maoists need miracles to happen and are banking on some kind of divine intervention in order to fulfil their election promises. Let's hope they will really be able to make Nepal an advanced country within the next few decades, or at least that we can climb out of the ignominious list of the world's poorest countries. I think the Maoists should organise a *yagya* before the constituent assembly begins. It might help them to have God on their side.

Kishor Kamal, email

● We base our judgements or thinking on the basis of what we watch, read and listen to in the media. I have to say I think it's pathetic that the Nepali media was so shocked by the election results. It shows that they aren't in touch with the people. Of course, it's true that the Maoists have perpetrated violence, which needs to be condemned, but the media was dead against them for the

whole election campaign, and never showed their positive side. Political analysis was totally Kathmandu-centric and based on personal convictions and prejudices rather than the truth. I agree with Pooja Belbase and Pashupati Neupane (Letters, #397). It is disheartening when our intellectuals prefer to spend more time heaping scorn on easy political targets. The public wants the media to report the news, not make it.

Prakash Sharma, Kathmandu

● Before the CA polls, there was a big tussle between the parties about the electoral system. The election was postponed in November 2007 because the Maoists were demanding a full PR and was nearly postponed again in March when the Madhesi parties demanded the same. The NC and UML were adamant the system should be mixed. It's ironic that the Maoists and the MJF would have actually done better in the election if more seats had been under the FPTP ballot,

and the NC and UML would have got more seats under an exclusively PR system. Of course the parties were advocating one or the other system because they thought they would get more seats that way, not because of any belief about what represents real democracy. Maybe the fact that they all lost out because of their own platforms might teach them a lesson not to be so self-seeking and short-sighted in the future.

Praveen Kumar Yadav, Birganj

GLORIOUS GUNDRUK

I loved reading Khaire Bhai ('Speaking in tongues', #397), in which he sang the praises of gundruk. But he forgot to mention gundruk's amazing power to keep stomachs (especially foreign ones) regular. I would like to second him: both my heart and my belly are lost to gundruk—both for its taste and for its restorative bowel-balancing qualities.

James, Biratnagar

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



GUEST COLUMN
Kul Chandra Gautam

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 Nepalis 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



KIRAN PANDAY

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.

10. Creating a conducive environment for public-private partnership, encouraging private sector development and foreign investment.

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 peace.

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 Nepalis 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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ISHWAR RAUNIYAR at EVEREST BASE CAMP

The ice pillars on the Khumbu glacier sparkled. The seracs on the Nuptse wall were blue-green and translucent.

We felt elated despite the 5,000m elevation as we walked towards Base Camp on Monday. Both the army and a trekking company had assured us as reporters we might be able to seek exemption from the ban on satellite phones and video cameras.

But minutes after arriving at Base Camp and being escorted to a temporary post by a friendly plainclothes policeman, Deputy Secretary of the Tourism Ministry Prabodh Dhakal took charge of us. “You are not allowed to talk to any one here,” he said sternly. “If anyone is found talking to you, they will be expelled.”

No journalist was allowed to enter Base Camp without a permit. “You are also unofficial here, so leave this place as soon as possible,” Dhakal told us.

The government has ordered an information blackout at Everest Base Camp. Not only video cameras and satellite phones, but also satellite internet and walkie-talkies, essential for mountain rescue, have been confiscated. We were told we



CHARLES HAVILAND

could not even cover non-political subjects.

When I asked why I, as a Nepali, could not stay, Dhakal said repeatedly that these were “exceptional circumstances”. He told us to come back after the Olympic Torch had reached the summit via the Chinese side.

“You have heard that Chinese officials have been meeting the Prime Minister and other government officials. It’s an order from the top. You are not allowed to stay here: you don’t have a permit,” he said.

This Base Camp is on the Nepal side of the mountain, but it might as well be in China.

Nepal has officially closed the southern side of Chomolungma until at least 10 May from Camp 2 (6,500 m) upwards. In addition, all foreigners without a climbing permits have been ordered to leave Base Camp from 1-4 May. That includes photographers, team leaders and spouses of climbers.

