Weekly Internet Poll  # 414. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. Can a Maoist-led government make a positive difference?

Total votes: 7,082

Weekly Internet Poll  # 415. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com
Q. What should the prime minister have worn during his swearing in?

BIRD’S EYE VIEW: The East-West Highway was the only dry ground for many fleeing the Kosi floods in Sunsari in this picture taken from a rescue helicopter on Wednesday. Full story ➤

The Maoists, MUF and UML scrambled to finalise their ministerial lineup ahead of a cabinet meeting on Friday before Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s departure for the Olympics.

The division of the portfolios were agreed in a three-party meeting, and the individual party candidates were finalised in separate meetings with the UML and MUF. The Maoists had earlier come up with their ministers.

At press time on Thursday evening, these were the names of the new ministers:

**Likely faces**

- **RAM RANJAN THAPA** DEFENCE, CPN(M)
- **BAM DEB GAUTAM** HOME, UML
- **BABU RAM BHATT ARAI** FINANCE, CPN(M)
- **DEB GURUNG** LAW, CPN(M)
- **BISHNU PUDIEL** UML
- **RAM CHANDRA JHA** UML
- **UPENDRA YADAV** MJF
- **TOP B RAYAMAJHI** CPN(N)
- **JAPUR PHUDEL** MJF
- **RAYA BAHADUR THAPA** MINIS. DEFENCE, CPN(M)
- **BHUWA RAM BHATT ARAI** MINIS. FINANCE, CPN(M)
- **BABU RAM BHATTARAI** MINIS. LAW, CPN(M)
- **BARSHA MAHAR JINA** MINIS. LAW, UML
- **PAMPHA BHUSHAL** MINIS. LAW, CPN(N)
- **BIJAYA GACHHEDAR** MJF
- **BHIM RAWAL** UML
- **KRISHNA B MAHARA** MINIS. DEFENCE, CPN(M)
- **DHIRENDRA PUN** UML
- **DHANI KANT RAI** MJF
Living with rivers

I
n the middle of World Water Week this week, Sunsari district bore the full fury of the Kosi. This wasn’t a natural disaster; it was man-made.

The mountains are ravaged by landslides, and in the Tarai monsoon floods cause more and more economic damage because of the destruction of the waterways and the blockage of natural drainage systems due to infrastructure.

A recent breach in the Kosi caused so much misery in Sunsari that less devastating floods elsewhere received scant national attention. Were it not for the high-profile visit of Norwegian Minister for Environment and International Development Erik Solheim to Mahottari, one of the most flood-prone districts of the country wouldn’t even have got a passing mention in the media.

Suga is a village not far from the place Solheim visited. Like most villages in the district, it is cut off by floods for a few weeks each year. Adults walk through knee-deep water to buy essentials from the only town between the Kosi in the east and the Bagmati in the west that never floods.

This year, Suga has been hit particularly hard by the flooding. Many homes have been damaged or destroyed, and the river has risen to the level of the first floor of some houses.

One family, the Thapa family, lost their home when the river flooded in the middle of the night. They had to be rescued by helicopter evacuation during times of emergency.

Some action can be taken to improve flood management in the area. One solution could be to build earthquake-proof, flat-roofed flood shelters on high ground and equipped for helicopter evacuation during times of emergency. These shelters could be equipped with emergency supplies and medical facilities.

The builders of the New Nepal are currently engaged in discussions over federalism, of what kind and their boundaries. This is like arguing about their own Nepaliness. The nation state that did emerge in Nepal after the 2006 uprising to demolish these edifices of our past was a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural nation state. We have always had the old, but there are no new shared bonds to help us stay together. Nepal lies in Nepal, but has questions about their own Nepaliness.

Political parties, ethnic groups and so-called experts have been putting forth demands for self-determination and for ethnic federalism. Their worry is not about the existence of the nation state, but about their individual identities.

This is like arguing over the windows even before the house is planned.

Airbrushing our shared history has brought out a cacophony of competing demands for identity which has drowned out the need for a shared identity for our new republic. How can we move ahead on the road towards a progressive, equitable and self-evident without a shared national consciousness, shared identity, shared symbols of Nepal nationalism?

These issues are now going to come to the fore in the discussions over federalism, of what kind and their boundaries. The builders of the New Nepal must now think about whether we will be here at all, or will we be with our windows ever be better.

Dr Naryan Khadka is a NC member of the Constituent Assembly from Udaypur.
I agree with your checklist (‘Checklist’, #412). The prime minister should have a clear vision, mission, goal and objectives to transform Nepal into a prosperous country.

Min Magar, email

I do want to hope that bad days for democracy have now started with Pushpa Kamal Dahal becoming the PM. I hope he understands that Zimbabwe can be the worst scenario. The power sharing by UML, and MUF without resolving the issue of PLA and YCL was a colossal blunder. The Maoists should have been disarmed before being given executive powers. There is now a big danger of a drift into totalitarianism. Let us be vigilant about the agenda of the Maoist-led government and any coercion.

Alok, email

Pushpa Kamal is about to find out that it’s more difficult to build than to destroy (‘From Comrade Prachanda to Prime Minister Dahal’, #413). This is where all Communist regimes have failed: they have successfully destroyed the status quo while failing to construct a functioning polity which promotes inclusive growth and development and ensures fundamental rights of all to practice their faith and protects their basic rights. Either the Maoists should abdicate their dubious label of ‘Maoism’ or we are back to business as usual: political demagoguery and ideology at complete odds with the realities of the 21st century.

Name withheld

At last, after 14,000 people killed, Prachanda has become Pushpa Kamal Dahal the prime minister. Most of those who died were poor Nepalis from indigenous communities. He is now the most powerful man in Nepal and says he is the right person to develop Nepal. Will he make up for all the death and destruction, will he be a government only for Maoist supporters? Will he turn Nepal into Cuba or North Korea? Now we will know. He should stop being populist and bring Nepal into a prosperous country.

