Weekly Internet Poll  # 414. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Can a Maoist-led government make a positive difference?

Total votes: 3,726

- Positive: 57%
- No change: 33%
- Negative: 10%

Weekly Internet Poll  # 413

Q. How would you characterise the political developments since the elections?

Immediate Relief
- Reassure us that the state exists
- Provide consumers with basic needs
- Ensure food for the neediest. Nepal is now on the UN's hunger hot-spot list
- Ensure security, tackle crime
- Crack down hard on those blocking highways on whatever pretext

Reassurance
- Keep the peace process on track
- In the plains, ensure a just and effective government
- Address growing discontent among Tharus, Muslims and Dalits
- Make state structures in the Madhes inclusive, start back-channel talks with Goit
- Consult Madhesi parties and civil society on security
- Ensure the Maoists return seized property, stop YCL hooliganism
- Work with UNMIN on PLA integration, make army flexible
- Address truth and justice, especially for families of the disappeared
- Reform the police to prevent more mutinies, warn them they're being watched

Development
- Launch showcase development schemes in the plains
- Prioritise food security and connectivity in the hills
- Launch job-creation campaign through investment in infrastructure
- Install alternative mechanisms for local government
- Educate donors: tell them we want infrastructure, irrigation, skills training and mass employment generation. Make them accountable.

Economy
- Restore proper energy supplies, clean up NCC, sort things out with India
- Fast-track investment in hydropower with short and long-term strategy
- Reassure small and medium businesses that the state will help revive them
- Help management and unions resolve conflict
- Provide basic social security for unorganised labour

Foreign Relations
- Reassure our neighbours to north and south that their security interests will be met
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Finally, we have a prime minister. To help him get straight down to business, here is his to-do list:

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What the new prime minister needs to get cracking on
Government at last

As prime minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal will be bettering his office at Singh Darbar rather than directing affairs from the Bhaluwarkot living room, which in itself shows the government’s momentum to government. The revival of state administration throughout, control of Tanai criminality with its cross-border aspect, restart of service delivery, energizing of the civilian police force: all of this is necessary for the ride back to stability, peace and prosperity.

The standoff between the protagonists of the peace process and the other political parties is needed to be revived, including support for the victims of both Maoist and state-sponsored violence, the return of hostilities at the border, and massive investments in infrastructure and the economy to make up for the lost time. Looking ahead, the government must guard against inter-community confrontation and join a country-wide campaign to push back the culture of violence that has overtaken society.

But peace must go hand in hand with pluralism, a conclusion to the Maoists enter government they must understand that the public already understands and appreciates democracy. The democratic era between 1990-2002 was derided in unison by Kathmandu’s nobility, the donor diplomats and the Maoists in the jungle, but it was actually an era of success. Besides conceding the freedoms and rights that we today take for granted, it was those dozen years when the people of Nepal were able to imagine the impossible. It was an era of successes. Besides the democracy, there will be much demand for the citizenry’s ownership of its state. As prime minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal will be bettering his office at Singh Darbar rather than directing affairs from the Bhaluwarkot living room, which in itself shows the government’s momentum to government. The revival of state administration throughout, control of Tanai criminality with its cross-border aspect, restart of service delivery, energizing of the civilian police force: all of this is necessary for the ride back to stability, peace and prosperity.

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district in the days ahead. A grievous mistake would be, at the village and district level, to seek to monopolise decisions on development projects and the disbursement of funds. For its part, the development community must respect the Nepali public enough to internalise the participatory nature of development that emerged after 1990. The litmus test of the Maoist record in the days ahead will rest on whether citizens' groups are allowed to freely organise and set their agenda, or whether Maoist committees will direct affairs for everyone else.

Many domestic and foreign analysts prefer to project the present-day Nepali polity as polarised—between the Maoists making up the progressive left and everyone else relegated to the feudal, rightist reactionary category. In reality, there is a brand-based vanguard which stands ready to defend pluralism as the way to the future, and its members reside in the large 'parliamentary parties' and among civil society. These 'classical democrats' make up Nepal's democratic centre-left and are the ones who fought the king and worked to bring the Maoists into the mainstream. They are not going anywhere. To be anti-violence is not to be anti-Maoist, but there is certainly the expectation that the Maoists, having been legitimised totally by the April elections, could do with political, economic and constitutional advice. In mind when he says that he erred of judgement in blindly implementing the language agenda of his party during the oath-taking ceremony, but he appears to be a man on the mend who may help mould history. The new prime minister will probably find that here is a person perhaps more amenable to change than the president. But whatever the system, he has no role except what the government of the day sets for the post. That's a limitation Jha will have to live with.

Empty role

The vice president would like something to do

When the king was the alpha male of Nepali politics, the Raj Sabha was a forum where politicians past their prime gathered and sang panegyrics in praise of the monarch and his family. With the fall of the monarchy, the institution passed into oblivion. Its premises at Bahadur Bhawan were appropriated by the Election Commission.

STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

However, the north-west wing remained unoccupied for quite a while. Equipped with a lift and designed for comfort, it was once used by the king to relax. Listening to non-stop flattery must have been exhausting. This is the space that has now been allotted to the vice president. The three-room suite is luxuriously appointed. The interim constitution says that the vice president is empowered to do everything the president does, but only in his absence. Pramanda Jha waits uselessly in his d aura survival in his opulent office as he tries to figure out the relevance of his office to himself. It is conspicuously empty. There are no papers on his desk. The phone rarely rings. The assistants outside try without success to look busy. Jha says he finds it disconcerting that his motorcade disturbs the flow of traffic when he commutes between home and office. His security detail doesn't allow him to offer a lift to neighbours walking home in the rain. Contrary to the media image of an unrepentant and haughty individual, the VP shows conviction and enthusiasm for the sovereignty, integrity and independence of the federal democratic republic of Nepal. He wants to do something, to be useful and keep himself busy, but doesn't know how to go about it.