As a Nepali I felt sad and humiliated. A Nepali mountaineering official, who didn’t want to be named, explained: “Nepal is a beggar country. We are getting lots of economic help from China, so we can’t jeopardise our relationship.”

But it’s not just geopolitics,

IRON CURTAIN: A temporary police checkpoint near Everest Base Camp where expedition gear is checked for pro-Tibet flags and material. All video cameras, satellite phones have to be surrendered.

mountaineers’ lives are also at risk. A climber at Base Camp who also didn’t want to be quoted, fearing expulsion, said that the longer the mountain was closed, the greater was the danger.

“Within 10 days, we could have made Camp 4 ready for the first summit push,” he said. “But the longer the closure, the greater the danger of ice falling on us. It’s

endangering our lives.”

The reason for all this bandobast is that China doesn’t want any embarrassing Free Tibet banners at Base Camp or on the mountain during the torch’s journey to the summit. Chinese ambassador Zheng Xianling flew into Base Camp this week in an army helicopter. The police had found a Free Tibet flag in the rucksack of an American mountaineer, he was sent down the mountain and later deported.

There is anger along the Everest Trail for the decline in business and employment this season. Dendi Sherpa, a lodge owner, said the restrictions were 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. But 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.” ●



COLD BEAUTY: The summit of Chomolungma peers from behind the Nuptse ridge on Tuesday. The Olympic torch is being taken up to the summit from the Chinese north side of the mountain sometime over the weekend.

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.

Some had speculated that the team hoped to make the ascent 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 summit on Tuesday and Wednesday which could indicate the torch is nearing the summit. Chinese CCTV reported mountaineers had completed the setup of a staging point at 8,300m for the final assault on the 8,850m summit.

HIMAL

SOUTH ASIAN

MAY ISSUE

Nepal: After the election, before the constitution

*Understanding the Nepali mandate, by Prashant Jha

*Seeking explanations for the Maobaadi triumph, by Kanak Mani Dixit

*Turning the Maoist victory into Nepal’s good fortune, by Kul Chandra Gautam

Also:

Lhotshampa, Madhesi, Nepamul

– A C Sinha

The Nepali-Qatari migrant world

– Tristan Bruslé

Landless in Tarai

– photo feature by Greg Constantine & C K Lal

Time for talk on Tibet

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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.

Everest branch

Everest Bank Ltd opened its 25th branch in Narayangarh on 28 April. The branch will offer full banking services, including a "three-month plan". The plan will allow customers to open an account with a minimum of Rs 500, get a free debit card, 50 percent discount in the locker service charges for a year, 50 percent discount in processing and 0.5 percent discount in customer interest for three months.

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.



Infrastructure blues
Roads and power plants can't build themselves

NEW DELHI—India's capital in late April has few virtues 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 powercuts 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



GRIDLOCK: Despite the metro and expressways, Delhi's transport infrastructure is still bursting at the seams.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

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 apace. 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 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 lightning 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 Delhiites had with their bus lanes on every new infrastructure project in Nepal. ● www.arthabeed.com

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Election diary

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

Damodar Neupane in Kantipur, 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 fearing another attack he ran away and hid in a bamboo grove behind the stadium. The Maoists tracked him down and beat him up again. When we arrived to report, the Maoists roughed up journalist Bhimlal Shrestha.

● Vote counting started on the night of 11 April. There was commotion outside. Lawyer Mohan Pokharel was running away from 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, sometimes 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 Parashuram Ramtel about the beatings and threats. He

कान्तिपुर

told me journalists wouldn't be harmed and we were free to report the facts. Maoist district in-charge Krishna Dhital and Secretary Chudamani Khadka said this wasn't party policy and said there might have been "infiltration". This worried me even more because it meant that if we were harmed the Maoists would simply blame someone else.

● The obstructions 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 from now is against Kantipur," Maoist district secretary Chudamani Khadka said. We thought this would stop after the elections, but it hasn't.