N Sherpa, Finland

Governments we’ve always had. What we didn’t have was governance. We have always had the same bunch of people running the show for the last two decades, the so-called left and so-called right. Those at the centre were left with problems that the governments wouldn’t give rats about. This time around there’s a different team at the helm. Although the violent path they took cannot be justified, the Maoists do seem to have a strategy: they understand coordination and have planned accordingly. They need to challenge the status quo through a new model of governance, policy making and rapid economic growth. Policies that impact the poorest, projects that deliver directly at the grassroots, economic activities that improve people’s lives.

I agree with Capt Kul Bahadur Limbu and his plans (‘Blue skies ahead’, #413) but it is not always correct to blame politicians. Capt Limbu is an operational man and knows the airline business but he should also investigate his own sales, admin and finance where more than 50 per cent of the corruption takes place. That is where streamlining should start.

Kaji, email

I wish Capt Limbu the best of luck. One of the main services of Nepal Airlines is its domestic routes which still regularly serves remote areas. If profitable international routes can subsidise an efficient, affordable domestic sector, there would be many benefits for rural communities. It would also help promote tourism in remote areas, as Nepal Airlines is more reasonably priced than overpriced private operators even for non-Nepalis.

Nima Sherpa, USA

Clean seat covers, carpets, no peanuts, tray tables that fold, slimmer and younger flight attendants.

K Gurung, Hong Kong

CORRECTIONS

Dr Rajesh Gongal was inadvertently misquoted in ‘More deliveries in Patan’ (#412). The new Nick Simons Block maternity ward of Patan Hospital was supported with a personal grant from Jim and Marilyn Simons and not from the Nick Simons Institute.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s birthplace is Dhulikhel, which is now in Kavre and not Tanahu as stated in ‘From Comrade Prachanda to Prime Minister Dahal’ (#413).

LETTERS

Nepal Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers who provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with ‘letter to the editor’ in the subject line.

Email: letters@nepaltimes.com
Fax: 977-1-5520103
Mail: Letters, Nepal Times, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.
After the deluge

in SUNSARI

After the deluge

1 8 August, 7.30 AM: Four of us were crammed in a car that was stuck in a long queue at Jamuna Chok near the welcome gate of the Kosi Tapu Wildlife Reserve.

The Kosi was in full spate, its waters were threatening the eastern embankment. Locals had blocked the road to force the administration to repair the levee. They were also angry that the Indians, who control the barrage at the border downstream, hadn’t opened the sluice gates.

Drivers were pleading with the locals to let them go. Suddenly, the people at the barricades scattered. Far off, we saw water surging out of a breach in the embankment. Our driver put the jeep into high gear and we sped at 140km/h towards the barrage, racing the rushing waters. We crossed the barrage and noticed that the Indians had opened only half the 56 sluice gates. It was only when we got to the western side of the river that we felt safe. Six hours later, we were in Hetauda, where we heard the news on the local FM station:

50,000 villagers displaced by the breach in the Kosi embankment. An entire 5km section of the East-West Highway had been washed away where we were stuck.

Water experts have been warning of a possible breach of the Kosi embankments for decades. Less serious levee collapses have happened eight times. The root of the problem is that the Kosi Barrage, built to control floods in the 1960s, was a colossal engineering mistake. It may have regulated flood waters for the first few years, but sediment deposits over the years has caused the Kosi to now flow three metres above the surrounding land.

When the sluice gates are not opened at the border by the Indians, the impounded water in Nepal endangers the levees. This week, the river broke through a weak point in the 12km eastern embankment.

Water expert Ajay Dixit says the focus should be on drainage, not river control. “By blocking a river’s path to the sea, you make the situation worse; we must try to manage the river, not control it,” he explained.

The Kosi has migrated 150km westwards since 1730, and could easily go back to its original course in a year with heavy monsoon. That would make the river bypass the barrage altogether, take it past Biratnagar, and make this week’s flood seem like a picnic.

The other problem is the lack of coordination between Nepal and India in managing the border barrage. “The embankments are weak and there is no maintenance,” says Debnarayan Yadav of the Kosi Pidit Samaj. “The decision to open the sluice gates has to come from Patna.”

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
**Capital flight**

The International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, is providing Buddha Air with a $10 million long-term loan to help the airline expand its capacity and reduce operating costs by improving fuel efficiency. “With IFC’s support, Buddha Air can focus on optimizing growth opportunities to strengthen our operations in the face of rising oil prices and a rapidly evolving competitive landscape,” said Birendra Basnet, Managing Director of Buddha Air. The airline also plans to expand its mountain flights. IFC has invested $6.7 million in the past in other Nepal projects such as hydropower generation and tourism.

**Deposit more**

NMB Bank is offering customers a tiered savings account, giving them greater returns according to the size of their deposit. Benefits from the account include free ATM access and a discount on Travelex Cheque issuing fees.

**Lighting up**

Himstar Electronics, part of the Golchha Organisation, has added new electronics and kitchen appliances to its product range including televisions, DVD players, CFL bulbs and gas stoves.

**Intensely caring**

The Marwadi Yuva Manch led by Rajendra Khetan has donated Rs 2.51 million to Patan Hospital to expand its intensive care unit by 15 beds. The donation was made at the inauguration ceremony of the new Nick Simons maternity wing.

**Military scholars**

Everest Bank is providing scholarships to 10 children who lost their parents during the insurgency. Half of the scholarships were offered to orphans in the Nepal Army and half to those in the People’s Liberation Army.

