The Maoists are coming under pressure from the political parties and the international community to take what is rightfully theirs and lead the new government. However, they appear to have recovered from their presidential defeat to pick up where they left off. On Thursday, they held a consultation with the 25 parties in the assembly who were said to be nearly unanimous in insisting that the Maoists lead the government.

When President Yadav formally asks the largest party to form a government on Friday, it seems the Maoists want to be ready. By allowing the UML assembly speaker to be elected unopposed on Thursday, the Maoists also have shown that they are open to government formation. The UML is trying to assure the Maoists that its alliance with the NC and MJF was temporary.

However, the level of distrust between the Maoists and the NC-MJP-UMC combine is still deep. “We are concerned about this alignment, they could go to the president and get him to call on them to form a government,” says Maoist CA nominee, Hari Roka. Arjun Narsingh KC of the NC dismisses this. “We don’t want to form a government, it is the Maoists who have the first chance as the largest party,” he told Nepali Times.

The kangresis seem content to have their candidate as president, and won’t mind being in the opposition. The MJF, however, is still fishing to see if there is a chance to also claim the prime ministership.

The real problem about government formation is not between the Maoists and the other parties but within the Maoist central committee where a group led by Mohan Baidya is said to be against forming the government now. Whether the Maoists will form the government will therefore depend on how soon Pushpa Kamal Dahal can convince his hardline colleagues to do it.
A nation of Rams

If you squeeze the spring too hard, it can jump out of your hand

Karl Marx was wrong. The history of the world is not made about class struggles, but the struggle for ethnic self-determination. The Soviet Union broke into 15 independent states, Yugoslavia into five (so far). The restoration of democracy in Nepal has also thrown up the demands of Nepal’s various ethnic entities. Though Pahuldis and Madhesis are not ethnic groups per se, they have a racial connotation. In the village where I was born, there was a Pahuldi family. They are still called Pahuldi. My family has been living in Kathmandu but we are still called Madheshi, even though we are Tharus.

Some one analyses all the near-disasters since April 2006, there is one thing which is more worrying about whether he will get his five litres before the petrol stations at Tiku run out. Ram Claudhary is concerned about making a living in Bardia, where highways have been closed down for a week because of a transportation dispute. But the Far West was always too far for Claudhary to take notice.

Twelve hours ago and a world away, Ram Bhattarai was mopping the floor of a hotel lobby in Balain. He hated his job. About class struggles, he would have come up with the alibi. If one analyses all the near-disasters since April 2006, there is one common denominator: the political decision that respects the popular mandate and follows the principles of pluralism and democracy is always the right one. On Monday, we could have been saddled with a president chosen by a bunch of self-serving politicians in some backroom deal. That person could have been dodging ex-terrorist, it could have been a long-in-the-tooth prime minister, or it could be a flip-flopping politician who lost the election from both constituencies.

But in the end, when it was put to the vote and we allowed our elected representatives to express their obvious and logical views, they came up with the right man. Wish it could have been a woman, but it was a man.

The presidential drama that unfolded in Kathmandu, Ram Bhattarai’s election wasn’t a defeat for the Maoists, it was one more indication that the people identify with the Maoist agenda for change.

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napalitimes.com

Mr Dahal, try once more to convince the Nepalis and Friends of Nepal now need backing of former kangreis in the struggle for ethnic self-determination. The Forum isn’t satisfied with being a compromise. The Maoists are neither ethnic groups per se, they have a racial connotation. In the village where I was born, there was a Pahuldi family. They are still called Pahuldi. My family has been living in Kathmandu but we are still called Madheshi, even though we are Tharus.

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OUR FIRST PRESIDENT
We may have our first president, but after formally sending the king packing nearly two months ago, the country is still without a functional government ('Our first president', #409). By playing upon the “patriotic” sentiments of a battered and demoralised populace, political parties have always tried to reach their petty goals. Just count how many years we have been on the streets. We run our government from the streets, we bring them down from the streets. We decide from the streets, we punish from there as well. Isn’t it time for some serious introspection? Where are our priorities and programs for economic progress, opportunity, respect, and equality? Where are the plans for investment and industrialisation? Every time Prachanda, Upendra Yadav or Girija open their mouths, it is to bad-mouth each other. Give us a break.

Bibek Paudel, email

The historic election of Ram Baran Yadav as Nepal’s first president is a victory for democracy and a defeat for totalitarian conspiracy. Yadav has indeed rekindled hopes of the Madhesi community and is a nationalistic figure. Yadav’s steadfast stance in safeguarding territorial integrity and national unity and addressing genuine issues of the Madhes have been recognised. Since the Nepali politics has undergone a turn, the political parties should involve the Maoists in the formation of new government. Yadav’s role will be decisive. We, the Madhesi people and all Nepalis are proud of our new president.

Dhananjay Shah, Dhapasi

The country has taken 100 days to get a president to replace a king, who was shown a Red Card way back in May. Personal bias aside, our first ever President does not possess the political stature and doesn’t have seniority of even a second generation leader. His greatest qualification was his origin as Madhesi. CK Lal struggles to justify that Maoists’ agenda of inclusiveness (‘Big Three vs Other Three’, #407). We seem to be dangerously pursuing Madhesi exclusiveness everywhere to appease the Tarai with the presidency and vice-presidency. When will this end? If political arithmetic holds the key to all the decision making, nobody should be surprised to see the MFJ’s Upendra Yadav being prime minister too.