● On 13 April, New Year's Day, it was still tense. 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 until he went 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.

● By 17 April we thought the situation had returned to normal and

went to Manakamana. But on return, the Maoist threats started again. This time they said they would analyse everyone's election coverage and take action.

● 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.



SAM KANG LI

RUMBLE TUMBLE: YCL cadre put on an acrobatic display in Gorkha during campaigning. Not all their activities are so peaceful.

Decision time

Yubraj Ghimire in Samaya, 26 April-2 May

समरा

The Maoists have said that it will be best if the king vacates the throne gracefully. Earlier it seemed they were in favour of him having some cultural and spiritual role, but in light of Maoist leader Ram Bahadur Thapa's statement that "there will be no place for any form of monarchy," this opinion has obviously changed.

India's Bharatiya Janata Party and especially its leader Lal Krishna Advani have been adamant that monarchy is crucial for the sovereignty of Nepal. But after the 10 April elections, even they have welcomed the advent of republican democracy. When the king was most in need of their support, the BJP abandoned him, claiming that it could not interfere in foreign matters.

Not many options remain for the king: either accept the offer of stepping down gracefully, reach a consensus through political negotiation or abdicate. "But in my opinion, under no circumstances will he leave the country," said an ex-minister who recently met with the king. "The king has accepted that the 1 February takeover was a mistake but all the political parties and foreign nations who encouraged him to take that action are trying to escape responsibility by blaming him.

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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
.....
Himal Khabarpatrika,
28 April- 13 May

हिमाल
खबरपत्रिका

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 decommissioning 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

नयाँ पत्रिका

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 PR 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 Koirala should lead 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.



VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

USAID/Nepal invites applications for employment from all interested and qualified US citizens/Green card holders for the position of Democracy and Conflict Specialist in the General Development Office, under a Personal Services Contract subject to availability of funds.

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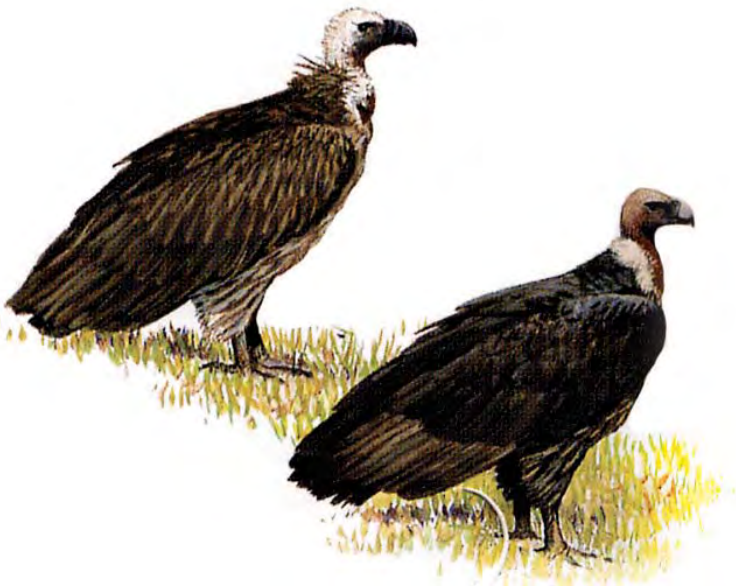
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And most helpful and generous friend to any one lucky to have met you.
You will be remembered for your humor, smile, intellect, selflessness, generosity and for your kind heart.
We will miss you but NEVER forget you.
Love forever your grieving family.