**Hilarious Hajmola**

Contestants in the ‘Hajmola Khane Bahana Two’ competition can win, among other prizes, a Sony home theatre and free Buddha Air mountain flight tickets by sending in humorous reasons to contest. ‘Who else? The Skoda died!’ no longer apply.

**New branch**

Nepal Investment Bank recently opened its 18th branch in Nepal at Battisputali. The branch is linked to all other 18 branches, and its services include 365-day banking, ATM and safety deposit lockers.

**Economic sense**

The Beed has always found the diaspora an interesting breed to research, be it on the streets of New York or around Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong. A couple of stark issues are always instantly noticeable. First is the question of Nepali identity. What is this Nepali identity and why can’t it be part of a South Asian identity?

The diaspora is disappointed to have Tami leaders as President and Vice President, since it increases the effort required to distance oneself from the Indian community. In the US, Nepalis prefer to be identified as Mexicans rather than as Indians.

In Hong Kong, they prefer to be called Japanese or even Thai, rather than anything close to being an Indian. The identity issue has revived the Gorkhaland movement in the Indian state of West Bengal, and it’s possible the quest for an elusive Nepali identity will never cease.

Second, one sees among the diaspora that people from places outside the Kathmandu valley have been more enterprising and done far better than those from within the valley. It would be interesting for a social scientist to do some research on this. There could also be a similar correlation between Nepalis and other South Asians and a desire to be an employee rather than an employer.

Lastly, it would be interesting to see how second-generation Nepalis in the diaspora turn out. We are already seeing children of those who emigrated in the 1970s and 1980s starting to do well, with some of them getting into Ivy League schools and landing good jobs or launching successful careers.

There are thousands of Nepali children in different schools and colleges who will be starting their careers in the next 10 years. Will they find—like the Indians have—the region hotting up economically, and decide to make a life for themselves back in the land of their parents? Or will they be like the Irish, who preferred never to go back? Nepal’s future, in terms of economic investment and human capabilities, may depend to a great extent on what the children of the diaspora decide to do.

**depending on the diaspora**

Nepalis abroad can help us rebuild

However, one thing the new government really must do is to sell Nepal to those outside. Our country needs to sell itself as a unique nation that has been able to deal with its monarchy and Maoism and is now ready to rebuild itself as the 40th most populous country in the world. We need to make as lot more noise in the corridors of Washington and other global capitals and revive our embassies abroad, which for so long have been moribund institutions.

The government needs to work with the diaspora to ensure that the Nepali dream emerges, and the time has come for the world to help Nepal do better that it ever did before. We need to create an air of optimism, an air of hope that will also entice the next generation of fortunate Nepalis to contribute to the rebuilding of the state. www.artibeed.com

**No Jokes allowed**

Your first thought is it can’t be a Skoda. It’s too conventional. And it’s good.

But long gone are the days when a Skoda was an under-powered, Czech-bult tin can with the noisy engine at the back blew up every few miles. ‘Skoda’ in Czech actually means ‘sorry’. And there are all under-powered, Czech-built tin cans where the noisy engine at the back blew up every few miles. ‘Skoda’ under-powered, Czech-built tin can where the noisy engine at the back blew up every few miles. ‘Skoda’

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Agrawal is confident his diesel-engined Laura and Octavia models will be a huge hit in Nepal, and will stand up well to the rigours of Nepal’s roads. The cars come with a ‘rough road’ package of upgraded shock absorbers, a protective underbody coating and 16km/h ground clearance. Laura can do 14km/l and the Octavia 16km/l. Both models can be seen at Morang’s Thapathali showroom, and its Dhulikhel workshop is equipped for full servicing.

After only 25 days in his showroom, Agrawal already has 10 bookings for Skodas. Phavan Mathema

**Air mountain flight tickets by sending in humorous reasons to contest. 'Who else? The Skoda died!' no longer apply.**

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** HP mobility** HP is providing laptop, printer and desktop offers in the latest HP Shopathon offer.

** Debate on the diaspora Nepalis abroad can help us rebuild**

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Two armies

Kul Chandra Gautam in Hinal Khaharpatrika, 17-31 August

• The Maoists need to clearly separate the political and the military responsibilities among their politicians. In a democratic framework, the line between these two responsibilities cannot be blurred. The Maoist comrades need to give up their military positions if they have been elected in the CA or nominated for civil posts. Military officials, whether in or outside the cantonments, should not hold a government position.

• Two armies cannot exist in a single state. According to an amendment to Section 146 of the Interim Constitution, a ministerial-level committee should immediately be given the responsibility of managing the cantonments, as directed by the multiparty special committee. The ministerial-level committee will work with technical help from UNMIN military advisers and specialists. The government can also be assisted by experienced and capable army officers, who have served in UN Peacekeeping missions, for this purpose.

• The under-age rebels should be temporarily shifted from the cantonments to a non-political shelter. UNICEF and other local and international organisations working with children can help in this regard.

• A high-level national security council must be established to gain the people’s trust and respect by addressing the long-term issues regarding improvement of security and policies of army integration.

• The process to re-establish the defence ministry as a competent and influential body should be started. A respected politician should be the nominated as defence minister. The officials and the employees at the ministry should be specialists or should have at least a minimum of knowledge about military and politics.

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Suitable clothes

Editorial in Kantipur, 20 August

The Nepali people were shocked to see the head of the government not in the national dress but in an attire which many labelled as feudalistic. Similar to the commotion created by the Vice President reciting his oath in Hindi, the Prime Minister’s clothes have left many people dissatisfied. The question that has now risen is: What dress represents Nepal’s national identity?

The idea of ‘one language, one dress’, which was propagated by King Mahendra for the success of the Panchayat, surely does not hold true any more. Even so, it is important to ensure homogeneity among high-level officers and dignitaries when they come together in public. When representing Nepal in an international forum, this dress should reflect what is called ‘Nepalipan’. A practical outfit that is acceptable to all ethnic groups can be used as long as it gives an essence of unity. The national dress is like the national anthem and language and should symbolise unity in diversity.

