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Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 415

Q. What should the prime minister have worn during his swearing in?

Total votes: 5,742

☐ Suit with tie, without top (11.4%)
☐ Suit with top, without tie (6.8%)
☐ Suit without top, without tie (2.8%)
☐ Dress (survived 79.9%)

Weekly Internet Poll # 416. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. The Prime Minister should have:
Gone to Delhi before Beijing
Did right by going to China first
Does it matter?

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MALLIKA ARYAL
in NEW DELHI

It's an indication of just how sensitive India-Nepal relations have become that few in the New Delhi foreign policy establishment want to speak even off the record to a Nepali journalist these days.

By ignoring Indian concerns and accepting Beijing's invitation to the Olympics closing ceremony last week, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal set alarm bells ringing here. Indian politicians and foreign policy bureaucrats tried to play down Dahal's 'China card', but the

military-intelligence establishment, the opposition BJP and some hawkish commentators have voiced concerns about China's growing influence in India's neighborhood.

'Prachanda's Beijing sojourn merely confirms the subcontinent's shifting balance of power in China's favour,' wrote the *Indian Express* in an editorial on Tuesday, a view echoed by other influential commentators here. 'Prachanda's departure from Nepal's natural logic for a strong relationship with India can only be understood in the context of Beijing's new

powerplay in South Asia.'

The opposition BJP, which has no love for Nepal's Maoists, said that now that they are in government the former rebels should behave more responsibly.

"The Maoists need to change their overall attitude towards India because they haven't been especially warm towards us," BJP leader N N Jha told *Nepali Times*.

Prime Minister Dahal's Beijing controversy was replaced by the Kosi embankment collapse this week as Indian officials realised the full extent of the flood crisis in eastern Bihar. The Kosi changing its course has made 60,000 homeless in Nepal, but downstream in India the number affected has reached a staggering four million.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh toured the region on Thursday, and most of the Indian press has passed the blame to Nepal for not allowing Indian engineers to repair the Kosi's east embankment in June when the breach was first noticed.

In Bihar, the inundation has got worse because railway embankments and flood control levees have dammed up the diverted Kosi as it flows through villages and towns.

Nepal's new Foreign Minister Upendra Yadav, in New Delhi for a meeting of the subregional group, BIMSTEC, was likely to have been quizzed about his "equidistance" remark when he met his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Nepal's ambassador to India, Durgesh Man Singh, was in full damage

control mode before Yadav arrived, dismissing the controversy as "pointless". He added: "Ties with India are in a different category." ●



BILASH RAI



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Flood of recrimination p2

PLAIN SPEAKING Prashant Jha
Two Dajus p10

Enjoy the moment
a swing at a time

Signature

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Published by Himalmedia Pvt Ltd. Editor: Kunda Dixit
CEO: Ashutosh Tiwari Design: Kiran Maharjan
Director Sales and Marketing: Sunaina Shah marketing@himalmedia.com
Marketing Manager: Sambhu Guragain
Asst Managers: Deepak Sangraula, Subhash Kumar
Subscriptions: 5542535/5542525

Hatiban, Godavari Road, Lalitpur
GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu 5250333/845, Fax: 5251013
Printed at Jagadamba Press, Hatiban: 5250017-19



Dhulikhel dispatch

A town in search of a soul

A FLOOD OF RECRIMINATION

When the Himalaya were being formed in the past 60 million years, what is now the Tarai used to be the shores of a sea called the Tethys. Prehistoric monsoons eroded the rising mountains, filling the sea with debris.

The mass wasting of the Himalaya is still going on. This makes the Kosi the river with one of the heaviest sediment loads in the world. More than 100 million cubic metres of silt are deposited every year in Nepal and Bihar when the river slows down after breaking through the mountains.

This is why the river is constantly trying to find new channels to the sea. The problem now is that the fertile banks of the Kosi are densely populated, and governments are under pressure to control the floods by straitjacketing the river with embankments.

When the Kosi Barrage was built in 1956, the lifespan of the embankments was 20 years. Today, the Kosi in Nepal flows three metres above the surrounding land. It was only a question of time before it breached the levee. The embankment started collapsing on 15 August, locals warned the authorities, but no action as taken.