There are basically three models for the functions of a parliamentary system. It is conspicuously empty. In the US, where the VP is an elected monarch for the term of his office, the VP has to be extremely knowledgeable, to represent the interests and ideas of his party to the president. In a parliamentary system, the president replaces the constitutional monarch. The VP, however, functions as an important component of the legislature. In India, he chairs the upper house and fulfils an important role in moderating debates between the ruling party and the opposition. The third model is a hybrid where vice presidents are allowed by their bosses to observe activities of the executive, record legislative actions and function as the repository of a non-partisan knowledge base to resolve contentious issues. In this form, the secretariat of the VP has to be extremely competent and committed. Jha probably has such a model in mind when he says that he could do with political, economic and constitutional advisers. He may have committed an error of judgement in blindly implementing the language agenda of his party during the oath-taking ceremony, but he appears to be a man on the mend who may help mould history. The new prime minister will probably find that here is a person perhaps more amenable to change than the president. But whatever the system, he has no role except what the government of the day sets for the post. That's a limitation Jha will have to live with.
Generating lift

MINESH POUDEL IN TOULOUSE

After trying to find a flight back to Nepal from Europe for Dasain, I finally found a seat on an Indian airline up to Delhi. I now had to book DEL-KTM-DEL, but it was almost impossible.

At a time when the tourism sector is looking at a healthy autumn season, flights to and from Nepal are once more going to be a major bottleneck. It needn’t be like this.

There is no point blaming other international airlines. Arranging modern, reliable transport to our own country should be our own responsibility. Making fares competitive and looking at the larger benefits to the country from expanded air connections should be the strategy.

Even more important than tourism is for Nepal’s national airline to be the carrier of choice for Nepalis travelling abroad for work. Even Nepalis don’t travel on Nepal Airlines because of unreliable service. This can easily be changed so that the estimated one million Nepalis working in south-east Asia and the Gulf choose their own flag carrier to travel to and from home.

It just needs proper planning, efficient management and minimum government interference in the running of the airline. There is no point just looking to the past and blaming corruption, mismanagement and political instability. The question is: what are we going to do now?

The strategy should be to have an efficient regional airline to bring passengers to Nepal from the Gulf and south-east Asian hubs: Dubai, Bahrain, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok and Hong Kong. Code-sharing links with international airlines to pick up passengers there could make transfers smooth. But these hubs are also where Nepalis themselves go for overseas work, so it is a double bonanza.

Nepal Airlines comes with lots of baggage, but rescue is possible

Restart India flights. We sit next door to a huge tourism and pilgrim market. For a full year, Nepal Airlines didn’t fly to a single Indian destination, and has just restarted its daily morning flight to Delhi. Even if only 0.5 per cent of India’s vast middle class in Delhi, Lucknow, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad, decided to fly to Nepal, our planes would be full.

Fleet expansion is a must and is much delayed. The ageing two 757s were the most modern jets in the world when NAC bought them in 1985. Today, they are superannuated. For the hub model, we need wide-body, fuel-efficient, medium-range twin jets. For shuttles to India the airline needs narrow bodies and even turboprops.

It boils down to management. Politicians and bureaucrats will be suspicious of an independent management consultant because they are afraid the advantages they derive from the airline will be lost. But there are plenty of Nepalis with international civil aviation experience who could be brought in, and some of them actually have experience in the airline. Bringing them in with guarantees of no government interference could work.

If the airline has lost its international reputation, there may be an opportunity to cash in on its locking and maintenance facility in Kathmandu and use the cheaper manpower for engineering services, or specialisation in flight operations. If the airline can tap into even a tiny part of the Indian or Chinese market for maintenance or consultancy support for flight operations development, that would be a major step forward.

Minesh Poudel is an aviation instructor at ENAC (the National Civil Aeronautics Academy) in Toulouse, France.

"The priority

Nepal’s national airline is finally flying out of turbulence

"None of this would have been a problem if the politicians interfered less and let the managers do their jobs," says Captain Vijay Lama, who heads Nepal Airlines’ domestic operations. He says political parties have used the airline like a recruitment centre, with some staff more loyal to their political masters than to the airline’s welfare.

In the long term, Limbu has pushed a public-private partnership to get a foreign big-name partner to manage the airline. The board has approved the proposal and forwarded it to the Ministry of Tourism, but it’s still stuck there because of the political uncertainty.

With the airline restarting its cancelled operations, there is a sense of optimism, but in the end the main question is, can the airline be saved from the politicians? Vijay Lama concludes: "We have flown through a lot of bad weather, but we now see blue skies ahead."
Double-digit growth

Some 20 consultant assembly members are discussing how the CA can take up the economic agenda and help Nepal achieve double-digit growth. A conference organised by the Confederation of Nepalese Industry (CNI) at Gokhale Village Resort from 14-16 August. The topic of the two working papers include: rapid economic growth and its associated issues; trends, constraints and impediments in some selected sectors; labour relations compatible to global trends; and economic vision in the new constitution. The papers will present practical and workable strategies for achieving growth. The core theme is: ‘Rs 12,000 per month earnings for every Nepali—a national commitment’. Experts from sectors that are seen to have the potential to grow will discuss the challenges and what needs to be done to address them. "We hope this summit will pave the way for a major international investment summit we plan to hold next year," says CNI President Binod Chaudhary.

Grand exhibition

On the 15-17 August, Alta Beta and WAVE will hold the second Grand Australasian Education Exhibition 2008 in the Alta Beta Complex, New Baneshwor. The exhibition will provide useful information about further studies in Australia.

Air Dragon

In the annual World Airline Survey by Skytrax, Dragonair has been voted ‘Best Regional Airline: Southeast Asia’. The survey measures passenger satisfaction across 40 products and services and this is the first time Dragonair has won in this category.