The vultures are circling



A drug ban and feeding centres have brought vultures back from extinction



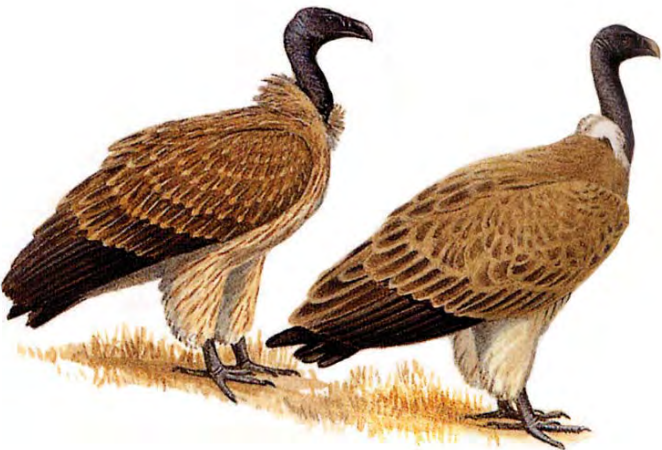
UMA KHANAL in NAWALPARASI

In the last 15 years 95 percent of South Asia’s vulture population has vanished. The fall in their population has been linked to an anti-inflammatory drug used by farmers to treat livestock. Residues of the drug in animal carcasses poisoned the vultures in large numbers. From Pakistan to Bangladesh, the sight of vultures circling overhead or feasting on animal carcasses by river banks became rare. With the scavengers gone, disease spread and dogs



proliferated. But a ban on the veterinary drug, diclofenac, and the setting up of safe feeding centres for vultures has revived populations. (See: ‘Soaring again’, #286 and ‘No more circling’, #185). In Nepal, the district of Nawalparasi has

seen a dramatic increase to vultures thanks to the opening of a feeding centre in Pithauli in 2006. Many travellers on the East-West Highway have seen a large billboard here that says ‘Jatayu Restaurant’ and have mistaken it for a roadside diner and driven in for lunch. It is only later that they realise ‘jatayu’ means vulture and the restaurant is not for humans but for vultures. Vultures dine for free at the Jatayu, and one of the ‘waiters’ is Yam Bahadur Nepali who lays out large chunks of buffalo for the vulture to feed on once a



Horns of a dilemma

Lax security led to a rise

RAMESWOR BOHARA in BARDIYA

All 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 Dasain, and three of them were found in the buffer zone surrounding the park.



KIRAN PANDAY

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) “The situation inside the national park is quite tight, but since we are not allowed to patrol with guns in the buffer zone, poaching has increased in the recent months,” says Col Samir

Singh at Bardiya. Chief Warden of the park, Phadindra Kharel is concerned that if present trends persist and given the fluid political situation, rhinos may become extinct in Bardiya. He says that

ing again

CLEAN PLATES: The restaurant at Pithauli before opening hours.



MUKESH POKHREL



around here, now there are 32,” reports Yuvaraj Mahato, member of the Vulture Management Committee.

Local agriculture specialist Sadananda Jaisi says the initiative is important, as the forests of Nawalparasi contain seven of the nine species of vulture in the world. Setting up the restaurant has also made it easier for conservationists to monitor the birds and their activities. Last year they fitted transmitters on two of the vultures, allowing them to monitor movement and habits.

The vulture resurgence has raised the area’s profile as a tourist destination, and an observation post has been built so vulture visitors can watch the birds swoop down at mealtime. The restaurant management is also training 40 local youngsters to be bird-watching guides for vultures and other birds in the nearby Chitwan National Park.

The government recently opened a Vulture Fertilisation Centre at Kasara in Chitwan, Jaisi is trying to get it relocated to Pithauli. Another vulture restaurant is also being set up 20km to the north of here.

Says Nepali: “Vultures have a bad image, but we want to give the message that they are clean animals and they play a valuable role in preventing disease.” ●

day. “If their population goes down it takes a long time to recover, so we have to make sure they can sustain themselves and their chicks,” says Nepali. An adult pair of vultures hatches only one egg a year.

“Before the restaurant opened, there were only 17 vulture nests

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 busier 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. ●

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South of the border

PATNA—Depending on who you talk to here in the capital of India's Maoist-affected state of Bihar, there is elation, scorn, cautious optimism or worry about the electoral success of Nepali comrades.