Things would have been worse if the Kosi had been in spate. The river could have permanently reverted to the Kosi's 1731 channel, obliterating Sunsari and half of Bihar.

So, what is to be done? The government belatedly realised the seriousness of the crisis and dispatched two ministers to Sunsari. They need to plan alternative routes to rejoin eastern Nepal to the rest of the country, plug the breach, coordinate relief, and resettle 60,000 people.

On Thursday, Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh toured northern Bihar, where 3 million people have been displaced. There are already renewed calls in Bihar to build the Kosi High Dam, which will create a reservoir stretching from Sunsari to Ramechhap.

The dam would be a solution if India and Nepal had a good record in large infrastructure projects, in spreading benefits and taking care of the displaced. But the Kosi dam will be plagued with the same problem that made the barrage unworkable: siltation.

We shouldn't try to correct one mistake by making an even bigger one. India and Nepal must be prepared for the day when the Kosi makes a catastrophic course change, an event that will make this week's disaster look like a picnic. But we do that by making it easy for the Kosi and other Nepali rivers to flow down to the sea. The more obstructions we create in their path, the more destructive future floods will be.

This is what the two countries should be working on, not getting worked up about whether the prime minister should have gone to China first or not.

DHULIKHEL—Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Despite all the changes this district capital has endured over the past three decades, it remains almost the same. Life still revolves around the Bhagbati temple, where a new



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

building has been added for devotees to sing bhajans in the morning. And come evening, most working men head for the cheap eateries and bars which have always been here, seeking to fill their bellies and relax their minds.

It's true that the buildings are bigger, the streets wider, and alleyways cleaner. And Dhulikhel looks smarter than it used to in the early seventies when it was just a sleepy Newar town where Tamang traders came to sell ghiu and buy salt, kerosene, clothes and trinkets.

It became the district

headquarters of Kabrepalanchok, which resulted in some new buildings and jobs. But despite the magnificent mountain views to be had on a clear day, few tourists came here in the 1970s. A private language school teaching Nepali to foreigners in Dilli Bajar used to bring its customers—mainly American students—to the town for an immersion course in Nepali culture. It was only later, with the establishment of the Dhulikhel Mountain Resort and a host of other hotels, that the focus of the town's economy changed.

After 2001, as the Maoist insurgency intensified and the number of tourists visiting Nepal slumped, the hotels on the slopes around Dhulikhel took whatever business they could get—often a slow but regular income from hosting conferences, seminars and workshops for NGOs and international donors who wanted a change of scene from the valley.

Could it be that some of those meetings helped bring an end to the war? Today, with Pushpa Kamal Dahal ensconced in Baluwatar, the foreign tourists are back, and talk at Dhulikhel's seminars is all about security sector reform, federalism and social inclusion.

While the hotel sector has bounced back, there have been failures in Dhulikhel—among them the information technology park which lies abandoned by all except wildlife. The brainchild of Sharad Chandra Shah, who perhaps had hopes of seeing the town emerge as the heart of IT in Nepal, the site was too far from Kathmandu to succeed. Kathmandu University is here, but most students and staff come from the capital. Dhulikhel Hospital is a beacon of hope, but relatives of a patient who died at childbirth trashed the place this week—another sign of the state's statelessness.

Like individuals, towns too have distinctive identities. Lalitpur was conceived as city of the arts and has retained some of those elements to this day. Kirtipur continues to be the city of glory and Bhaktapur the town of devotees. Kantipur transformed itself into Kathmandu, but it still glitters when there is no load-shedding. What about Dhulikhel?

A town develops only when its residents own it, take pride in it and wouldn't think of living anywhere else. That sort of feeling can be sensed among residents in old Dhulikhel.

But new Dhulikhel is turning into Kathmandu's suburbia, inhabited by a transient population of tourists, day students and Kathmandu's city slicker weekenders. ●



SOHAN SHRESTHA

LETTERS

NEPALINESS

Narayan Khadka's vision of a common Nepali identity is reminiscent of the Panchyati days ('Shared past, shared future', #414). Different ethnic groups in Nepal need to ensure that they have a say and are treated equally. And that is why there is a need for provinces divided roughly along ethnic lines.