No hassles

Laxmi Bank has recently introduced a Personal Reserve Account service. Customers will be provided with a flexible personal overdraft for use during financial emergencies.

To Singapore

SINGAPORE ENTERPRISES

Vintage

Darbar Marg. The cafe is equipped with wi-fi connectivity and widescreen tv.

is to add a third jet"'

Captain Kul Bahadur Limbu became managing director of Nepal Airlines in January. Last week, Nepal Times caught up with him in the cockpit of a 757 before he flew it to Hong Kong as RA409.

Nepali Times: The reputation of Nepal Airlines seems to have nosedived in the last two years. Kul Limbu: Look, a state-owned airline can only be as efficient as the state that owns it. The instability of the past few years and the deplorable Industries (CNIs) at Gokhale Village Resort from 14-16 August. The topic of the two working papers include: rapid economic growth and its associated issues; trends, constraints and impediments in some selected sectors; labour relations compatible to global trends; and economic vision in the new constitution. The papers will present practical and workable strategies for achieving growth. The core theme is: ‘Rs 12,000 per month earnings for every Nepali—a national commitment’. Experts from sectors that are seen to have the potential to grow will discuss the challenges and what needs to be done to address them. "We hope this summit will pave the way for a major international investment summit we plan to hold next year," says CNI President Binod Chaudhary.

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Shameful swindles

Dambar K Shrestha in Himal/Khabarpatrika, 1-15 August

When Gokul Basnyat of Khotang flew to Singapore, he thought that he would earn Rs 100,000 a month as a cook. In hope of this he gave Rs 75,000 to Rajendra Thapa, a manpower agent. Only after reaching Singapore did he realise that a tourist visa had been stamped in his passport. Basnyat came back to Nepal and filed a case in the Ministry of Labour. Thapa was caught on 21 July.

Under the name of a company named Aupair Nepal, Gambhir Raj and Gagan Raj KC duped sums of between Rs 25,000 and Rs 400,000 from people hoping to go to the US, Canada, Australia and Macau. Gambhir Raj was arrested on 12 July but his brother is still out on the streets. According to Posh Raj Chaudhary, he gave Rs 75,000 to Rajendra Thapa, a manpower agent. Only after reaching Singapore did he realise that a tourist visa had been stamped in his passport. Basnyat came back to Nepal and filed a case in the Ministry of Labour. Thapa was caught on 21 July.

The opening of the Karnali Highway has increased deaths and injuries because of accidents. It may seem wrong to compare Kalikot to Kathmandu. But there are shortages now in both places. Scarcity of food and basic commodities has been a way of life in far-off rural areas like Kalikot. Since the April Uprising, the capital too has been plunged into a life of shortages.

But the well-off population seems to be getting on fine. Even at the time of the worst shortages, commodities have been a way of life in far-off rural areas like Kalikot. Since the April Uprising, the capital too has been plunged into a life of shortages. But for the middle and the lower classes, Kathmandu has become a city of crises. Hoarding in idle banks is getting worse. At the time of disturbances, people tend to hoard cash, kerosene, diesel and petrol. The consumers need to address these issues before their patience runs out.

Dambal K Shrestha

COPYING KALIKOT

Tulsaram Pandey in Kantipur, 13 August

Kalikot has never been without problems. Food has always been scarce and prices for the basic necessities high. Schoolchildren do not have enough books, the sick do not have doctors or medicate, and in case of accidents, medical care is quite scant.

The victims of conflict are waiting for relief. The budget has been frozen since the end of the fiscal year because no work has been done. The phone lines are dead and the banks do not have enough cash. The police let him off on the condition that he would pay everybody who had been swindled money out of them. He would pretend to be a singer-songwriter, reporter or even a policeman. Gurung was caught but the government needs to address these issues before their patience runs out.

New Nepal?

Tulsi Gurjanda Vaidhya in Dristi, 12 August

For the past few years, no one has dared to invest in Nepal. Foreign investors have gone to Africa or south-east Asia. Politicians must be aware of this, but they have done nothing to attract FDI. There is capital flight. This country is headed towards financial disaster.

Insecure investments have put money into industry or agriculture and others are pulling out even from the investments they made. Labour problems have now become a serious impropriety. Instead of focusing on increasing productivity and earnings, workers are creating anarchy in the name of rights. If the political parties themselves seem to be using the policy of inciting workers to tackle businessmen, why would anyone be interested in investing here?

Without these investments, we won’t be able to create jobs here.

Three tea companies in Hili, Dhankuta, which were already running at a loss, have now closed down because of threats and occupation by militant workers. The layoffs seem to worry neither the government nor the political parties, who are on a mission to make sure Nepal.

At this rate, the question seems to revolve not around building a new Nepal but whether Nepal can continue to exist or not. If we are actually going to save and build a new Nepal, this anarchy has to be dealt with firmly.

“...they took the money time and again, but didn’t do our work,” says Rupa Shrestha as she shows a receipt for Rs 350,000. Her husband was one of the 18 deceived. Another six, including Santosh Gurung of Pokhara, were also waiting to go the US through the company.

Chandra Bahadur BK’s story is no different. He left his home in Nanglebari, Kathmandu to work as a plumber in Qatar where he expected a salary of Rs 14,000 a month. Instead he had to labour digging a tunnel in a desert and was not paid well either. He had borrowed Rs 95,000 from a local moneylender at five per cent interest. He was duped by a company named Aupair Nepal, which had taken Rs 275,000 from them to send them to Afghanistan. Sri Krishna Gurung offered people employment abroad and even after Gurung had given Rs 83,000, was jailed there for a month. He too is at the Ministry of Labour, hoping he will get his money back.

“Can you believe this is happening in Nepal?” asks Santosh Gurung of Pokhara, who went to Qatar through the same manpower company after being fooled by Kalpesh Patel.