Predictably enough, it is at the offices of the far-left parties near the city's Income Tax crossing where leaders are thrilled, and at times envious, to see a revolutionary party's march towards power. The Communist Party of India (ML-Liberation) has tried the bullet and for the past decade, experimented with the ballot, but success has been elusive. The inspiration from across the border comes as a much-needed morale boost in the run up to Lok Sabha polls next year.

But the original partner of the Maoists, India's Naxalites, are not convinced this is real revolution. Still scornful of the Maobadis for "selling out", Hyderabad-based ideologue Varavara Rao said in

a recent interview they will wait to see if the Maoists maintain their "anti-feudal and anti-imperial character". The Naxalites suspect that the Nepali Maoists are no



TARAI EYE
Prashant Jha

longer concerned about changing relations of production, just ousting the monarchy.

Many bureaucrats in Patna appear nonchalant about the Maoist win for the same reason. "Our Maoists are fighting a parliamentary democracy. Your Maoists fought a king to establish a parliamentary democracy. This is an anti-monarchy vote," said a senior official.

Officials here claim the links between Maoists and North Bihar Naxalites are tenuous at best, and say they aren't worried. "We had arrested Nepali Maoists in the past because they possessed illegal arms or when they came for treatment. It was not because of Naxal links," said one official.

New Delhi's South Block has adjusted to the Maoist success. In the true Indian foreign policy tradition of working with whoever is in government in neighbouring countries (Musharraf, the Burmese Junta, Bangladesh's military) the Delhi establishment has started developing a working relationship with Maoists. The Maoist leadership reaching out and being flexible has helped.

India's rulers grapple with new Nepal reality

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, "renegotiating the 1950 treaty does us no harm, it is Nepali workers who will be affected. Tightening the border will have consequences for your local economy."

But there is a school within the Indian establishment, particularly mid-level officials in the intelligence agencies and security wings, which is alarmed. This view holds that a Maoist win will help Naxalites psychologically and operationally, that Maoists will build warmer ties with China at India's expense, the new government will do little to address India's concerns about ISI influence in the Tarai, and that this is all a tactical interlude before the Maoists consolidate themselves in power and become hegemonic. Worried that they have less maneuvering space with the Maoists, it is possible that these sections, prodded on by 'strategic experts', will look at alternatives.

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 with Kathmandu if the Maoists ever get too belligerent. I am not saying support armed groups, but Delhi must use Madhesi politicians for its benefit."

In Bihar, India's Intelligence Bureau has several offices near the border, closely tracks Madhesi politics, and feeds information to Delhi. RAW has become more active over the past year. It has limited infrastructure in Bihar but has command over unaccountable slush funds used for different purposes. Many in these agencies have direct channels of communication with Madhesi groups. It would be dangerous if they decide to push for more radicalisation in the Tarai or confrontation with Maoists.

The Ministry of External Affairs, which has sensibly said that Madhesi grievances must be addressed within the legitimately elected CA and all forces should work together, must prevail. It is important not to play up the divide within the Indian establishment. After all, once India decided to back the elections in Nepal, all branches went out of their way to control any violence that could have emanated from the Bihar side. MEA officials personally visited Bihar and met police officials, the SSB was on high alert and agencies passed on a stern message to armed groups.

India's political and bureaucratic elite is grappling with the new power reality in Nepal. Their attitudes and decisions will play a critical role in determining the future politics in Nepal and the Tarai. ●

People power to



KUNDA DIXIT in PATNA

Initially caught off-guard by Nepal's constituent assembly election results, New Delhi is hoping to do business with a Maoist-led government especially on water resources.

Publicly, the Indians say they are happy with whatever result, but there seems to be nervousness about Maoist policy on strategic issues like water, power and geopolitics.

"Some people seem to think we were caught by surprise with the result," says Shyam Saran, former ambassador to Kathmandu and ex-Foreign Secretary, "but India doesn't play favourites in Nepal. We can do business with any political dispensation."