Pradeep Sharma, Mumbai

It seems like the Maoists are never truly going to totally understand the ground reality. All those years in the jungle must have clouded their vision when it comes to diplomacy. Baburam Bhattarai says the reason his party is not forming the government is because the old feudal mentality remains. Who are they kidding? Nepali people are not dumb. They gave the Maoists a chance, made them the largest party and the Maoists find a pretext not to respect that trust. A small defeat and they start showing their true colours. And there are mixed signals. While PKD says he is happy to remain in the opposition, BRB says he is not. Who should the people believe? These are the people who will lead the government? The president is just going to be a ceremonial position anyway, the real power is actually with the PM.

Prerana Shihapat, Sinamangal

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Ishwari Pradhan, email

CORRECTION
Due to a translation error, the allowance amount for Bhutanis resettled in the Netherlands in the story ‘Refugees finally find respect’ (#409) was wrong. It should have been 50 euros per week.
democracy, constitution-writing, and even Kathmandu-Madhesh relationship. Depending on how you look at it, the peace process is either over or doomed to remain incomplete and flawed. If this exercise was only about getting the Maoists out of the jungle and ‘locking them in’, the job is done. But if the process entailed sustained engagement on other issues (integration of soldiers, building a just state, tackling disappearances, ensuring accountability and reorienting economic policies) the political confrontation has made the task a lot harder. There is a possibility that PLA soldiers will drift out of the cantonments, and YCL will become more assertive. If this exercise was only about getting the Maoists out of the jungle and ‘locking them in’, the job is done. But if the process entailed sustained engagement on other issues (integration of soldiers, building a just state, tackling disappearances, ensuring accountability and reorienting economic policies) the political confrontation has made the task a lot harder. There is a possibility that PLA soldiers will drift out of the cantonments, and YCL will become more assertive.

Democracy is in danger not just from Maoist authoritarianism, but the lack of real political opposition to them. A top NC negotiator, who has played a role since the 12-point agreement, says: “Stop pampering the Maoists in the name of the peace process. We have suffered enough. Just treat them like other political party.” But they are not just another party. Democracy is in danger not just from the authoritarian impulses of the Maoists, but also from the lack of political opposition to them on the ground. Recent political events have further opened the space for the Maoists to consolidate even as NC and UML stick to manipulative and petty Kathmandu-centred politics. If the Maoists stay out of government, it could be a collective self-goal for the others. The former rebels will use their effective organisation and propaganda machine to play the victim. They will monopolise the opposition so any government is bound to fail in dealing with popular expectations. There is little hope that the old faces in the new government will do anything to initiate progressive economic change. This can only mean that the extremists will emerge even stronger. The relationship between Kathmandu and Madhes, and between Madhesi parties and the people has also got strained over the past week. Most Madhesis grumble that Madhesi got more than their share by occupying both top presidency posts. The irony is that Madhesi are not too satisfied either. MUF district activists find it difficult to explain why the MUF has allied with the NC, its main electoral competitor; and the UML, the main opponent on federalism with Jhalanath Khanal even rejecting the eight-point agreement. Upendra Yadav may have wanted to balance the Maoists and extract a top post from the alliance, but he risks being discredited like he was after signing the 22-point agreement last year unless he goes back to the Tarai and explains the logic of his decision. Talk to Madhesi intellectuals and they are happy to see a Madhesi as president, but ask whether it had to be Ram Baran Yadav. Kathmandu’s narrative of Yadav is that of a nationalist who resisted the pull of identity politics. Many in Madhesi perceive him as someone who did nothing for the Madhesian movement, but used it to rose up. They remember him calling the agitation ‘mass hysteria’ and saying this is not the time for identity assertion. Madhesi may not turn radical, but don’t be surprised if you find they are not thrilled with his elevation. It is also not important to be compliant about the Madhesi because the fundamental faultlines remain. The state-Madhes trust gap will remain as long as CDOs and SPs are ethnic issues) and separatist political agendas (one Madhesi One Pradesh) also bodies well for the framing of a new constitution for Nepal’s inclusive democracy. President Yadav’s background in the peasantry of the plains rather than in the upper castes makes him not only a Madhesi, but a son of the tillers of the soil. And in this sense, this event marks a clear break both from the past of the Shah kings and the upper caste hierarchies of the plains and the hills, a phenomenon that has indubitably scarred the political and social life of Nepal and North India.