When, two years ago, Dahal appeared in public as the chairman of the Maoists at Baluwatar, he was dressed in a grey coat. Now he is entering Baluwatar in a suit. According to statements from other Maoist politicians, the PM’s attire was decided by the party itself.

In order to achieve homogeneity in dress, it is important to have an agreement between the supporters of the government and other parties. This is not a simple issue of clothes but is connected with the future identity of New Nepal.
In his first interview since being elected prime minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal spoke to Himal Khabarpatrika. Translated excerpts:

**Himal Khabarpatrika**: How did you reach a consensus to form the government?

**Pushpa Kamal Dahal**: This was an effort to forge consensus amidst disagreement. We share an agenda of social and economic transformation with the UML, and are with the Forum on the matter of the formation of a federal republic.

How can those who call for ‘one Madhes, one state’ and those who oppose it, work together?

We have an understanding on autonomous regions and federalism with the pro-Madhes parties. However, we made it clear early on that ‘one Madhes, one state’ is not a possibility. We can have lots of autonomous provinces in the Madhes or Tarai on the basis of language, culture and geography.

How can the new constitution be written with the Nepali Congress out of government?

The NC is trying to imply that it has been deliberately left out of the government, but this is untrue. We were fully engaged over a long period to go into the government with the NC. Finally, on the afternoon of 14 August, at a meeting with the UML and the Forum, the NC made it clear that it was not keen to be part of a Maoist-led government.

How can there be agreement in constitution-writing, now that we have a government and an opposition?

We will try to maintain consensus. We have been telling the Congress that we need to conduct ourselves carefully, since the constitution has to be written on time. We will try this exercise and perhaps, a couple of months or more after staying in opposition, the Congress will be persuaded to join the government.

What are the new government’s priorities?

The peace process indeed comes first. We have agreed on the integration of the military forces within three to six months. Then, second, we need to draft the constitution. Third, we have to provide relief to the people. The absence of a government for the past four months has led to a rise in impunity, and has threatened peace and security. The need of the hour is to address and manage these issues.

How will you fulfill the pledges made during the elections?

We presented an election manifesto with long-term plans for 10, 20, 40 years. Since our focus in the next two years will be on writing the constitution, it is true that we will not be able to do much.

The Nepal Army seems anxious over the formation of a Maoist-led government. How will you address its concerns about the matter of integration?

We are committed to the goal of long-term peace, and the Nepal Army too does not want bloodshed among Nepalis. I see no reason why the army should be distressed by the turn of events that has us leading the government.

How will you go about the issue of integration?

The main basis of integration is the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Then there is the interim constitution, which has formed the ground. As per the constitution, the third basis will be the formation of a committee to look into the matter, comprising the political parties in the cabinet.

Will you continue to use Maoist combatants for your security?

At the moment, we are using a team comprising the police and members of the PLA who have been verified by UNMIN. In future, too, as per requirements, we may continue with a similar arrangement. After army integration and rehabilitation, one can think of an adjustment so that they are under a single command and control.

Will the Maoists now formally announce a rejection of violence?

This is a very difficult question. Those who demand this of us are the very people who engage in violence under the cover of so-called democracy. We cannot talk about violence in neutral terms, and only a fool would say he is forever against the use of violence. Likewise, it is foolish and unscientific to claim to be forever in favour of the use of violence. One is for or against violence depending on the situation. If a foreign army attacks Nepal, we would all be speaking in favour of violence. To try to make us say we will never use violence is an attempt to trap us. Violence was never our choice in the past, and neither is it today.

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“**The peace process comes first**”

Himal Khabarpatrika, 17-31 August
Kathmandu’s best gyms offer a whole lot more besides pumping iron

**Jasmine Club, United World Trade Center, Tripureswor**

Whether it’s the soothing current of steamy water from the Jacuzzi or the well-equipped gym that grabs you, the Jasmine Club is a great place for either a relaxing spa treatment or a vigorous workout. There is a beauty parlour for those who want a more thorough grooming, as well as aqua aerobics in its roof-top heated pool and power yoga with experienced trainers.

*Annual membership: Rs 40,000.*

**Hotel Shaligram, Jawalakhel**

Bamboo Grove at Hotel Shaligram offers a children’s pool and a larger pool for adults surrounded by shrubbery. The club’s exercise equipment is housed in a homely environment.

*Annual membership: Rs 27,000.*

**Rage Fitness, Thasikhel**

Trainers at the Rage Fitness make that extra effort to motivate their clients, by making home calls if they don’t show up and handing out certificates to those who’ve achieved their goals. The club may be small but the friendly atmosphere and affordability make it all the more accessible.

*Annual membership: Rs 10,800.*

**Flex, Nakhu**

Spacious and well-equipped with elliptic crosstrainers, chest press exercise machines and large treadmills, Flex specialises in serious exercise regime. There is a swimming pool, an indoor badminton court and sauna.

*Annual membership: Rs 22,000.*

**Clark Hatch, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat**

The Radisson’s Clark Hatch gym is the only international fitness chain in Nepal. You can exercise your reciprocal rights and use other Clark Hatch gyms in Asia when you’re on the go. Its facilities include a gym with top-quality Life Fitness equipment, a spa and roof-top swimming pool.

*Annual membership: Rs 49,267.*
Club Oasis, Hyatt Regency, Boudhanath

Club Oasis offers the most luxurious facilities and top-class service for which members are more than willing to pay the price. “People come here for our presentation and ambience,” says manager Naresh Maharjan. There are Astroturf tennis courts, a well-equipped gym, and a 1km jogging track around the hotel. The spa has an outdoor whirlpool and offers singing bowl therapy and Shirodhara massage. 