But past Maoist pronouncements, including an interview by Pushpa Kamal Dahal in 2000 in which he boasted the Maoists would fight the Indian Army if necessary and frequent references to "Indian expansionism" in Dahal's campaign speeches haven't helped allay Indian unease.

When the Maoists won the election, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs nearly cancelled a

previously-scheduled conference here in the Bihar capital to discuss Indo-Nepal relations. Even though some high-profile guests and speakers dropped out, the meeting went ahead as scheduled on 26-27 April.

Saran and Indian State Minister for Commerce and Power Jairam Ramesh stayed for the whole two-day conference attended by 40 invited participants from Nepal. The Nepali delegation was headed by Minister for Physical Planning and Infrastructure, Hisila Yami, and also included Maoist leader CP Gajurel.

Bihar is suffering a crippling power shortage this summer, and the Ganges is almost dry. But in a few months, as every year, most of the state will be inundated by floods. It wasn't surprising, therefore, that a recurrent theme at the conference was water and power.

"In Bihar we only think of Nepal during the monsoon floods," quipped Nitish Kumar, Bihar's chief minister in his keynote address. "We have a common problem of poverty and we can tackle that by mutual

cooperation on the Kosi High Dam." How to deal with displacement of people in Nepal and the Kosi's massive silt load was not broached.

Yami didn't want to be dragged into specifics, but responded: "People on both sides of the border would benefit from transparency and accountability in political and economic commitments... particularly in the areas of flood control."

Kumar saw storing monsoon runoff on Himalayan high dams as mutually beneficial. But given perceptions of unfair treatment on Kosi and Gandaki in the 1960s, India may need to do more to build trust among Nepalis about river sharing. It didn't help that Indian officials kept urging Nepal to follow the "Bhutan model".

In the past six months two Indian private companies have signed MoUs for the 300MW Upper Karnali and 400MW Arun III. Adding West Seti and Budi Gandaki, the total power agreement with India would go up to nearly 1,800MW.

Minister Ramesh was optimistic that all this would

"The next step is to build



In contrast to his flamboyant predecessor Laloo Yadav, Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar has carved an image of being focused on governance. Walking out of his Patna secretariat office after a series of meetings late on Tuesday night, Kumar spoke to Prashant Jha about the Maoists, Madhes and monsoon.

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

Nitish 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 Naxals have 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?

They did come and speak to me and I listened to their views. But this is a problem that has to be solved within Nepal. There is a constituent assembly now. Madhesi 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 anyway. From what I understand, the message from the people of Nepal is that all their political leaders should work together. Everyone, including the Madhesi, must be taken together in this process.

hydropower



KUNDA DIXIT

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

MEDIA 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.

lead to bigger and better things. “We are no longer talking about a pie in the sky,” he said, “we have made progress and a final push on joint projects by the new government is all that is required.”

Ramesh tried to assure Nepali visitors that India was not “coveting and salivating” over Himalayan rivers, but would like to see mutual cooperation also benefit Nepal with power, irrigation and balance of payments. “One major project exporting power to India would wipe out Nepal’s trade deficit with India,” he said.

Saran echoed the view. “Nepal has to start seeing India not as a threat but as an opportunity, you 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 anti-Indianism. Former JNU professor SD Muni advised the Maoists not to fall into that trap. “The new rulers of Nepal don’t have to fall 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 Tantra Naryan 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 200,000 MW 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 \$2.7 billion a year, Thakur said.

Foreign investors in Nepal, however, say they need to feel that they are not wasting their time. Dabur India is one investor which has stuck it out in Nepal through the conflict years. Its CEO, Udayan Ganguly 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.” ●



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

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

Revolution to development

At an interaction last week organised by this paper, Maoist foreign minister-in-waiting C P Gajurel, like many past politicians in Nepal, turned to donors present for help in rebuilding the country.

He said his party would make sure aid goes directly to the people and without leakage and corruption along the way. There was a strong sense of déjà vu hearing all this. It was reminiscent of the euphoria after 1990. Leaders then, as now, promised corruption-free good governance.