Nevertheless, President Yadav’s election is only the beginning and it calls for critical thinking and soul searching. First of all, the way the presidential election was handled by the parties reveals the inability of the NC and the UML to lead their power games. To elect both the President and the Vice President from the same Madhesis linguistic group demonstrates lack of strategic foresight in the leadership of the parties and is a waste of electoral opportunity for added inclusivity. One of the two posts should handpicked by the leader of the Tamil nationalities, Dalits or women, especially since we know that the post of the prime minister is sure to go to the hill high caste. It would have made everyone feel included, and it would have made better history. Moreover, the fact that both posts went to the Maithili-speaking Madhesi does not necessarily demonstrate UML or NCs unflinching commitment to redress Madhesi grievances. At best, it shows tokenism and remained commitment to the people of the plains. After the candidacies of Madhali Nepal and Girija Koirala floundered in the face of Maoist opposition and they put up a candidate, the UML floundered in the face of Maoist decision. Instead of Girija Koirala, Madhab Nepal and Girija Koirala’s candidacy became unacceptable to the Maoists! Such knee-jerk commitment to ethnic and regional issues is neither effective nor durable. However, this is still better than Panchayat-era or post-1990 symbolic politics in which ethnic groups got cabinet berths. The need for genuine and balanced commitment to ethnic and regional democracy should emerge by the time the new constitution is forged. A New Nepal must reflect the people’s genuine wishes rather than chance. The party leadership needs to do some serious homework before it sets down to frame the constitution.

Ram Baran Yadav’s presidency may have been the result of political gamesmanship but it does represent the emergence of a new type of chief executive. Instead of Girija Koirala, Madhab Nepal or any other person from the traditional Bahumati leadership becoming New Nepal’s first president, Yadav’s election has achieved a number of goals. It could potentially knock the wind out of Madhesi separatists, probably the most dangerous of Nepal’s ethnic movements. The people of the Tamal, alienated for so long and identified as “Illicitas” by Nepali-speaking ultra-nationalists, will now have a stake in a Nepal that is equally theirs. Yadav’s track record against opportunist politics (whenever faced with political sunset, rake up propaganda machine to play the victim. They will become more assertive.

A good start, but Ram Baran Yadav became president by chance, not by design. Why didn’t the NC and UML have a Plan B for a more inclusive election when Koirala or Nepal’s candidacy became unacceptable to the Maoists? Such knee-jerk commitment to ethnic and regional issues is neither effective nor durable. However, this is still better than Panchayat-era or post-1990 symbolic politics in which ethnic groups got cabinet berths. The need for genuine and balanced commitment to ethnic and regional democracy should emerge by the time the new constitution is forged. A New Nepal must reflect the people’s genuine wishes rather than chance. The party leadership needs to do some serious homework before it sits down to frame the constitution.
Himalayan and Laxmi Bank recently signed an agreement to work together and make all their services available to customers of both banks. Customers can also withdraw and transfer money from any of the branches of either bank.

A decade

Nepal Industrial and Commercial Bank recently entered its 10th year of service in Nepal. It also inaugurated a branch at Battisputali. The branch is the fifth in the Valley along with New Road, Kamaladi, Pulchowk and Bhaktapur branches, and several others across Nepal.

Players

A new John Players outlet, offering formal and causal wear for men, opened at Durbarmarg recently. The store has a collection of shirts, t-shirts and trousers in a range of sizes. John Players has three other outlets at Bluebird mall, WTC, and Patlaisadak.

NEW PRODUCTS

SECRET SMS: Innovative has introduced a new service in Nepal which enables all mobile users to send encrypted SMSs that can't be read by anyone but the recipient. Secret SMS uses cryptographic algorithms and costs Rs 50 per month.

LA VIVA: Viva, a new compact car from Perodua, is spacious from the inside, features a secure body mechanism and double air bags. It comes in high mileage of 650cc and 850cc, 1000 cc standard and premium models.

MOBILE: Sony Ericsson was officially launched in Nepal. Its authorised distributor, Future Tech, will introduce new Sony Ericsson mobile phones including Walkman, Cyber-shot TM and new-generation business phones, along with other accessories of the brand.

ECONOMIC SENSE

Artha Beed

Take economic policy. We don’t have one. Things are allowed to drift from one day to the next, come what may. For the first time in Nepal’s modern history, we did away with the budget and substituted it with an advance to the government. The Economic Survey for 2007/2008 hasn’t been published yet. So no one knows what our performance was in the past year.

The government’s regular expenses are soaring and total revenue collection doesn’t match spending. We are borrowing and surviving on grants to meet development expenditure. With inflation going up and up, the government wants more money to fund the development expenditure. With the economic survey not available, no one knows what our performance was in the past year.

Petroleum subsidies have now been added up to Rs 12 billion, and continuing this spending spree will mean losses amounting to five percent of GDP. The money lost on oil subsidies should be what the government should spend on education and health.

There are two ways of handling this issue, one is to leave petroleum to the market and allow people who know the business to run it.

The other is to base the petroleum prices on a fixed rupee tax rather than tax based on a percentage of the price. The government shouldn’t be profiting from rising global oil prices at the expense of consumers.

Protectionist Nepali businesses always find ways to convince the government to raise duties, taxes or fees. Every increase in the tax rate benefits the informal trade more than the government. Higher taxes mean more incentive not to pay them. The revenue administration gets its cut, but the government loses out.

What it boils down to is that when the economy is as mismanaged as it is now, we will be even more dependent on foreign aid. The government may get some relief, but aid comes with strings attached, and this will increase foreign interference in our internal affairs.

Nepal will remain a guinea pig for CDA experimentation, junkets, conferences and seminars at the cost of finally coming to grips with the hard economic realities. If we can rely on Pashupatinath, who needs a budget?