Anand Jha, Texas, USA

● Congratulations! Finally a good piece in *Nepali Times* that shows we have no reason to be ashamed of our history. We are Nepalis and never became a part of British India because of the bravery of our ancestors. Thank you Narayan Khadka for having the courage to write this. Don't waver. There are millions who will agree with you.

Rajan, Taulihawa

● 100 per cent agreed with Narayan Khadka. Without Prithbi Narayan Shah we would all be a part of the British Empire and eventually India. The visionary campaign to create a modern Nepal was a shared by the Gurungs, Magars, Rais, Kanuwar, and Limbus. Trying to erase this

glorious history of Nepal will be a big mistake. If you want to find a fault in this Nepali history, you can, and we should so that we do not repeat it. But, give me one history that is flawless.

Rajendra Magar, UK

● Nepaliness could be defined at different levels. At a basic level, everyone living in Nepal with Nepali citizenship is Nepali. On a deeper level, the real Nepalis are those citizens who are not only proud to be Nepalis but are willing to make sacrifices for Nepal—those who have a spiritual non-religious bond with their motherland. Wise rulers would try to strive for the masses to attain the deeper level of Nepaliness without any and prejudices.

● An excellent article at a most appropriate time. I hope our new breed of politicians will sacrifice their larger-than-life egos to go through it.

C K Shrestha, Kathmandu

● Wonderful article. This is exactly what we need, someone defending "Nepaliness" as something not to be ashamed of. Bravo Khadakaji. Don't listen to naysayers and flag burners.

Niru, Patan



suspicion

K Rai, UK

● People are so ashamed of our proud history that we may soon have to go to Darjeeling to celebrate our Nepali culture. So, please protect and preserve it here.

Ram S., Kathmandu

SMALL FARMERS

I agree with Bihari Krishna Shrestha's view ('Sowing doubts', #414) on small-farmer cooperatives and the past World Bank poverty alleviation program. As the small-farmers' program showed, it is a sustainable poverty alleviation model, so why can't the World Bank follow it? The new Maoist-led government should not be tempted to waive small-farmer loans because it will distort the market for microfinance cooperatives. There are lots

of farmers who are using their loans properly and are paying back on time, and such populist measures will destroy our achievements.

Rabin Choudhari, Janakpur

VISA ON ARRIVAL

I am a frequent visitor to Nepal, and on my latest visit this week experienced the 'New Nepal' on arrival at immigration. Nepal under 'dictator' Gyanendra and 'bourgeois leader' GP Koirala used to allow Bangladeshis to have a visa on arrival without any fee. The rule has changed under the 'proletarian' government of Comrade Prachanda. Now we have to pay \$25 for each subsequent visit after the first one (which is still free) in a calendar year. Comrade Prachanda's government also pursues a policy of global egalitarianism. The visa fee is the same for an 'income poor' Bangladeshi and an 'income rich' American.

I am still grateful to the government of Nepal for its continued policy of providing a visa on arrival, which our government doesn't reciprocate to Nepalis. But why the change?

Mohi, Dhaka

Justice delayed

Let truth prevail on the
International Day of the Disappeared

The political transition of the past two years, from monarchy to republic, from interim constitution to elections, has been surprisingly smooth. That this has happened through political negotiation and not violence is equally astonishing. We now have the chance to achieve real social and political progress as the task of drafting a new constitution gets under way.



GUEST COLUMN
Ram K Bhandari

But the end of the war does not mean we are at peace. Violence continues in the Tarai, and the first challenge of the new Maoist-led government will be to restore law and order. As for the tens of thousands of Nepalis whose relatives were killed or 'disappeared' during the conflict, their pain continues unabated. (See: *Vanished without trace*, page 8-9)

In the week that we remember the more than one thousand Nepalis whose whereabouts remain unknown, we must reassert our political commitment to seek justice and truth. The peace process will be unsustainable unless the uncertainty, grief and anger of the families of the 'disappeared' are addressed. We want the truth, and we want justice.