Dambal K Shrestha

"There is anarchy in this country. The government nor the political parties seem to be getting on fine. Even at the time of the worst shortages, people are doing the same. At this rate, the question seems to revolve not around building a new Nepal but whether Nepal can continue to exist or not. If we are actually going to save and build a new Nepal, this anarchy has to be dealt with firmly."
get set to catch the i

Within a just few months of this wonder car’s glittering launch, automobile critics were convinced enough to reward it with more than six prestigious awards. Now, it’s all set to rule the streets of Nepal.
Arco International (P) Ltd., the sole distributor of Hyundai vehicles will soon be rolling out the i10 from its showrooms across the country. Convinced that this will mark the entry of stylish, performance-driven compact cars with the latest technology and design wrapped in a value for money package, Myndal knows that the i10 will catch more than just the eye.

i-inspiration

Packed with all of the inspiration that makes the i10 into a new urban challenger. Elegant outside and versatile inside, i10 fits driving fun to a higher level. New clear Xenon finish power coupled with dynamic chassis design delivers sharpening performance and a nappy, precise ride. It’s the perfect intelligent combination of rest, scenario and relaxation. Together with the excellent handling and control of the i10, they form unwavished power of inspiration.

i-intelligence

Intelligent and ergonomics interior design, delivers seating for five adults. The i10 is ingeniously designed for easy handling at neat folding. Enter the i10 and you‘ll find cutting-edge design that puts everything into instinctive reach. Also, the i10 impresses with a real feeling of quality. High levels of support in the front seats, carefully shaped rear seats and ample through ventilation offer a feeling of spaciousness rare in a car of this size.

i-ignition

The i10 has a much improved 1.1 litre gasoline engine which offers superior performance and unmatched fuel economy. The unit develop 65 ps at 5500 rpm and has a peak torque output of 0.5 kgm@3500 rpm to deliver real fun and that’s just the start. Motor driver power steering delivers effortless dynamic control. What it comes to safety the i10 surpasses you with heightened protection.

i-innovation

Distinctive and stylish from every angle, the i10 brings a new, more intense, freshness to the environment. The styling, with the upward side windows and reflective lower character line, is both expressive and attention-grabbing. The high quality, high-tech head and tail-lights help relieve the whole design, yet maintains both driver vision and aerodynamic efficiency. In short, the i10 combines fresh design with integrity and innovation.

i-inner flexibility

The i10 is for independent people, those who don’t want to do whatever they need or want to. The i10 is flexible, with one or both rear seats down there is room for longer or larger luggage, home or business items. Also there are all the storage features you expect from Hyundai, from the rear storage holder to door and seat back pockets, the i10 is more than generously equipped.
Athens's travel options are hopeless: take public transport and you'll wait ages for the vehicle to be filled to its ultimate money-making, roof-top magnificence.

Chances are your car or motorcycle will grind to a halt midway, its fuel finished. Or last night's load-shedding will have left your electric bike in a coma. If walking is not an option, you're left with the humble pedal cycle.

It may be simple technology, but with no end in sight to the fuel crisis, more and more people in the city are seeing the advantages of cycling.

Typical is Surabhi Pudasaini. After suffering the tedium of slow, unreliable microbus rides, she took the plunge and upgraded to a bicycle for her commute to work, and she's never been happier. Her small two-wheeler easily snakes through Kathmandu's traffic and she can be sure of getting to work on time. Her only disappointment is that there are hardly any other women cyclists on the road. Fellow traveller David Kraklau takes to the road with his bicycle whenever he can. “They’re the perfect transport for a place like Kathmandu, especially in Asan and Mangal Bajar,” he says. Bicycle sales may not be as high as in the days before people could afford cars, but retailers say they have seen a significant increase in the past two years. Even upwardly mobile office workers are buying them, though few use them all the time. Petrol may now be as rare as a bottlenose dolphin in the Karnali, but there is clearly no shortage of petrol-burning vehicles waiting for their rations.

“Our customers are still stuck in the fuel queues,” says Sidhi Bahadur at Govinda Cycle Shop in Kamalachhi. The condition of Kathmandu's roads does little to encourage cycling. “The main roads are fine,” says Surabhi. “It’s the gallis that have lots of potholes.” And in the monsoon, when the drains are often clogged, riding a bike can be like wallowing in a mud-bath. The Department of Roads is constructing a few cycle lanes in places like Gongabu, and from Maitighar to Tinkune and Sinamangal, but like everything else we don’t know when they’ll be complete.

“We are working on them,” Tulasi Prasad Sitaula, the department’s director-general assured us. “But our priority is the main roads.” And the cycle paths are not linked together, so they won’t make long-distance cycling through the city any easier.

Kesar Mahat, a bike shop owner in Patan Dhoka, says people in Kathmandu associate cycling with low status. “In Chitwan, you are incompetent if you don’t ride a cycle,” he says. “Here, people on the road make fun of you.” But views seem to be changing, and in recent months more middle-class cyclists have been seen donning their riding gear. “If there were suitable roads like in Amsterdam and China, a bicycle culture would flourish,” says Tirek Manandhar at Pancha

ROMA ARYAL

K

PEDAL POWER: Surabhi Pudasaini (left) and David Kraklau (right) see the benefits of cycling, as volunteer Amanda Talbot (far right) attends a VSO Nepal rally to promote cycling in the city.
Asta Nirayam Cycles in Kamalachhi. Even the last Dutch prime minister rode a bicycle.

Anywhere inside the ring road is in easy riding distance. “But some people are just lazy,” says Kraklau. “They’ll take their car even if work is just a kilometre away.”

They may be better for the environment and for people’s health, but not everyone wants to see more bicycles on the streets.

“Heavy use of cycles, the rate of work done would be slower and our economy would collapse,” says Laxman Ratna Tuladhar, director of Hero Honda Motorcycles in Nepal. “What we need most is a means of mass transportation.”