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BEST MICROSOFT PARTNER AWARD 2008

Dhulikhel—Microsoft’s Annual Partner Meet was organised at Mirage Resort from 18-19 July. The meet was attended by various dignitaries including director of Partner Development for Asia Pacific Stephan Cadisch, and Incubation Partner manager Mei Fang Heng. The two-day event comprised of many training sessions for the participants from a variety of resources personnel. During the closing ceremony Rajendra Aryal, CEO of Cyber International Pvt Ltd, was recognized as the largest sales and service organization and was given the Best Partner Award 2008 for Nepal. Cyber International Pvt Ltd, established in 1996, is the largest sales and service organisation for Microsoft products in Nepal. In the past it has already been recognized with the Microsoft Gold Certified Partner for sales and service.
Grow up

Narayan Wagle in Kantipur, July 22

The Maoist candidate may not have won the presidential election but the Maoist ideals did triumph. Now that we have a president in place, Nepal has become a republic in the true sense. However, when Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal left the assembly after the results were announced he did not look happy. In fact, he made serious accusations that the result was ‘unnatural’, ‘unしてきた, ‘a conspiracy’ and ‘non-political’.

The fact that we now have a president and a vice-president, both from the Tarai, itself should be a sign of victory for the Maoists. It was the Maoists who first pushed for the Tarai autonomy with the Madhesi Muktik Mukha. The Maoists should be proud that a peasant’s son from Janakpur has become the first president of Nepal, a historic achievement in itself.

This is not a defeat for the Maoists also because they succeeded in preventing Girija Prasad Koirala or Madhab Kumar Nepal from becoming the president. Since the very first meeting of the constituent assembly, the Maoists had been against the idea of a major party leader holding the presidency. They made inclusion the main criteria for the choice of president.

If the Maoists had not nominated Ram Raja Prasad Singh there was little chance that NC would have put up Ram Baran Yadav, and neither would the UML have fielded Ram Prat Paswan. Nepal’s first president is exactly the kind of person the Maoists wanted.

Having an NC candidate in the presidency has paved the way for the Maoists to head the government. If the Maoists had won the presidency, the other parties would have ganged up for the prime minister’s post. If the Maoists had supported the NC and the UML for the president and speaker, they would not be seen as self-centered and arrogant.

The Maoists played a pivotal role in abolishing the monarchy, and the election of the president is the culmination of that struggle. It would be wise for the Maoists to grow up and show that they are a mature political party. The NC, the UML and MJP do not want to form an alliance to head the government. In fact, they are asking the Maoists to lead the government. So why are they hesitating? The people elected the Maoists as the largest party. Now they can’t shirk from their responsibility.

The NC, the UML and MJF do not want to form an alliance to head the government. So why are they hesitating? The people elected the Maoists as the largest party. Now they can’t shirk from their responsibility.

The largest component of economic development for a country is its assets but obtaining them only from our own domestic sector wouldn’t be enough. There will always be a need for foreign aid. But there are necessary criteria for taking it: a guarantee over the ownership of assets should be included in the budget itself, the process of acquisition must be made simple and clear, and the government’s reputation as an efficient entity must be changed.

The Appropriations Bill announced a rise in government salaries, but it should have been left to the new government. The Finance Minister may have just included this clause to appease civil servants, but this may put a big burden on the treasury and trigger further inflation. Just because the employees get a raise...
doesn’t really mean that they will be more productive, or that it will help in the economic development. The government should have made a decision only after studying the experience of other countries in civil service pay rise. The passing of Appropriation Bill for a budget advance means that the new government will have more time to make a new budget after analysis and discussion. If the government ignores the country’s economic reality for populism, it will be very dangerous for the country. CA members who watch the economy, including businessmen, have to be particularly watchful.

Media bashing
Raju Thapa in Himal Khabarpatra 16-30 July
On 30 June in Aba Ke Huncha program on Nepal Television, I asked the Maoist leader Neta Bikram Chand: ‘There’s a sense that the Maoists are pushing for a president who will do what they say like a cow herder, would you like to comment?’ The word ‘cow herder’ angered the Maoist NTV chairman, Rishi Raj Baral. The following week I explained on air why I used the term ‘cow herder’, which angered him even more and I was told my program was being pulled off air from mid July.

The program faced difficulty right from the beginning, but after the Maoists took over the Communication Ministry, I had to face the kind of censorship media houses faced during Gyanaendra’s direct rule. The Maoists say they will support press freedom, but they can’t stand criticism. The control over my program was so extreme that I had no say over the subject of discussion, nor the people to interview.

There was a time when UML leader Madhab Kumar Nepal was ready to come to the studio but I was asked to not invite him. I had to call Nepal and apologise. Baral threatened to call the technicians to pull the program off air if I went ahead with the Nepal interview. Instead he asked me to call Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Mohan Baidya and Baburam Bhattarai to the program. But even within the Maoist ranks I was told not to invite Hishila Yami, Matrika Yadav and Banha Man Pun.

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The traditional trekking model in Nepal is a two-week to one-month hiking holiday which requires visitors to trudge up and down mountains to reach a scenic valley and trudge back out along the same route.

Take Manang. Trekkers usually take one week to walk up the hot and humid Marsyangdi Valley. Finally they get to Pisang and zip through the most scenic part of the Annapurna circuit. Huff and puff up Thorung La so breathless that one is in no mood to admire the vistas, clamber down the other side to Jomsom and fly back.