Today, more than two years after the conflict ended, families who were too afraid to do so

earlier are now coming forward to report the disappearance of relatives and friends. We have not yet begun to systematically document the enforced disappearances and executions that occurred.

The warring sides are now in government. The erstwhile chief of the PLA is now prime minister, a guerrilla commander is the defence minister, the chief Maoist ideologue is finance minister. There is a commitment in the Common Minimum Program to set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Individuals and families showed great personal and collective courage to survive, resist and actively struggle for change. But many of those in positions of authority who were responsible for their subjugation remain in their posts despite the regime change.

The perpetrators of war crimes on both sides are known. We know where they are and in what position. Some guilty CDOs, DSPs and army officers remain in the same districts, where they continue to resist the struggle by victims' families for justice.

Those responsible for illegal detentions, torture, 'disappearances' and custodial killings are walking around openly. The families of their victims will never forget who they are and history will brand them. But this is not enough. As long as they continue to blatantly flaunt their freedom, they insult

the dignity of the dead and the suffering of the families of the 'disappeared', many of whom have lost hope that even with the new government, anything much will change.

Many families still suffer post-traumatic stress, while children who witnessed violence carry deep psychological scars even though there may be no physical wounds. Activists and human rights groups say they are working on peace and reconciliation, and keep themselves busy writing proposals and reports. But they haven't yet reached us in remote districts. This may be the way the organised politics of victimhood works, but it leaves the real victims without hope.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal often promised in the past two years that he would publish the names of the 'disappeared' and form a high-level commission to investigate forced disappearances. If the peace process is as high on the agenda as the prime minister says it is, he must fulfil these promises.

We have died many times in the years since our relatives 'disappeared'. We demand the truth about our dear ones. If you can't tell us their whereabouts, then declare them martyrs on 31 August. ●

Ram Kumar Bhandari's father was 'disappeared' by the army in 2004. He is the coordinator of the Committee for Social Justice in Lamjung.



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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

GM targets South Asia

Despite a slump in the car market caused by the global financial crisis and the shift towards smaller, more fuel-efficient cars, General Motors (GM) is expanding in South Asia.

The multinational car company is adding another manufacturing unit in India, taking its overall investment to \$1 billion. India has seen a 14 per cent annual growth in car sales, and the Chevrolet range has posted an annual 75 per cent increase.

Although the South Asian market is smaller than the Chinese, there is a lot more potential for growth because there are only eight cars per thousand population in India while China has already attained 17 cars per thousand.

"There is a downturn and it will be a struggle to retain double digit growth in automobile sales in India, but our models are doing well," says Karl Slym, president and managing director of General Motors India who was in Nepal this week. (pictured left)

The trend towards smaller, more fuel-efficient cars is mirrored in South Asia as well, with customers now much more conscious about fuel efficiency, Slym told *Nepali Times*. This is why the Chevrolet Spark has proved to be very popular because it has the best mileage in the small car range with 16.9km/l and the cost of ownership is on a par with a Maruti. The Spark's elegantly modern lines and spacious interior have proved to be a hit with customers, with two million sold worldwide.

GM says it is in India for the long haul, using it as a manufacturing base for the region and beyond. It has invested in a research and development division in Bangalore, a design studio which is part of a network of 11 across the world and a power train development unit that will try to localise tooling. It has a production unit in Baroda making 70,000 cars a year and is adding another one next month in Talegaon in Maharashtra, capable of producing 140,000 cars a year.

The cars are also being adapted for poor road conditions and low quality fuel with stronger suspension, engine calibration and additives to protect the engine from adulterated fuel.

The reason car sales in India are still below China is because infrastructure hasn't kept pace with demand.

In Nepal, however, despite the crippling fuel shortage which has now lasted two years and poor road conditions, car sales overall haven't dropped. GM's sole distributor in Nepal, Vijaya Motors, expects the Spark to do well and has already sold 76 units since the model was introduced this year. Vijaya Motors has added sales offices and showrooms in Pokhara, Butwal and Biratnagar.