It didn’t take long for the hope to evaporate. Given the role of money in competitive politics, most



COMMENT
Bihari K Shrestha

politicos were soon up to their necks in the quagmire of corruption.

Gajurel was asked how his party would meet the aspirations of thousands of his 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 now use ministries as recruitment 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 ODA for more than 50 years and part of the goal has been poverty alleviation through job creation. Despite this, unemployment (13 percent) and under employment (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, MOLD) 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 production, widespread hunger and malnutrition, unemployment and an exploding population. All of this fuelled the combustion of the insurgency during the last decade.

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 and only 10 years to resurrect it. Our forests now not only meet needs 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 dominate the exercise and together lured government professionals into abdication) practically removed the user group

Job-creation is about local ownership and institution-building

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 decision-making must be by national 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.

high dams”

Tarai armed militants are reported to be based in Bihar.

Well people of the Tarai come and go. This is an open border. We share a roti-beti relationship. Our lives are intertwined and our problems are the same. We have always been ready to help Nepal and during elections, we tightened up our security to ensure things remained calm.

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

Water management is of course a priority. Can you imagine what a relief it would be for us in Bihar if the annual floods do not devastate lives? So much of my work goes to waste every monsoon. The roads get destroyed, we have to spend at least Rs 3,000 crore in relief and rehabilitation. This will help Nepal also, by stopping floods in your Tarai and enabling the development of hydropower. What we have signed are a few run-of-the-river projects. The next step must be to build high dams.



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Carbon neutral



THE PAST: Our dependence on fossil fuels must become obsolete soon.

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.

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.



COMMENT
Jeffrey D Sachs

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

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 dividing the world in a bitter struggle over diminishing oil, gas, and coal reserves. ●

Project Syndicate

Jeffrey Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

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Wah, kya ishtyle hai!



It was around 2001 that a new awareness briskly entered Bollywood. After several slow years at the box office, an insuperable war with the pirate industry, and an increasing dependence on the global market, filmwalas 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.

Bollywood’s quest for substance was noble but doomed to failure

Anyhow, that is the least of Victor’s concerns. His mind is more focussed 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 tashan*’ message doesn’t have much to offer to Bollywood’s yearning for ‘substance’.

TASHAN
Director: Vijay Krishna Acharya.
Cast: Akshay Kumar, Saif Ali Khan, Kareena Kapoor, Anil Kapoor. 2008. 195 min.

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Date of First Publication: 1 May 2008

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **photo.circle.xvii** election special, 3 May, 9.45 AM at the Sundhara Bakery Café.
- ❖ **Art Freedom**, a group painting exhibition from 4-6 May, 10AM-5PM at NAFA Balmandir Naxal, 9841341810
- ❖ **Masks – 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 Mohammed Ali Bhatti until 9 May at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babermahal Revisited, 4218048
- ❖ **Solo Painting Exhibition** by Suzan Maharjan from until 9 May at Kathmandu Gallery, Thamel Chok, 4248094
- ❖ **Collection One** paintings by Amir and Anup Chitrakar, until 10 May, at the Saturday Café, Boudha. 9851106626

EVENTS

- ❖ **Sufi Night** a tribute to legends at Garden of Dreams on 2 May, 7PM onwards, Rs. 999 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 Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Reineke the fox** a drama performed by Studio 7 at the Naga Theatre, Hotel Vajra, opening 9 May, 7.15 PM.
- ❖ **Tantric Dance of Nepal** presented by Kalamandapa, every Tuesday 7PM at Hotel Vajra and every Saturday 11AM at Patan Museum.