The advantage of this was that the tourists had time to acclimatise and know Nepal in all its diversity not just the high mountains but also the lush, deep valleys. They also spread their wealth in tea shops along the way and employed porters. The disadvantage was that they had to rush through the best part.

As roads go up to some of the popular trekking areas, including the Kali Gandaki and Marsyangdi Valleys, the once remote trekking areas are now more accessible. Some people lament this, but the good thing is that trekkers now have the chance to spend more time at their destination to explore, or just chill out.

More and more trekking companies are planning to fly their guests in the autumn trekking season up to high valleys like Dhaulagiri, Langtang or Kangchenjunga so their clients don’t waste time on the trek-in.

This remote and exotically unspoilt valley behind Dhaulagiri would take more than two weeks to walk to from Beni. But in a helicopter, it is a half-hour flight and after that trekkers can enjoy Nepal’s nature in all its unspoilt glory and be choppered out after a holiday of a life-time.

The trek takes one through the Swiss Base Camp on the southwest slopes of Dhaulagiri to the Italian Base Camp; a valley that, so far, was only frequented by mountaineers. The sheer cliffs on both sides of the valley soar above, narrowing the sky. Waterfalls roar down hundreds of metres from rock ledges on either side, Alpine choughs fly in great flocks high above a landscape that remains as it has for millions of years.

Occasionally from a windy saddle between the Base Camps, one catches a glimpse of Dhaulagiri, unrecognisable because we are right below it and its familiar summit pyramid is foreshortened. And lined up to the western horizon are the lesser Dhaulagiris; lesser in height but all above 7,500 metres and all major massifs in their own right.

After two weeks of roughing it in the glaciers, walking along moraines and being in the wild, it’s time once more to rendezvous with the helicopter at 3300m.

From the valley below comes the familiar thump-thump of the Ecureil. The pilot gets out, opens the cabin door and refuels his aircraft from jerry cans he’s flown up for the flight down to Pokhara.

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Fishtail Air: $1500 per hour. Bell Jet Ranger. 01-4112206
Air Dynasty: $1500 per hour. AS 350 Series Ecureil. 01-4497418
Shree Airlines: $4000-4500 per hour. Mi-17. 01-4222948

**Padam Ghaile in Dhaulagiri Base Camp**
Garbage camp

The closer one gets to base camp on Himalayan peaks, the more you see garbage. In fact, Dhaulagiri Base Camp looks a bit like Thamel when Kathmandu’s trash collection people are on strike.

There are mountains of garbage in sacks that have been moved down by the glacier, and judging from the content some of them are from expeditions 20 years old. Mysteriously, there are dozens of old tyres scattered across the glacier: Gorakhkali, Jet Rib from India, Seenma from China. Was there some kind of protest by porters in which they were burning tyres? Or were they laid out to cushion cargo drops from helicopters? No one knows, but it’s an ugly sight.

There is even the carcass of a helicopter that crashed here last year. It has been stripped of all its avionics and only the aluminium skeleton remains. One day the glacier is going to deposit all this deep-frozen rubbish at the terminal moraine.

One is happy to get out of the squalour of Base Camp once more to the pristine valley below.

Heli-trekking adds a new horizon to mountain tourism

FLY TO ANOTHER WORLD: Chopper drop-off point in the Mayandi Valley offers breathtaking views of waterfalls, and mountains all around (far left).

Dhaulagiri Base Camp that would take a two-week walk from Beni is just a few days away from a heli-drop. This awesome view of Dhaulagiri from the north can be possible if trekking times could be shortened by flying part of the way.

A helicopter drops trekkers at Annapurna Base Camp (opposite), cutting the trek-in time by up to four days. After acclimatisation, they can explore hitherto inaccessible areas.
Nepal’s energy

Required immediately: more power to meet domestic shortfall and to reduce the trade gap by exporting to India

DEWAN RAI

Which ever government comes to power, the first thing it will have to start working on will be energy. In any other country, this would be considered an emergency. Nepal is going through its first-ever monsoon power cuts. This winter load-shedding will go up to 56 hours a week. The generation shortfall will be 35 per cent below demand this December. It has arisen even in the case of the 750MW West Seti being promoted by the Australian Snowy Mountain group with Indian, ADB and Chinese investment. The promoters argue that they have no way it is willing to pay for electricity. This will be a factor in the huge high

activists argue that these regulated flows are a valuable byproduct of rendering the water much more valuable for irrigation. Some

flows, alleviating floods, while increasing flows in the dry season,

imbalanced is expected to grow, and

imbalance is expected to grow, and falling export. The trade

higher cost of petroleum imports

billion this year because of the

widening balance of payments gap

The other emergency is Nepal’s widening balance of payments gap with India, which reached Rs 96 billion this year because of the higher cost of petroleum imports and falling export. The trade imbalance is expected to grow, and the only way to narrow the gap in the medium term is by launching hydropower export projects immediately.

There will be other benefits from aggressive investments in hydropower infrastructure: it will generate tens of thousands of jobs. In their economic masterplan, the Maoists say they want to generate 10,000 megawatts in the next 10 years to meet domestic demand and to export to India. This would require investments at a time when most international companies are wary of doing business in Nepal because of political risk.