Says Annie Gardener of Vijaya Motors: "Imagine what it would be like if the highways were in top condition, the fuel crisis was resolved and there was stability and economic growth." ●

Copying goes digital

Nepali Times met up with Toshitaka Tanaka, Managing Director of Kyocera Mita Singapore, during his recent visit to Kathmandu, to find out about the company's brand strategy in Nepal.

Nepali Times: We have heard of the Mita brand but tell us more about Kyocera Mita
Toshitaka Tanaka: Mita was founded in 1934 in Osaka and Kyocera Mita was formed after a merger between Kyocera and Mita in 1989. Kyocera Mita now has 12,000 employees and sales of nearly \$2 billion. It is part of the Kyocera group with sales of over \$12 billion worldwide. Kyocera Mita Singapore oversees 14 Asian countries, including Nepal.

With so many brands of copiers in the market, why do you think the Kyocera copier is doing so well in Nepal? We are extremely proud of being the market leader in Nepal for over



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

PERFECT COPY: Billy Kee, export manager of Kyocera Mita Singapore, Toshitaka Tanaka Managing Director and Toshio Furomoto, former managing director in Kathmandu this week.

30 years. Kyocera copiers are reliable products that provide the best value for money. Mercantile Traders is and has been our distributor in Nepal for over 30


years. It provides efficient and effective after-sales service from a team of expert technicians, along with a full range of spares. Mercantile was in fact our first

appointed distributor in Asia and one of our oldest distributors worldwide. It is this partnership that makes Kyocera Mita the brand leader here.

Isn't the Nepali market relatively small compared with other Asian countries?

Nepal may be a relatively small market, but it is not a small country with 28 million people. Nepal is one of the fastest growing markets in Asia and has immense potential especially as the peace process leads to economic expansion.

Looking ahead, what are Kyocera Mita's medium term business and investment plans in Nepal? Nepal still has a relatively large number of analog machines. I see a natural migration in the pipeline from analog to digital copiers. Thereafter, in line with the regional buying trend, I firmly believe Nepal will be an attractive and growing market for colour and multi-function networked copiers. I remain optimistic that the copier sales volume will increase in tandem with the economic growth potential of the country. Mercantile and Kyocera Mita will be here to take the lead and further consolidate our market share in the Nepali market.




SEPTEMBER ISSUE IS ON THE STANDS

Cover section:
Instruments of Ideology: The ways of words and weapons
Sam Cowan on the battles of Khara and Pili
Ahmed Rashid on the Taliban
Ajai Sahni and Sarbani Bandyopadhyay on India's Naxalites
Also, the LTTE in decline, and an interview with Naga rebel leader Thuingaleng Muivah

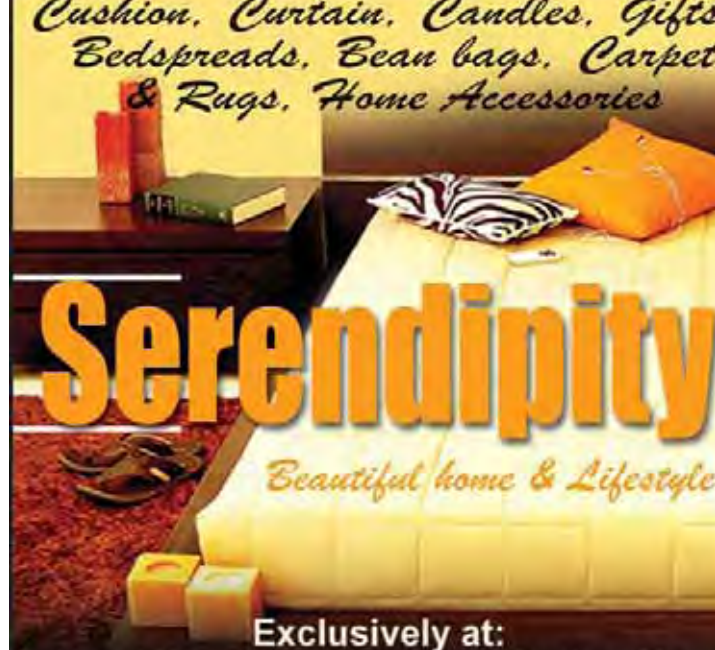
SPECIAL FEATURE:
The first interview with Prime Minister Prachanda!