Annual membership: Rs 50,000.

Hotel Shahanshah, Dhapasi

Membership at the Shahanshah’s health club includes indoor and outdoor swimming pool and multi-gyms (with a separate one for women), along with spa essentials. Besides the health club, there is an indoor tennis court. The swimming pools are small but the most popular pick, especially for school children.

Annual membership: Rs 32,000.
Land and peace

NEPALGANJ – Land management is a central question of our political economy. The absence of land reform helped the Maoists gain popularity and consolidate. The formal agenda of the new government includes the need to carve out policies ‘related to land’.

The issue is linked not only to the dip in farm productivity and the agrarian crisis, but also with social justice and livelihoods. As the Maoists project it, the core contradiction is that those who own the land are not the actual tillers and those who till the land are not the owners.

The recognition that land and peace is related is most acutely felt here in the western Tarai. This is where an explosive jamindari system, landlessness, Maoist land-grab, and their electoral success have converged. “Solve land issues and 75 per cent of the conflict will be resolved,” says Bhuja Mahat of the rights group, INSEC.

But apart from occasional civil society seminars and sporadic op-ed pieces, the land question isn’t on the agenda. It is a complex policy challenge, affects a majority of the country’s population, and has antagonistic classes pitted against each other.

Do we need land reform? The consensus across the board is that the government can do is set up a commission which prepares a white paper on previous land-reform attempts, and conducts a nation-wide survey to come up with baseline data on land ownership and productivity. Balancing individual rights with social justice, and performance is one way to ensure development at the grassroots is to devolve that power to local units.

For this, the Maoists must rebuild the elected village and district committees that they dismantled during the war. Three thousand of the 4,000 VDC buildings were bombarded, members were chased out, DDCs were not allowed to function properly. Here in Khushadebi village, the VDC building was firebombed by the Maoists in 2003 (right), and there are ruins of the village council building, which was never implemented.

PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

Land reform cannot just be about redistribution; it has to be a package deal

But what kind of land reform? Given inequitable land distribution, does the answer lie in reducing the ceiling further to extract land from those who have it and redistribute it? But after fragmentation within families and across generations, most farmers in the Tarai have less than 10 bighas. Half a ropani of land in Kathmandu is more valuable than 15-20 bighas in most districts. If there has to be redistribution, what can be properly managed and not just land.

Will giving small plots away only lead to a further dip in production and reduce the ability of marginal farmers to invest in modern technology? Even those with five bighas of land just manage modern living standards, so how will a family with half a bigha of land manage? Will he just end up selling it and becoming landless again?

Can all this be a sophisticated rationalisation for not doing anything for the landless? Is it important to target the few remaining big jamindars who have accrued the property illegally over the years? Is it possible to use scattered public land, called ‘elani jagya’, and take property of the guthis which are monopolised by a few?

But even if you find land without drastically infringing on the right to property, will merely giving it away to select poor help change lives? Isn’t the core issue the need for an agrarian revival: irrigation, moderate use of subsidised fertilisers, crop diversification, technical know-how, availability of seeds, better market management and co-operative farming?

And do we not need to start exploring non-farm economy options for employment generation? If the migration is any indicator, people will continue to profit from land?

Sowing doubts

Farmers fret as Maoists remain vague over land reform plans

Comments by senior Maoists at a recent meeting with small farmers have left them nervous that the reality of the Maoists’ land reform program may be different from their stated intent.

COMMENT
Bihani K Shrestha

Senior Maoist CP Gajurel said he had been impressed by the cooperatives he had seen in Japan, and would use them as his model for boosting farm output. But many in his audience were nervous that the reality of the Maoists’ land reform program may be different from their stated intent.

And what have the Maoists planned for the rest of the country? During the ‘people’s war’, Nepal’s relatively few but economically self-sufficient small-farmer cooperatives were often targeted by Maoist guerrillas. A Maoist at the recent meeting expressed a degree of remorse, claiming that they had only turned to their guns after their attempts to be heard by the state failed. But his audience remained unimpressed.

In the same breath he also disclosed that the Maoists had seized 50,000 bighas of land and would not release it until the party had implemented the so-called scientific land reform—a concept.
1998, it broke conventional and cultural barriers and transferred not just decision-making authority but also the right to frame local laws to elected village and district committees. Where these committees began to exercise these powers, decentralisation delivered development.

The strength of the Act was that it recognised that devolution was necessary for development,” says Dwarika Dhungel, a researcher at the Institute for Integrated Development Studies. But in July 2002, local elections could not be held and the Local Self Governance Act has remained in limbo ever since. As the process of writing a new constitution begins, experts say that the CA members need to learn from past mistakes and build on the successes of rural democracy of the 1990s. “As a concept, decentralisation is quite simple: empower those who are closest to the problem to solve the problem,” says development expert Bilhari Krishna Shrestha.

Nepal is committed to fulfilling various international commitments, including achieving Millennium Development Goals by 2015. Experts say the central government should focus on national projects and leave the districts alone to plan out their own futures. “If the government actually wants devolution to work this time, it needs to start rebuilding the destroyed VDCs and DDCs,” says Khema Raj Nepal, a member of the National Council. “The Institute of Local Governance says Dwarika Dhungel: “Power could still be centred in the provincial capitals and with district committees. Where these committees began to exercise these powers, decentralisation delivered development.”

Despite the successes, historically the program has been in retreat, plagued by government and donor indifference. The 1998 Local Self Government Act gave power to local people to plan out their own futures. “If the government actually wants devolution to work this time, it needs to start rebuilding the destroyed VDCs and DDCs,” says Khema Raj Nepal, a member of the National Council. “The Institute of Local Governance says Dwarika Dhungel: “Power could still be centred in the provincial capitals and with district committees. Where these committees began to exercise these powers, decentralisation delivered development.”