Tuladhar believes the future is in electric vehicles, and says Nepal should be using its hydropower resources to become a leader in sustainably-powered electric vehicles instead of relying on petrol imports.
hen Jim and Marilyn Simons’ son Nick drowned in Indonesia 2004, they knew they wanted to honour his memory by doing something for the country he loved. Nick had intended to dedicate himself to improving healthcare in Nepal, which is why his parents wanted to continue this ambition.

Jim and Marilyn wanted to do something more for Nepal that would make a real long-term difference in rural health. They set up the Nick Simons Institute (NSI) which has been working for the past three years to select and train health personnel who are most likely to remain in the villages and not migrate to the cities once they learn the skills. And it was while touring Patan Hospital in 2005 that the Simons were astonished by the sight of the overcrowded and chaotic maternity ward. They subsequently decided to fund a new $4 million maternity wing for the hospital.

Better in Patan

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With the help of NSI we are able to build a more efficient and better equipped ward with improved services,” says Rajesh N Gongal of Patan Hospital. The hospital presently carries out 7,000 deliveries and 2,500 Caesarean sections a year, and the new ward will help improve the quality of the services provided.
Deliveries

Demand far outstrips the provision of decent maternity services in Nepal, and there is a particular shortage of facilities that can provide neonatal and paediatric critical care. The new ward, with about 150 beds, will help meet this demand, boosting the hospital’s total capacity to about 450 beds.

The new ward will have a special care nursery to provide better treatment for vulnerable new-borns, and there will also be two new operating theatres and an energy-efficient heating system. The new complex also has a top floor to be used as an academic centre:

The new wing will be inaugurated on 17 August by Maoist leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal, the Simons will be here for the occasion, and the ward is expected to be fully functional in two months.

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA
Comrade Prachanda to

KUNDA DIXIT

So little was known about him during the first five years of the war that many in Kathmandu were convinced Prachanda didn’t exist. Other leaders of the Maoist movement, like ideologue Baburam Bhattarai and his activist wife Hisila Yami, were public figures before they went underground. Some like Krishna Bahadur Mahara were even members of parliament. But few had ever heard of Prachanda.

By 2000, a drawing started appearing in pamphlets and newspapers (second pic) of a moustached man in a turtleneck sweater. Then the army captured a group photo in with a bearded Prachanda (third pic).

From farmer’s son to teacher to guerrilla chief to government

The chairman had named Nepal’s brand of Maoism after himself: Marxismo-Leninismo-Maoismo-Prachanda Path. This played on the word ‘path’, meaning ‘way’ in both English and Sanskrit. But more importantly, it had resonance with the ‘Shining Path’ of the senderistas in Peru.

As far back as 1993, the writing was—quite literally—on the wall. Trekkers hiking in the mountains would find red grafitti scrawled on boulders: “Release Comrade Prachanda.” The revolution had leapfrogged quite literally—on the wall. Trekkers hiking in the mountains would find red grafitti scrawled on boulders: “Release Comrade Prachanda.” The revolution had leapfrogged

In other words, comrades elsewhere

In an interview with Revolutionary Worker in 2000, Prachanda gave a hint of what was to come: ‘Right now, subjectively, the proletarian forces are weak, after Mao’s death and the counter-revolution in China. Nepal is a small country, we are a small party, but we have a big perspective. Our People’s War may be a spark, but a spark for a prairie fire...the People’s War in Nepal is contributing to making and accelerating this new wave of revolution. And Maoism should be the commander of this new wave of world revolution.’

Prachanda has given many interviews since then, and in these has contradicted himself many times, or at least tried to rationalise. Eight years ago, Prachanda sounded vehement: ‘I hate revisionism. I seriously hate revisionism. I never compromise with revisionism. I fought and fought again with revisionism.

The Maoists, he said, were different. That led to the Maoists joining hands with Nepal’s bourgeois parties in November 2005 to bring down King Gyanendra. By April 2006, when the king was forced to step down, it was clear that what the Maoists could not achieve through 10 years of war and 15,000 deaths they could attain through unarmed street protests and elections. Pushpa Kamal Dahal still won’t admit it, but this was a moral victory for non-violent political struggle.

Now in a position of power, Dahal has already been forced to be more responsible in his comments. The man who used to denounce “American imperialism and Indian expansionism” and accuse those countries of trying to assassinate him, now meets the ambassadors of both countries and assures them of his party’s adherence to multi-party democracy, the free market and support for foreign investment.

He also has to answer a lot of people asking: if you were for private property and the free market all along, why did you wage war and kill all those people?”

Dahal was born in a poor bahun family from Tanahu which, like tens of thousands of others, was resettled in the cleared jungles of Chitwan after the eradication of malaria in the 1960s. His father was a frontiersman, farming and raising a family at the edge of the jungle. Life was hard in the mountains, but it wasn’t easy in the plains either. It was a struggle to survive—against wild animals, ruthless moneylenders and a government which abandoned resettled farmers to fend for themselves.

In college, Dahal was strongly influenced by communist ideology. He had seen Nepal’s yawning economic gulf at first hand while growing up in Chitwan. “I never really understood why we had to struggle so hard to survive from day to day while our neighbours had all the luxuries,” Dahal once told an interviewer.

In 1983, at the age of 25, Prachanda became a member of the Communist Party, which was in the throes of a split, reflecting...
Prime Minister

Dahal

fissures in the international communist movement. Dahal's Prachanda came into contact with Nepal's senior communists, who made a strong impression on him but with whom he later disagreed about the relevance and need for waging armed struggle.

Prachanda enrolled at the Agriculture Campus in Rampur, Chitwan, which was set up with American aid and had become a hotbed of student politics. After graduation in 1976 he spent two years in a teaching job in Gorkha's Arughat.