Nepal’s electricity demand is rising at 10 per cent a year, but could increase if the peace dividend finally spurs economic growth. Domestic investors and community generation schemes could easily add up to 50MW a year. Industry analysts see a role for large foreign joint ventures in projects to export power to India.

They point to the Electricity Act of 1962 that allowed 300MW of power to be generated in six years in the mid-1960s, doubling...
emergency

generation capacity, and say Nepal’s new government needs to make a similar breakthrough.

“Ten years ago, no one even wanted to hear about investment in hydropower but now we have investors lining up to put money into this sector,” says Gyaneendra Lall Pradhan of Butwal Power Company, one of Nepal’s new breed of entrepreneurs with stakes in seven hydro projects worth 350MW in pipeline.

“It’s simple demand and supply,” Pradhan adds. “Demand is growing so we need to add supply. But we have to be fast, if we start today we may be able to bring load shedding down to zero in seven years, otherwise this shortage will last till 2016.”

The time is right for new investments in hydropower to meet domestic shortfalls and to export to India. The Maoists have expressed a strong commitment to developing the sector, but investors are still wary.

Earlier this year, the government issued licenses to two Indian companies for big budget projects: Arun III (402MW) and Upper Karnali (300MW), both dedicated export projects. (See box)

On Monday, the World Bank’s soft loan division, the International Finance Corporation announced in Kathmandu that it would be financing 25 per cent of the cost of both projects.

The government is re-inviting bids for a storage project on the Budi Gandaki, and a slew of new projects are coming on line that will generate 150MW in the next two years.

The latest any of the export projects will start selling power to India will be 2015, and that is if work starts right away. The 790MW Australia-Nepal export joint venture West Seti project has been delayed by 10 years and will take another 10 years to be completed.

SN Power is exploring the Upper Tama Kosi II and III (500MW), while NEA, with public shares, is starting Upper Tama Kosi I next year to be completed by 2013.

Some, like Ajaya Dixit of Nepal Water Conservation Foundation, say that Nepal should concentrate on fulfilling domestic demand and promoting value-added industries first before expending time and money on export projects which have long gestation.

“Rather than just sell electricity, it would be better to generate downstream benefits from using electricity,” he says, “electricity can be the primary mover of socio-economic progress in Nepal.”

Others say meeting domestic demand should go hand-in-hand with exports to India to balance the trade gap. Says Balaram Pradhan of the Nepal Hydropower Association: “We have to produce enough energy for domestic economic growth, but we also need to export electricity to bridge the trade gap.”

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**There is no formula for success, but there are methods.**

Every successful corporate follows a path that is distinctly theirs. Most will however, admit to deriving spontaneous inspiration from what they read. With leading writers, professionals, gurus and journalists contributing, Perspectives offers a fresh take on issues that matter most to the corporate world.
China enters the 2008 Olympics looking to compete for the overall medals title, and dominance by the hosts in a number of sports will help in that goal. China’s overall haul will largely depend on their showing in sports where they usually dominate.

One of the Chinese main strongholds has been badminton where the nation actually has seen the men and women world number ones - Lin Dan and Xie Xingfang - become a couple. With a planned marriage coming after the Beijing Games, both Lin and Xie hope to bring a 2008 gold medal to their married life. But Chinese badminton possesses so many top talents that a number of the shuttlers left home are better than many of the competitors in Beijing.

The same is the case in Chinese table tennis, where both the men and women are expected to dominate the podium after 33 medals in 20 events including 16 golds since table tennis became an Olympic sport in 1988. The main story being the world’s number one player Wang Hao, who will be looking to improve on his silver from 2004, when he lost in the final against South Korea’s Ryu Seung Min.

The 2008 Olympics could also see a number of siblings share gold medal moments. The wrestling field has a trio of siblings, including two-time Olympic welterweight champion Buvaisa Saitiyev and his younger brother Adam, who claimed middleweight gold in 2000 from the dominating Russia team.

The Japanese sister duo of Chiharu and Kaori Icho both won wrestling medals in Athens and are reigning world champions while American brothers Mike and Bill Zadick both collected freestyle medals at the 2006 World Championships.

Another American family story is in taekwondo where Steven Lopez is a two-time defending Olympic champion and younger siblings Mark and Diana are making their Olympic debuts in Beijing. And oldest brother Jean will be coaching Team USA for the second time.

A final pair of siblings looking for gold are the New Zealand identical twin rowers Georgina and Caroline Evers-Swindell, who could bring home another double sculls gold medal as the 2004 Olympic champions took silver at the 2007 Worlds behind the Chinese duo of Qin Li and Liang Tian.

In the weightlifting world, Hossein Rezazadeh will be hoping to clinch super heavyweight gold for the third straight time but Turkey’s Halil Mutlu has decided against attempting to win a fourth straight gold medal after failing to lift his target weight in practice.

There is an absolute star-in-the-making in triathlon where Vanessa Fernandes of Portugal finished eighth at Athens 2004 as an 18-year-old and has since won five straight European titles and the 2007 World crown. The world of gymnastics always brings in new stars and Shawn Johnson of the US is the favourite for the much-cherished all-around individual gold. China’s Yang Wei is the men’s favourite.