In addition:
The Red Guard of Nepal – Harald Olav Skar
A review of Maoist films – Surabhi Pudasaini
The retribalisation of Pakistan – Khaled Ahmed
The 25th International Day of the Disappeared – Ingrid Massage
Extremist academics in Bangladesh – Imtiaz Ahmed
The Karen of Burma – photo feature by Massimiliano Clausi



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Helping hands for Kosi

The European Commission has pledged up to •1 million to provide food aid for 50,000 victims of the floods that have affected Sunsari district. The funds will be channelled through the European Commission's humanitarian aid department.

The most vulnerable people displaced by the flooding will benefit from nutritional support through the World Food Programme. Eduardo Lechuga Jimenez, chargé d' affaires at the Delegation of the European Commission to Nepal said the assistance was on top of the •18 million for the victims of the conflict and •15.4 million in food aid for Bhutani refugees that the Commission has been providing.

Among other donors, Surya Nepal has donated Rs1 million to the disaster relief fund for Kosi flood victims. While Yeti Airlines has pitched in Rs 150,000 worth of food grains to flood victims in Inaruwa, including two tonnes of rice and one tonne of pulses to the District Head Office.

Best of Bolly

Nepal Telecom subscribers can now download the latest Bollywood ringtones via SMS or internet. Each tone costs Rs 10 plus VAT and is activated for 15 days. The service is provided by Digitainment, a company affiliated to Hangama, which is promoting Nepali and Bollywood digital music on mobiles.

Logan Launch

Agni, the local distributor of Mahindra vehicles, has launched two models of the Mahindra Renault Logan. The 1.4-litre petrol version has an introductory price of Rs 1.65 million, and the 1.5-litre diesel, Rs 2.195 million.



Fully charged

A joint venture between Tata AutoComp Systems and GS Yuasa International of Japan has launched a range of automotive and inverter batteries which have a calcium-calcium alloy composition that reduces water evaporation in the battery. Mahabir Trade Concerns is the sole distributor of the batteries, which also have 'self-switch-off' technology that gives extended shelf life and, according to Tata, charges quickly.

Superior room s

For the second year running, the Soaltee Crowne Plaza Hotel has won the Platinum Award for Nepal's Best Business Hotel from *Today's Traveler* magazine, in a ceremony organized in Delhi on the magazine's 11th anniversary. The hotel is managed by the British-based InterContinental Hotels Group.

Undervalued work

Writing a column, even if it is every fortnight, is a struggle. In less than 600 words, should I write (without putting you to sleep) on Big Picture topics such as the rate at which remittances are causing inflation in Nepal or why global oil prices are starting to come down and what that means for



STRICTLY BUSINESS Ashutosh Tiwari

NOC? Or should I focus on undervalued issues such as what works for a Nepali manager to run her business well or how an attack on a particular newspaper is an attack on *all* our freedoms?

The perpetual student in me has discovered that while Big Picture writing may help burnish one's image as a thinker (even if few read, and even fewer understand it), it's the pieces on undervalued issues that seem to resonate well with most readers.

One reason is that not many choose to write them. Because of a short supply, the few that do get published receive disproportionate attention from readers. Anyone, for instance, can ridicule the government's negligence and incompetence in broad terms. But few can and want to explain how such inactions have affected, say, one particular Muslim Nepali family displaced by last week's Kosi embankment collapse.

This idea of work that's initially undervalued but which ends up being crucial for success later on extends to other spheres of

life too. Take Barack Obama's career. After graduating from Harvard Law School, he went to Chicago to work as a community organiser. As a rule, the brightest law graduates in the US do not start their professional lives in some of the poorest neighbourhoods. For them, full-time community activism is an undervalued activity.

But 16 years later, Obama's community organising skills, performed nationally with additional effort and luck, broke the political machinery of his party's more seasoned rivals. I doubt whether Obama would have been where he is today had he joined his classmates in signing up for "billable hours" with white-shoe law firms in New York or DC. Undervalued work, in

Studying in China was an undervalued idea.