Satrughan Shrestha is an ex-student of Prachanda, and remembers "Dahal Sir" as a talented teacher who stood out because he seemed to take his job of mentoring very seriously. He gave every student individual attention and in the evenings would even listen avidly to songs on the radio and things. He had a passion for Hindi movies, and it seemed to know he was headed for greater things. He had a black jacket with a stern expression on his face. Even then the young Dahal had once said to him: "If I want to be minister, I can easily achieve that."

After his teaching job, Dahal did a brief stint working for the US-funded Rapti Project. Dahal remembers thinking just how wasteful foreign aid was, and also noted the segregation between Nepalis and Americans in the project office. He says he saw how little of the aid money actually went to improving people's lives, and even the little that did just made the people more dependent.

A fellow teacher in Arughat told Nepal Times Dahal had once said to him: "If I want to be minister, I can easily achieve that." After his teaching job, Dahal did a brief stint working for the US-funded Rapti Project. Dahal remembers thinking just how wasteful foreign aid was, and also noted the segregation between Nepalis and Americans in the project office. He says he saw how little of the aid money actually went to improving people's lives, and even the little that did just made the people more dependent.

Dahal said his worst moment during the conflict was when 36 bus passengers were killed when his guerrillas blew it up in Chitwan in 2004. "I couldn't eat for three days and I couldn't sleep," he said, "it was a big blunder."

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Many committed social workers, popular teachers and enlightened farmers were killed by his cadre. Most were tortured in front of the entire village or their families in an effective use of terror. When asked about this in a meeting with editors recently, Dahal said: "I never ordered our forces to torture anyone. If anyone had to be exterminated, I told them they should do it quickly, with a bullet to the temple."

Dahal had not just underestimated the people's desire for change, but also their tolerance and forgiving nature. Through the vote, the people were telling Prachanda: "You don't dare take us back to war."

But there are detractors, even within his party, who say Dahal has gone soft. After decades of being underground, the father of three likes the finer things in life, dresses well and can't resist good food. Public expectations are very high, and his party will have to start delivering on his promise to turn Nepal into the 'Switzerland of Asia'. Dahal may find that waging war was the easy part. Now that he may be heading the government that he fought to overthrow, he must be wondering how to start rebuilding a country destroyed by a war he started. Dahal will be tempted to achieve all this with unsustainable populist economic measures, or by clamping down and asserting the authoritarianism that he is familiar with. The real battle of Dahal's life is just beginning: how can he lead a party in power to deliver the goods. This is what he will be judged by in history.

Stayed underground even after the ban on political parties was lifted in 1990. While his comrade-in-arms Baburam Bhattarai engaged in open politics with the United People's Front, Dahal was working behind the scenes to prepare for armed struggle with his trusted comrade Mohan Baidya. The strategy and tactics were straight out of Mao's red book. When the war started in 1996 it spread rapidly, not because the Maoists were exceptionally brilliant or militarily strong, but because the state was so brutal, factionalised and corrupt.

For Prachanda, like all revolutionaries, the end justified the means. He said: "In a revolution, we had to weaken the repressive state, and any institution or structure that represented the government was a legitimate target."

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Dahal explained. Prachanda's transformation into Pushpa Kamal Dahal started during the election campaign this year. In speech after speech, he glossed over his party's brutal past. He tried to force people to look to the future and championed the cause of the poor and oppressed. In a country where 95 per cent of the people are poor, this was a fail-safe strategy. Dahal was more surprised about his party's victory than anyone else. He was so unsure about his own win that he tried to negotiate with the other parties a guaranteed win for himself and his senior leaders.

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Savor the taste of Indian Kebabs and Curries by famous Chef Anil Khurana especially flown in from Hyatt Regency Delhi. FEEL THE HYATT TOUCH™ Venue: The Cafe Date: 28th July - 17th August Time: 7 pm onwards Price: 1050 plus tax and service charge For reservation please contact Hyatt Regency Kathmandu: 4480362
Despite a ceasefire, the fighting hasn’t ended in the fierce war that has broken out in the Caucasus in a geopolitical struggle between the US and Russia.

President of the Caucasus country of 4.6 million people, claims the Russian “invasion” was premeditated. Abkhazia, another breakaway region in Western Georgia that proclaimed independence in the same year, has also become entangled in the conflict by taking Russia’s side.

Sporadic clashes between Georgian and separatist soldiers were not rare, but hostilities never reached the current extent. The Georgian move apparently took Western leaders, who had warned against attempting a military solution, by surprise.

Says Caucasus specialist Ivan Sukhov: “Saakashvili took a position that is awkward for the West, since Georgia has consistently positioned itself as a principled opponent of military action. Even if the Georgian actions were provoked by the South Ossetians, this is a serious political mistake.”

Georgia seemed determined to expose Russia’s involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and present the conflict as one between Western democracy and Eastern authoritarianism, possibly hoping to obtain a more decisive Western intervention in the conflict.

The attempt to revive cold war rhetoric was palpable in Saakashvili’s parallels of Georgia’s situation with the 1956 Hungarian and 1968 Czechoslovak interventions by the Soviet Union.

One possible goal of the Georgian leadership’s military intervention was to internationalise the conflict so as to change the format of the present Russian-dominated peacekeeping mission, and facilitate the regions’ peaceful or forcible reintegration.

The move has encouraged the separatist claims of the South Ossetian and Abkhaz leaderships, and Georgia’s renewed determination to fully regain its territorial sovereignty.

Unhappy with the U.S.-promoted Kosovo independence, Moscow had promised an adequate response to the latest violation in international law, and its first step came with the institutionalisation of ties with Georgia’s two breakaway regions in March.

Besides Kosovo, Russia was irritated by Washington’s enthusiastic promotion of NATO membership for two of Russia’s neighbours, Ukraine and Georgia, as well as US plans to build a missile defence system in Eastern Europe which it claims will alter the balance of forces in Europe.

Many elites in the post-communist countries tend to believe that Russia is inherently inclined towards authoritarianism and expansionism and that the Soviet Union was just another expression of this impulse.