The 2003 GTZ review recommended an expansion of the program to create 400 cooperatives catering to 400,000 households within four years, but this was ignored. Meanwhile, there is the Poverty Alleviation Fund with $100 million in World Bank funding. Unfortunately, the PAF is myopic and is engaged in promoting what it calls “community organisation”, which by all accounts is a poorer version of the small farmers development project of the 1970s.

The 1998 Local Self Government Act gave power to local authorities, but in the past five years the VDCs run by government bureaucrats, says Krishna Prasad Sinjoka, a member from Kalimati-3: “It is absurd that a VDC secretary in Marsung has to be sent from Singha Durbar. There’s no accountability. If that officer makes a mistake in one VDC, he is immediately transferred to another. They have to be locally elected.”

Despite being the first country in South Asia to attempt devolution, Nepal’s progress with decentralisation was first stalled by the war and now by the lack of preparation for local elections. But it is a model that can easily be revived. The 2007 interim constitution endorsed a federal system of governance, but some fear that even within a federal structure there could be the concentration of key powers in the centre. Warns Dwarika Dhungel: “Power could still be centred in the provincial capitals and with district committees. Where these committees began to exercise these powers, decentralisation delivered development.”
For departing Sri Lankan ambassador Sumith Nakandala, his two-year posting in Nepal was shorter than normal but unusually exciting, as he watched the country stumble through the peace process to emerge intact with a new government.

“I became close to Mr Prachanda in the past two years, and I found in him a real determination to see the peace process to its conclusion and to develop the country,” Nakandala told Nepali Times before leaving for his new job as Sri Lanka’s deputy high commissioner in London.

He admitted to feeling highly emotional as he made his farewell call on newly elected Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal on Sunday morning, realising what an historic period he had witnessed in Nepal’s modern history.

Coming from a country where violence is again increasing following the collapse of the 2002 ceasefire, Nakandala welcomed what he saw as a genuine commitment among Nepal’s political forces for peace and reconciliation. “Nepal has evolved its own model based on diversity and pluralism and it can be a showcase for the world,” he said.

Nakandala said the second main reason for his emotional attachment to Nepal was that it was the birthplace of the Buddha. During his stay here, he visited Lumbini 15 times, often accompanying Sri Lankan ministers and dignitaries.

But he said the 34,000 Sri Lankan pilgrims who visit Lumbini each year—more than from any other country—are often disappointed by the lack of decent accommodation and other visitor facilities at the site, so most of them end up making brief day trips.

Nakandala said his greatest regret was not being able to start a regular Sri Lankan Airlines flight between Kathmandu and Colombo. Despite two bilateral meetings, talks broke down over the number the passengers the airline could carry between Kathmandu and Delhi. The Sri Lankans wanted 700 seats a week to make the route viable, while the Nepalis wouldn’t budge on 500.

However, it was Nakandala’s deft diplomacy that helped save last month’s SAARC summit in Colombo which he said came close to being cancelled because of the delay in Nepal naming a prime minister. His own hectic, last-minute lobbying ensured a Nepali head of government attended—even if only a caretaker prime minister.

“It was touch and go till the last moment,” Nakandala recalled. “But the bottom line was that the summit had to be held.” At the time, the Maoists demanded that the summit be postponed, but Nakandala said Dahal bore him no hard feelings today.

To this Sri Lankan diplomat, South Asians share a common culture and similar moral values. “We are not different, we are the same,” he said. “We have the resources and wisdom to strive for a better common future for our peoples.”

He said his inspiration came from the Buddha’s teachings to replace selfishness and pettiness with compassion and generosity—qualities he found in abundance in Nepal.

Asked for his enduring memory of Nepal, Nakandala replied: “The people, the simplicity of the Nepali people, the complete lack of arrogance from the top leadership right down to ordinary people. I leave a bit of my heart here.”

Kumar Acharya

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down the hill in Kopundole, into a narrow lane that you almost miss, past two security gates where guards examine the bottom of the car with mirrors, the first sight of the new Norwegian Embassy building nearly takes your breath away.

Large zig-zag windows dominate the low-slung façade of the building that you don’t see until you are right in front of it. The building is classic Nordic architectural functionality, low-key and modern, and full of common sense.

“We call them the Himalayan windows,” says architect Kristin Jarmund, who designed the building and its dramatic glass façade, “the windows mimic the mountains, and when the weather is clear it will reflect Langtang.”

The building was inaugurated on Monday by visiting Norwegian Development Minister Erik Solheim. “It is a fantastic coincidence that this chancery is being opened on the day of the prime minister’s oath-taking,” said Solheim at the inaugural function attended by Nepali foreign ministry officials and Kathmandu-based diplomats.

Solheim was the first foreign dignitary to visit Nepal after the success of the People Power uprising in April 2006, and couldn’t help drawing attention to Nepal’s political transformation since then. “This is the first time in world history that a Maoist has been elected to head a government,” he said, “even Mao wouldn’t have predicted it.”

The chancery building in Kopundole has used local materials as much as possible. “This is not Norwegian wood,” says Jarmund (see in pic, left) pointing out the sisau ceiling and wall panels. Stacked slate facades and flagstones in the parking lot and walls are all locally made.

“This is the first foreign project for Jarmund’s firm, which has designed school buildings, office blocks and even tube stations in Norway. Three years ago when she saw the site for the first time, it was north-facing terraced slope in Kopundole with a view of the mountains.

“What we tried to do was to greet and celebrate the Himalayan environment and integrate the building with the outside,” she says.

In stark contrast with the elegant functionality of the building, however, are the unaesthetic brick-and-concrete boxes that have come up outside the compound in the three years it took for the embassy to be completed. Nepali architects could learn a tip or two from a building that is stylishly simple and built mostly from material available in Nepal. The building is also energy efficient and environment-friendly, with a rainwater harvesting system and solar heating panels.