MUSIC

- ❖ **Sundance music festival** a weekend of live music at The Last Resort, 3-4 May, 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
- ❖ **Sufi music** by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.
- ❖ **Yankey and friends** live acoustic music every Friday at the Bourbon room Restro-bar, Lal Darbar.
- ❖ **Anil Shahi** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, 8PM. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **The Kaiser Café 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 barbeque, with jazz by Mariano and band, at the Rox Garden, Hyatt Regency. 4489361
- ❖ **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 every meal a Zest Restaurant and Bar, Pulchok.
- ❖ **Illy espresso coffee** at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails.
- ❖ **International buffet** at the Sunrise Café, and Russian specialties at Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- ❖ **Roasts and reds** fine roasts and red wine at the Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency, 15 April-6 May. 4489361
- ❖ **Jazz in Patan** with coffee, food, drinks and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 8.30 AM-10PM. 5522708
- ❖ **Saturday special** barbeque, sekuwa, momos, dal-bhat at The Tea House Inn, Windy Hills, Nagarkot every Saturday. 9841250848.
- ❖ **Dice-licious brunch** at Kakori, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, roll the dice to the number of the day and get 50 percent discount on an individual meal, Saturdays and Sundays, 12.30-3.30 PM. 4273999
- ❖ **Scrumptious wood fired pizzas**, cocktails and more at Roadhouse, Bhatbateni 4426587, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4260187.
- ❖ **Retro Brunch Barbeque** with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Nepali Barbeque Dhamaka** 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. 9841290619
- ❖ **Lavazza coffee** Italy's favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, Roadhouse Café Pulchok and Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Pizza** from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519



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

Quest Entertainment



The film tells the story about call centre executive Jimmy Cliff (Saif Ali Khan), gangster Bachchan Pande (Akshay Kumar) and Pooja (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 Bhaiyyaji (Anil Kapoor), a maverick gangster who enjoys killing people as much as he enjoys speaking English.

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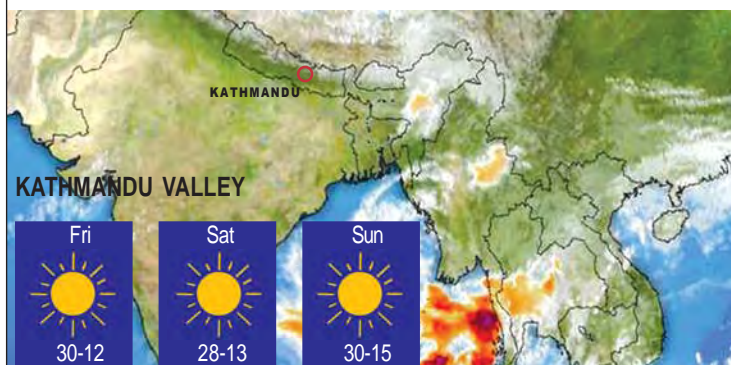
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Kathmandu is dry right now. April has ended with only two-thirds of the monthly rainfall quota having fallen, and the steady rise in temperatures has also brought humidity to its lowest level of the season. In May we are moving into the pre-monsoon period, which usually comes with thunderstorms, wind, and short-lasting showers. Satellite pictures on Wednesday afternoon show a strong cyclone over the Bay of Bengal, which is a sign of the brewing monsoon. But it will still be at least a month until it whips up enough strength to bring the first monsoon rains to eastern Nepal. The afternoons this weekend will be hot and the nights hazy.



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हरेक आइतबार दिउँसो (१:४०-२:००)
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(रेडियो सगरमाथा र अमेरिकी राजदुतावास, अमेरिकी केन्द्रको सहकार्य)

सम्पर्क: ५५२००१, ५५४२२४५ मोस्ट बक्स: १०२८, ईमेल: info@radiosagarmatha.org

हरेक विहान ५:०० देखि राती ११:०० बजे सम्म सूचना शिक्षा र स्वस्थ मनोरञ्जनका लागि भरपर्दो साथी रेडियो सगरमाथा १०२ थोप्लो ४ मेगाहर्ज



KIRAN PANDAY

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.



SHEERE NG

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

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Naryanhiti Party Palace

Among all the brilliant ideas about what to do with royal assets, the one to turn Naryanhiti 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 Naryanhiti 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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