But the Western European member states, aware that Georgia’s commitment to liberal democracy was dubious and territorial tensions were on the rise, decided to postpone the discussion on Georgia’s membership of NATO.

The US has also been openly providing military support and training to the Georgian army while often encouraging Georgia to see itself as a crusader for democracy in the midst of authoritarianism. But as a member of NATO, a young and nationalistic state like Georgia could have drawn the entire alliance into a direct military confrontation with Russia.

IPS/Other News

The conflict started after Georgian troops tried to take control of the Georgian breakaway region of South Ossetia, which had been de facto independent and protected by Russian peacekeeping forces since 1992. Russia has responded by launching an extensive military operation in South Ossetia, repelling Georgian forces from the regional capital Tskhinvali, 100 km northwest of the Georgian capital Tbilisi, and advancing into Georgian territory.

Mikheil Saakashvili, president of the Caucasus country of 4.6 million people, claims the Russian “invasion” was premeditated. Abkhazia, another breakaway region in Western Georgia that proclaimed independence in the same year, has also become entangled in the conflict by taking Russia’s side.

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IPS/Other News
Kathmandu traffic police chief Bhisma Prasai has an unenviable job. But where others would just throw up their hands in despair, Prasai is determined to make a difference.

Where does one start to sort things out in a city where maniacal motorcyclists, speed-freak microbus drivers, stationery taxis, rickshaws, bulls and jaywalkers all share the same potholed streets? Bringing order to this chaos is a mammoth task, but Prasai is making a dent.

“In the last 10 years there have been only 40km of new roads built in Kathmandu, but the number of vehicles has gone up by 400 per cent,” Prasai told Nepali Times in the traffic control room at Putali Sadak, from where he looks at live images of intersections from experimental CCTV cameras.

Prasai says public awareness is low and the traffic police can do little except fine lawbreakers. “There has been more support for traffic management from the people than from the government,” he says, pointing to the concrete lane dividers and corporate support for the Valley’s traffic police.

As a former journalist, Prasai has got newspapers and FM stations to help raise public awareness of traffic issues. He has set up a phone hotline (103) and an SMS hotline (4321) with traffic information. He also wants to see more intensive checks for vehicle roadworthiness and a get-tough policy for traffic violators.

The fuel shortage has given Prasai and the 875 officers under his command some respite because traffic volume has decreased dramatically. But he says the queues for fuel at petrol stations have created another problem.

Prasai joined the police in 1983 in the belief that where there is a will there is a way. He topped his class in basic training and early on became a police instructor at the National Police Academy. During the insurgency he found himself posted in hotspots like Rupandehi, Ilam, Palpa, Nuwakot, Nepalgunj and Jumla. He has served with UN peacekeepers in Croatia and Sierra Leone.

Prasai says the city’s streets have now reached choking point: “Traffic management can help, but there is no alternative to developing an efficient and reliable public transport system.”

Bhuvan Mathema
ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- The Group Painting Exhibition by Bipin Raj Shrestha, Kishor Nakarmi and Madan Shrestha, 16-23 August, at United World Trade Centre, Tripureswor.
- Duet of Fantasies by Promina Shrestha and Ranendra B. Mali till 7 September, 10AM-6PM, Gallery 32, Dent Inn at Heritage Plaza II, Kamladi. 4241942
- Amalagam-2008 an exhibition of paintings by national and international artists till 8 September at Siddharta Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Sunday - Friday 11AM- 6PM and Saturday 12- 4PM. 4438979.

EVENTS

- Water, a film by Deepa Mehta, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 19 August, starts at 6.30 PM. 4488560
- Danceyoga-lyoncé with Shhabra Rao 1-14 September, Rs 300 per session, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan. 9803673551
- Monsoon madness package at Shangri-la Village Resort, Pokhara, Rs 5999. 4456741

MUSIC

- 28 Yala Maya Classic, a classical music series, 18 August, 5PM, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, Rs. 100. 5553767
- Rock and Roll Friday night, Jazzabar Café, Patan, 2114075
- Ladies night at Jatta Bar Café & Bar on Wednesday with live unplugged music by D Shewan
- Hjazz Club every Friday from 8.30PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4489003
- Fusion and Lozoo Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, 4412013
- Rudra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212

DINING

- Indian Food Promotion at The Cafe, Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards until 17 Aug. 4489361
- Shiraz Promotion at La Maison Wine and Cigar Lounge, Baluwatar. (Throughout August. 4428003)
- TFC Buffet and Lunch for Senior Citizen, 50 per cent discount offer throughout August, Radisson Hotel. 4411818
- Sixth Annual Wine Festival until September at Kinny’s, Jyatha. 4250440
- New menu at Dhomkai, Patan Dhoka. 5522113
- Masala, an Indian restaurant in Jawalakhel, St.Mary’s school road. 4421634
- Asparago Promotion at Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards till August 21. 4489361
- Patr Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 60. 4412999
- Lavaozza coffee Italy’s favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, Roadhouse Café Pulchok and Thamel. 4700612
- Mexican Food Special at Jalan Jalan restaurant, Kupandole Heights. 5546472
- Continental and cafe item with Live band every Friday at Vintage Pub, Woodwood Complex, Durbarmarg.
- Home made pasta at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Hot summer spicy food at the Jalan Jalan Restaurant, Kupandole Heights. 5546472
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarka’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-9PM. 4425341
- Steak escape with premier steaks available for lunch and dinner at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 441818
- Bourbon Room Resto-bar open for lunch and dinner, Lai Darbar.
- Cocktails and grooves with jazz by Inner Groove at Fusion-the bar, every Wednesday at Dwarka’s Hotel.
- Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- Illy espresso coffee at the Galleta Café, every Friday.
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and more at Roadhouse, Bhatbaten 4426687, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4290187.
- Retro Brunch Barbeque with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4401212
- Dhamaika Nepali style barbeque with pan-Indian fusion at the Splash Bar and Grill, Hotel Radisson, 7PM, every Friday. 441818
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 668, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412909
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841306019
- Pizza from the woodfired oven at Java, Thamel. 4422519