Norwegian ambassador Tore Toreng said he was happy everything had come together a week before he is scheduled to conclude his four-year tenure in Nepal. He told guests at Monday’s inauguration: “I managed to see the building finished before I go, and even got to see the new prime minister take office.”
ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- Missing Persons in Nepal, black and white photo exhibition by Kishor Kayastha, Indigo gallery, 30 August - 6 September, Danbar Square: Bhaktapur 7 September, Kathmandu 8 September, Lalitpur 9 September, 9AM- 6.30 PM. Free entrance.

- The Cross Painting Exhibition by Bijnig Rai Shrestha, Kishor Nakarmi Hand Madan Shrestha, till 23 August. 4.30 PM. Light and Shade Gallery, Thamel.


- Duet of Fantasies by Promina Shrestha and Ranendra B. Mali till 7 September, 10AM-6PM, Gallery 32, Dent Inn at Heritage Plaza II, Kamaladi. 4241942.

- Amalgam-2008 an exhibition of paintings by national and international artists, 15 September at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babur Mahal. visite diaries, Sunday-Friday 11AM-6PM, Saturday 1-4PM. 4436979.

EVENTS


- Paletti concert with Madan Krishna Shrestha at Nepalaya on 26 August, 4142469.

- Dancing-yoga-latey with Shabira Rao 1-14 September, Rs 300 per session, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan. 9808730278.

- Monsoon madness package at Shangri-la Village Resort, Pokhara. Rs 599. 4436741.

- Rudra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien,Gokarna. 4451212.

- Sufi music by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.

- Fusion and Classical Music by Anil Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, Saturday with live acoustic music by Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479488.

- Shiraz Fever, Australian Shiraz promotion throughout August at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612.

- Half Nelson is an action-packed thriller that tells the story of three bachelors, Raj (Hrithik Roshan) who is not his fault that he's a heartbreaker, it's in his DNA. The movie tells his three love stories with Mahi (Minissha Lamba), Radhika (Bipasha Basu) and Gayatri (Deepika Padukone), his ladyloves at different times in his life. All three of them teach him a little bit about love and life in their own sweet, sexy or sassy way. Come fall in love... three times over!

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

WEEKEND WEATHER

The disastrous flooding in Sunnari district after the Kosi River breached its east bank this week was not a direct result of excessive rainfall upstream. Most of the weather stations in the Kosi river basin have recorded normal or slightly higher than average rainfall this season, and no unusually large cloudbursts were recorded there in the last week. Satellite pictures on Thursday morning showed a persistent low pressure belt along the southern Himalaya alongside patches of moisture-bearing cloud. The stormy sky is adding moisture to the air but most of this will be dumped before reaching Nepal. Conclusion: expect change early into next week, when sunny intervals will make the days hot and humid but the nights will remain cool due to occasional showers.

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MUSIC

- Some like it hot every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479488.

- Ladies night at Jatra Cafe & Bar on Wednesday with live unplugged music by D. Shewak.

- Hy Jazz Club every Friday from 8.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4498800.

- Dance and Cocktails at Cube Bar, Kamalad. 4436917.

- Fusion and Loosha Band every Friday night, Bhumir Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4421212.

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- Shiraz Fever, Australian Shiraz promotion throughout August at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612.

-头脑风暴

- Headline Entertainment

- Headline Entertainment

DINING

- Mediterranean Culinary Delights every Friday at Hyatt Regency. 4491234.

- Shiraz Fever, Australian Shiraz promotion throughout August at La Maison Wine and Cigar Lounge, Baluwatar. 4429903.

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

- Sixth Annual Wine Festival until September at Kilroy’s, Jyatha. 4250440.

- Fusion of Marcela Reganís new menu and Mannieís new bar at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999.

- Pasta pesto passion at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612.

- Mexican Food Special at Jatan Jatan restaurant, Kupondole height. 5648721.

- Steak special with free Irish coffee at K-tool! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4700043.

- Continental and cafe item with Live band every Friday at Vintage Cafe and Pub, Woodland Complex, Durbarmarg.

- Home made pasta at Alfresco, Soobee Crowne Plaza. 4273999.

- Reality Bites, The Kaiser CafÈ with Live band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4436914.

- Masala, an Indian restaurant in Jawalakhel, St.Maryís school road, 4421634.

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HAPPENINGS

PROUD DADDY: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal is congratulated by his father, Mukt Ram Dahal, at the Rastapati Bhaban on Monday after his swearing in while CA speaker Subhas Nembang looks on.

POLITICAL SPIN: Prime Minister Dahal meets with a delegation of former Miss Nepals (l-r) Sugarika KC and Usha Khadgi and 2008 contestents Akriti Shrestha and Padmini Jha. Gopal Kakshapati of Hidden Treasure took the delegation to get Dahal to call off the threats to the pageant from Maoist-affiliated groups.

PHOTO MONTAGE: Photojournalists parade at Hanuman Dhoka on Tuesday on the occasion of 169th World Photography Day.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO GIVE: Maoist supporters collect money for flood victims in Sunsari at Indra Chok on Thursday.

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PHOTO MONTAGE: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal meets with a delegation of former Miss Nepal contestants and other organizations.

KIRAN PANDAY

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For someone who dresses well, has a good taste in John Player shirts, Prime Minister Awesome sprung on us all a surprise with his choice of a dirt-beige suit and a matching ugly tie. The Ass’ tip: wear a dark suit, light blue shirt and red tie to Beijing, if you don’t want to look like an ass.