The modern pentathlon women’s competition promises a top-notch showdown between two-time reigning world champion Amelie Caen of France and Egypt’s 19-year-old hopeful, Aya Medany. Tony Estanguet and Michal Martikan will continue their ongoing canoe battle and the women’s sport looks to move past the retirement of the legendary Brigit Fischer, the owner of eight golds and 27 world titles.

Perhaps the most dominating side in team sports is the US softball team. Team USA is fully expected to clinch their fourth gold medal in the fourth Olympics after putting on an amazing display at Athens 2004, out-scoring their opponents 51-1 in nine games.

Softball and baseball are both on their way off the Olympic program, definitely a disappointment for Cuba since they have captured three of the four Olympic golds along with silver in 2000 while also claiming 25 world titles including 12 of the last 13. In field hockey, all three nations Australia, Germany and Netherlands can sweep the men and women golds. And the US and Brazil are expected to battle Russia and China for gold in volleyball.
Let it begin

Nepal hopes for at least a bronze in Beijing

Debu Thapa

Nepal hopes for at least a bronze in Beijing.

“Debu Thapa is representing Nepal in judo at the Olympic Games in Beijing next month. She won the silver at the 10th SAF Games and is undergoing vigorous training. “If not a medal, I hope to at least bring back a diploma,” she says modestly. Seven other Olympians will accompany Debu to Beijing along with 22 other ‘officials’ next month. She won the silver at the 10th SAF Games and is undergoing vigorous training.

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**ABOUT TOWN**

**EXHIBITIONS**
- **Connection**, solo Charity Art exhibition by Juju taji Mahajan, until 6 August, 2PM onwards at 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath, 9801050299

**EVENTS**
- **Triplets of Belleville**, a screening by Alliance Francaise, 27 July, 7PM, 4241112
- **Dancing YOGA-LOTUS**, 1-1 September, Rs 300 per session, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan, 9800873551
- **Summer Cult Film Festival**, at the Lazimpat Galleria Café throughout July and August
- **Monsoon madness package at Shankri-la Village Resort**, Pokhara, Rs 5999 and get back Rs 5000 to spend on any hotel facilities. Also available is the Yvie Airlines Special offer. 4434741
- **Tarante Tonic Dance of Nepal** presented by Kalmadamapa, every Tuesday 7PM at Hotel Vaja and every Saturday 11AM at Patan Museum.

**MUSIC**
- **Badri & Durga Khaire** a composer/singer duo from Darjeeling performing at nepa-laya’s Pateli series, ‘r’-nala theatre, July 25, 4412469
- **Hylaz Club** every Friday from 8.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu, 4489800
- **Fusion and Lozza Band** every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat, 4412133
- **Rudra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shay Nepali and friends**, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meriden, Gokarna. 4451212
- **Sufi music by Hamana Rana**, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.
- **Yankey and friends** live acoustic music every Friday at the Boulevard room Restro-bar, Lal Darbar.
- **Fusion and Classical Music by Anil Shahi** every Wednesday and Rashmi Singh every Friday, Sufi and Sufi with Hemant Rana every Saturday live at the Absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani Complex, BPM, 5521408

**DINING**
- **Walk and lunch**, 26 July, Shivapuri heights cottage
- **The Fun Cafe**, discounts available at lunch 12-3.30-2.30 PM and 6.30-10.30 PM dinner at Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu, Rs. 800, till 31 July, 4411818
- **Sixth Annual Wine Festival** until September at Kino’s, Jaytha. 4250440
- **Pizza from the wood fired oven at Java**, Thamel, 4422519
- **New menu** at Dohkaima, Patan Dhoka, 552213
- **Masala**, an Indian Restaurant on Jawalakhel, St. Mary’s school road, 4421834
- **Steak Fare** every Monday and Tuesday, 7PM-10.30 PM, Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 4489381
- **Pusat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs. 600, 4412999
- **Asian Food Special** at Jalan Jalan, Indian Restaurant on Kupondole height, 5544872
- **Steak special** with free Irish coffee at k-tool Beer & Steakhouse, 6.30-10.30 PM dinner at Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu, Rs. 800, till 31 July, 4411818
- **Continental and café item** with Live band every Friday at Vintage Cafe and Pub, Woodland Complex, Durbar Marg.
- **Lalitmane** tandoori and kabab festival, 7-10PM every Friday at the Hotel Himalaya, Hyatt Regency, 550.
- **Home made pasta at Alfresco**, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- **Hot summer spicy food** at the Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Kupondole every Saturday live at the absolute Bar, Hotel Narayani complex, BPM, 5521408
- **Beck escape** with Kathmandu’s premier steaks available for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- **Bourbon Room Restro-bar** open for lunch and dinner with over 100 cocktails, Lal Darbar.
- **Cocktails and grooves with jazz by Inner Groove at Fusion-the bar at Daiwaria’s, every Wednesday, at Daiwaria’s Hotel.
- **Cocktail, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- **Ily espresso coffee** at the Galleria café, every Friday espresso cocktails.
- **International buffet at the Sunrise Cafe**, and Russian specialties at Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999
- **Jazz in Patan at the New Orleans Cafe**, Jawalakhel, 8.30 AM-10PM, 5522708
- **Scrumptious wood fire pizza** at Roadhouse, Bhaktapur 4242587, Puchok 5521755 and Thamel 4261877.
- **Retro Brush Barbeque** with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4489381
- **Dhamaka a Nepali style barbeque with a pan-Indian fusion at the Splash Bar and Grill**, Hotel Radisson,7PM, every Friday. 4411818
- **Starry night barbeque** at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Gary Gurung, Rs. 666, at the Shanbala garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- **Lavazza coffee** Italy’s favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, Roadhouse café Puchok and Thamel. 470612