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MUSIC

Shiraz Promotion at La Maison Wine and Cigar Lounge, Baluwatar. (Throughout August. 4428003)

EXHIBITIONS

Water, a film by Deepa Mehta, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 19 August, starts at 6.30 PM. 4488560

EVENTS

Dining: Indian Food Promotion at The Cafe, Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards until 17 Aug. 4489361

Dining: Shiraz Promotion at La Maison Wine and Cigar Lounge, Baluwatar. (Throughout August. 4428003)

Dining: TFC Buffet and Lunch for Senior Citizen, 50 per cent discount offer throughout August, Radisson Hotel. 4411818

Dining: Sixth Annual Wine Festival until September at Kinny’s, Jyatha. 4250440

Dining: New menu at Dhomkai, Patan Dhoka. 5522113

Dining: Masala, an Indian restaurant in Jawalakhel, St.Mary’s school road. 4421634

Dining: Asparago Promotion at Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards till August 21. 4489361

Dining: Patr Du Jour at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 60. 4412999

Dining: Lavaozza coffee Italy’s favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, Roadhouse Café Pulchok and Thamel. 4700612

Dining: Mexican Food Special at Jalan Jalan restaurant, Kupandole Heights. 5546472

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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Our observations over the past 10 weeks show that this year’s monsoon has been weaker than normal. Newspaper reports of record-breaking maximum temperatures in August, and of paddy farmers in Karnie and some other districts still awaiting sufficient rain to transplant their seedlings indicate the frailty of this monsoon. Satellite pictures on Thursday showed fresh cyclones over the Bay of Bengal on their way to replenish the Arabian branch of the South Asian monsoon. The Kathmandu Valley will continue to get light or moderate showers towards evening or at night, with sunny intervals during the day.
HAPPENINGS

POLITICAL SPIN: (l-r) Maoist CA member Amrita Thapa Magar, UML youth leader Ram Kumari Jhakri, NC central committee member Prakash Sharan Mathat and Maoist leader Barsha Man Pun attend a cycle rally to mark International Youth Day at Maitighar on Tuesday.

ANGEL DELIGHT: Miss Nepal 2007 Sitashma Chand, Sushil Malla from Kathmandu Jaycees, and Gopal Kakshapali and Subarna Chhetri from The Hidden Treasure announce new dates for Miss Nepal 2008, postponed after complaints from leftist women’s groups.
Offence is the best defence

The Ass is beginning to suspect that the public disagreement between the NC and the Maoists over the defence ministry portfolio was a bit of a red herring. Just a hunch: wasn’t the real issue over the finance ministry? After all, if finance turns the tap off, the army gets no moolah, right? But for some reason the army brass that had got all antsy about a Maoist president is also getting rattled about the prospect of a Maoist defence minister because of what it would mean for PLA-army integration.

The defence ministry post was always ceremonial anyway. It’s the PM who can call the shots. Besides, under the interim constitution, army policy is supposed to be governed by the National Security Council of which the defence minister is only one of the members. So why were the kangresis pretending it was so important that they were willing to stay out of government for it? And if they stay out, they have even less say, no? And why were the Maoists so dead against the kangresis getting defence? That they considered CP Mainali as DefMin proves what little importance they attach to it.

Girjau’s whole strategy has been to try to delay the Maoist government formation as long as possible by setting up one obstacle after another. The real issue here was that GPK just didn’t want to allow PKD to become prime minister because PKD vetoed GPK as president. But in his quest for revenge, the Old Fox didn’t realise that time had run out and he’d also run out of clever tricks. His personal quest has led to his party now being left out of the government with nothing to do but lick its wounds. But don’t count out Girija ‘Sour Grapes’ Koirala yet, the man is still capable of pulling another joker out of the pack.

The UML is playing coy, and is happy enough to have the home ministry in return for voting with the Maoists on the prime minister. Jhol Nath got himself a good deal this time by using his brains for once.

But if there is such a grand alliance between the Maoists and the UML at the leadership level, why are their Armed Adolescents trying their best to break each others’ skulls? The Youth Force and YCL have landed themselves in a mafia-style extermination battle over an extortion racket at Kathmandu’s casinos. The stakes are high, and both are gambling on big long-term payoffs for whoever gets to keep the division of the spoils that the royals used to pocket.

The MUF for its part is sitting tight because it has been assured of the foreign ministry by the Maoists. A couple of its leaders have got used to jet-setting during their karens ministerial days, and long to get back to jewels gleaning. The irony of the situation is that while the president gets to occupy Shahjank, a madhesi foreign minister could occupy Naryanhiti. But if the Maoists suddenly change their minds (which the MUF thinks is a distinct possibility), then it is going to gun for hydropower. No one seems to want the supply ministry at the moment because it is such a thankless job despite there being huge opportunities there for hanky panky.

In all this wheeling and dealing, the Big Four totally forgot one thing: their much-publicised attempt to come up with a common version of their common minimum program. One kangresi task force delegate in an unguarded moment admitted that in the meetings set aside for CMP all they did was bargain over portfolios. So what else is new?

Is the fuel situation in Nepal so critical that the US Air Force had to fly in a KC-10 Extender midair refueling tanker aircraft to augment petrol supply? Why else would there be an emergency visit by an airborne tanker at Gauchar that didn’t even have to pay landing and parking charges?

This week’s New Name Contest winner is Alonzo Lucius Lyons with his renaming of the Nepali Congress as Nepali Regress and the Constituent Assembly as Constant Disassembly. Runner-up is CK Shrestha with a new name for GPK: Gidda Prasad Koirala.

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