The question of what to wear at the swearing-in engaged the Maoist politburo in a two-hour debate on Sunday. PKD himself at first wanted to wear daura suruwal, but the central committee had other ideas. After some heated exchange between the Gang of Fourists and Dengists the comrades settled on the fusion of suit and black cap. But when Awesome sneaked in a tie at the last moment, no one was more shocked than politburo members present at the oath-taking.

What the prime minister’s suit fiasco did was take attention off the vice president’s re-appearance in a dhoti. We urgently need an inclusive unisex national dress for a New Nepal that incorporates dress elements from the far corners of the republic from head to toe with a Sherpa fur hat, chuba with gamchha and bhoto, bakkhu, patuka, dhoti wrapped around a suruwal and a pair of kharau.

Despite the prime minister’s sympathetic assurance to the organizers of Miss Nepal on Sunday that he would unblock the pageant, and having posed with all the girls for a group picture, Maoist affiliated cadre have over-ruled their leader. If this is the way it’s going to be, how is one to believe all the Maoist assurances to foreign investors about being business friendly?

The real delay in government formation was not the feud between parties but within the Maoists, UML and MJF. The Comrade Biplop faction was sidelined in the race to replace PKD as PLA chieftain. Mohan Baidya rejected a ministership and wanted the much more powerful party post. UML couldn’t agree on who should be Homemaker Minister.

What irritates President Yadav the most these days as he commutes to and from work in his motorcade are large billboards with Awesome’s snapshots that still proclaim ‘Ganatantra Nepal ko Pahilo Rastrapati’. The Baddie Propaganda Division should repaint ‘President’ with ‘Prime Minister’ in these hoardings for the sake of inter-party harmony. This has become such a common election slogan that even BRB blurted out “our president” during his fiery tirade at the Constituent Assembly last week. He quickly corrected himself amidst laughter from honourable members. That slip of the tongue proves that in the Maoist gameplan PKD was supposed to be first prez and BRB PM.

The Maoists came out of the jungle and they sent the king into the jungle. But ex-kingji is preparing to vacate his temporary abode at Nagarjun and move back down to the city. Which is a pity, because Gyan was making good progress on his memoir, which they say will tell all and set the record straight on the royal massacre on the February First coup. Friends and relatives were surprised by how relaxed and happy the former majesty looked at a birthday bash for the Queen Mother at Nirmal Niwas on Wednesday night.

The Maoist mouthpiece Janadisha is so chockablock full of congratulatory ads felicitating PKD on being PM it has brought out a Special Supplement. Some of them are the same guys who felicitated King Gyanendra when he sacked an elected prime minister in 2001. Prominent among Janadisha advertisers on Wednesday were Chitwan CoE, Nepal Telecom, Spice Nepal, various District Development Committees, and even the People’s Liberation Army and Airport Sekuwa Girar.

The winner of this week’s New Name Contest is the Associated Press which filed a Kathmandu datelined story last week in which the editor in Hong Kong put the spell checker on Girija Prasad Koirala and put out the story with: Gorilla Proboscis Corolla. Moral of the story: always double check the spell check.

The Maoist politburo in a two-hour debate on Sunday.

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What irritates President Yadav the most these days as he commutes to and from work in his motorcade are large billboards with Awesome’s snapshots that still proclaim ‘Ganatantra Nepal ko Pahilo Rastrapati’. The Baddie Propaganda Division should repaint ‘President’ with ‘Prime Minister’ in these hoardings for the sake of inter-party harmony. This has become such a common election slogan that even BRB blurted out “our president” during his fiery tirade at the Constituent Assembly last week. He quickly corrected himself amidst laughter from honourable members. That slip of the tongue proves that in the Maoist gameplan PKD was supposed to be first prez and BRB PM.

The Maoists came out of the jungle and they sent the king into the jungle. But ex-kingji is preparing to vacate his temporary abode at Nagarjun and move back down to the city. Which is a pity, because Gyan was making good progress on his memoir, which they say will tell all and set the record straight on the royal massacre on the February First coup. Friends and relatives were surprised by how relaxed and happy the former majesty looked at a birthday bash for the Queen Mother at Nirmal Niwas on Wednesday night.

The Maoist mouthpiece Janadisha is so chockablock full of congratulatory ads felicitating PKD on being PM it has brought out a Special Supplement. Some of them are the same guys who felicitated King Gyanendra when he sacked an elected prime minister in 2001. Prominent among Janadisha advertisers on Wednesday were Chitwan CoE, Nepal Telecom, Spice Nepal, various District Development Committees, and even the People’s Liberation Army and Airport Sekuwa Girar.

The winner of this week’s New Name Contest is the Associated Press which filed a Kathmandu datelined story last week in which the editor in Hong Kong put the spell checker on Girija Prasad Koirala and put out the story with: Gorilla Proboscis Corolla. Moral of the story: always double check the spell check.

The Maoist politburo in a two-hour debate on Sunday.

For someone who dresses well, has a good taste in John Player shirts, Prime Minister Awesome sprung on us all a surprise with his choice of a dirt-beige suit and a matching ugly tie. The Ass’ tip: wear a dark suit, light blue shirt and red tie to Beijing, if you don’t want to look like an ass.

The question of what to wear at the swearing-in engaged the Maoist politburo in a two-hour debate on Sunday. PKD himself at first wanted to wear daura suruwal, but the central committee had other ideas. After some heated exchange between the Gang of Fourists and Dengists the comrades settled on the fusion of suit and black cap. But when Awesome sneaked in a tie at the last moment, no one was more shocked than politburo members present at the oath-taking.

What the prime minister’s suit fiasco did was take attention off the vice president’s re-appearance in a dhoti. We urgently need an inclusive unisex national dress for a New Nepal that incorporates dress elements from the far corners of the republic from head to toe with a Sherpa fur hat, chuba with gamchha and bhoto, bakkhu, patuka, dhoti wrapped around a suruwal and a pair of kharau.

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