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

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_The sequel to Batman Begins, The Dark Knight reunites director Christopher Nolan and star Christian Bale, who reprises the role of Bruce Wayne/Batman. In this 5hr. Batman continues his quest to fight organized crime with the help of Lieutenant Jim Gordon (Gary Oldman) and District Attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart). However a maniacal criminal mastermind the Joker (Heath Ledger) unleashes a fresh reign of chaos and anarchy across Gotham City. For Batman to stop his most personal and vicious enemy yet, he will have to use every high-tech weapon in his arsenal and confront everything he believes in._

_Call 4442229 for show timings at Jai Nepal_ www.jainepal.com

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HAPPENINGS

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

JAGUARS AND HORSES: The stretched Jaguar that ex-king Gyanendra used to drive himself is now the official presidential limo. It waits at Sital Nibas on Wednesday to take President Ram Baran Yadav for a wreath-laying ceremony at the Martyr’s Memorial.

KIRAN PANDAY

SIDE BY SIDE: First Daughter Sujata Koirala at the presidential swearing in on Wednesday with RP leader Kamal Thapa. Prime Minister Koirala handed in his resignation to President Yadav after the ceremony. Thapa met Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Thursday to convince him to lead the new government.

KIRAN PANDAY

DISCIPLINED DIPS: Kathmandu-based ambasadors wait patiently for their turn to congratulate President Yadav after the swearing-in at Sital Nibas on Wednesday.

SHOW OF HANDS: CA members unanimously voting for Subhas Nembang as the Speaker of the Assembly on Thursday.

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Spooked by spooks

From what the Ass has been able to piece together, here is a blow-by-blow account of the fast-paced events of this past week in which the Maoists double-crossed the UML, the UML double-crossed the Maoists and the MJF tripled-crossed everyone else.

Wednesday afternoon: JN and PKD still aren’t able to reach an agreement. Out of sheer exasperation, PKD says ok, time is running out, we can accept Makunay as president. Jhallu thinks, hey that was easy, and immediately also demands Defence and Home Ministry as part of a package deal. Unbeknownst to the Eh-males, the Baddies have been working all along on Plan B with the Madhesis.

Thursday evening, Jhallu, Makunay and other sidekick comrades attend a dinner at the Chinese Embassy at which they are patted on their backs for forging Bam Ekata. The Chinese are said to prefer a united left that will be called just ‘Communist Party of Nepal’ so the Great Helmsman’s name will be forever jettisoned.

Dinner over, the comrades hurry over to Pistachio Palace to meet PKD but are kept waiting for half-an-hour cuz he’s meeting his handler. Finally, a white-haired guy emerges from El Supremo’s bedroom, hiding his face behind the lapel of a trench coat. PKD comes out in his night suit, but has suddenly gone cold on the deal.

Thursday morning, Jhallu calls Pukada to say he ain’t insisting on the ministries, but it’s too late. The Baddies announce a talmel with the Forum and back ex-terrorista Raja Ram for president. Makunay’s hypertension acts up, Jhallu goes into shock and colleagues see steam coming out of his ears. Then the Forum drops its bombshell by dumping the Baddies to form an alliance with the UML and NC. Now, it is the turn of Pukada’s ears for steam to come out of. With everyone stabbing everyone else in the back, the Baddies are too busy to do their math and therefore lose the runoff vote in the assembly.

So badly does Giprako want to exact revenge on Pukada for refusing to hand him the presidency he overcomes his own ambition and actually agrees to field a kangresi candidate other than himself. Thursday morning he summons Ram Chandra Poudel, Ram Sharan Mahat and Ram Baran Yadav and asks: “Which of you three Rams wants to be president?” Ram Chandra and Ram Sharan, being political animules, say “maybe next time”. Girjau then forces Ram Baran to volunteer, figuring that since the other Ram has Baddie backing, he has as much chance as a snowflake in hell to get elected. The rest, as they say, is historical. Moral of the story to UML, NC, MJF and the Maoists: shit happens.

No sooner had the Maoists said they won’t lead a new govt, Giprako’s sagging ambition suddenly perks up at the prospect of being PM again. The Forum also stakes its claim to PM-ship if the Maoists decline: imagine President Yadav and Prime Minister Yadav. They will have to toss a coin about which one should attend the SHARK summit.

It looks like the Nepal police mutiny is spreading to Singapore. A dozen Nepali nationals in the Singapore Police have already been deported for daring to question the salary discrepancy with foreign cops. The Singaporeans promptly deported the lot. Maybe that’s why they call Singapore a “police state”?

And the winning entry for this week’s New Name Contest comes from Anonymous via email: “If Kantipur is bought over by the Maoists, they will call it Krantipur.”

Entries to the New Name Contest: and@nepalitimes.com