A decade later, with the rise of China on the global stage, Nepalis who studied engineering and sciences there now have the sort of skills that are on the demand list of every global company: fluency in Mandarin and English, familiarity with China, technical degrees and an ability to work hard and learn things fast. I wouldn't be surprised if the first pukka Nepali dollar-billionaire eventually emerged out of Nepalis in China.

The trouble with undervalued work or idea is that it's hard to know in advance whether engaging in it will yield success. That is why, for most people, the mantra is always: Play safe, don't rock the boat and follow the herd. But for a few entrepreneurial ones, whether

Form ost, the m antra is: play safe , don 't rock the boat and follow the herd

effect, became a robust platform for Obama's eventual nomination to be the next US president.

On a recent visit to Shanghai, I met Nepali professionals who have done well. What struck me was that hardly any of them were from Kathmandu. They started in China as scholarship students from Parsa, Dang and Chitwan. Ten years ago, when most Kathmandu-based Nepali students went abroad for studies, they went, as they still do, to the usual places: the US, the UK, Canada, Australia and so on.

in academia, politics, the arts, business or sport, spending time and effort on first doing the undervalued work of their respective domains for the sheer enjoyment of it, trusting their instincts that somehow things will turn out all right, mastering the required skills, and then, with a dose of luck, using that experience to propel themselves ahead seem to be one interesting way to gain a sturdier command of success.

Framed that way, maybe writing columns need not be such a struggle. ●

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YCL terror in Qatar

Shyam Sundar Sashi in *Kantipur*, 26 August

कान्तिपुर

21 August, 2008—exactly 111 days after I was transferred to the Arab Bureau of *Kantipur*, I was invited to a political program. Maoist leaders CP Gajurel and Matrika Yadav were attending and the government was about to be formed. The event was organized by a Maoist sister organization here, Jana Pragatisheel Manch. Although no invitation had been sent to *Kantipur*, these were public figures and I decided to cover the event. At Doha Airport, I met Yadav, who is from my own

district Dhanusa and he was chummy, saying we should get together. We drove to Dukhan, 100 km from Doha. At the venue, we were welcomed by a dozen YCL followers sporting red bandanas with hammers, sickles and stars on them. Gajurel was speaking, and I took a few pictures. Suddenly a YCL cadre pushed me roughly and ordered me to go out. I figured maybe I was blocking his view, changed my position and took some more pictures. This time, he dragged me out, demanding to know why I was there without an invitation. I tried to argue that I was a journalist and I had a right to be there. The youngster was drunk on luma, a homemade brew available here. Another intoxicated Maoist pushed me around. I was thrown to the ground by 30 to 40 Maoists. A skinny YCL cadre took away my camera. I then called my colleague at the Doha office, Dipendra Bhattarai and told him what was happening. He immediately called the ambassador, who was still inside at the function. If the ambassador hadn't come to my aid, I cannot say if I would have lived or not. On his insistence, the Maoists returned my camera but kept the memory card which contained all my pictures of the past four months. Just then Gajurel came out and saw me pinned down by the YCLs. I shouted out to him: "Is this the democracy you are trying to establish?" Gajurel said he had talked to his followers to return the memory card, and with that he got into the ambassador's car. Even when I pleaded for help, he did not say anything. Then the Madhesi leader, Matrika Yadav walked in. He intervened, I was eventually released and the memory card was returned.

Journalists like Dekendra Thapa and Birendra Shah have died at the hands of the Maoists, and chairman Prachanda has apologised for it. But the Maoists now need to understand that anarchic actions like these can harm bilateral relations between Qatar and Nepal and jeopardize the status of the 300,000 Nepalis working here. The Maoists can't get away with this intimidation and violence in Qatar's strict legal system. Nepali society will never forgive them for the consequences.



KUMAR KARKI

Unethical media

Yubraj Ghimire in *Samaya*, 28 August

समय

The news media are being targeted by state or political players, and is criticised for being politically biased. What is overlooked in these discussions is the important notion of 'ethics'. The only people to stand up for media ethics have been victims of the media's lack of ethics.

Renowned neurosurgeon Upendra Devkota recently drew attention to the issue of media ethics. A month ago, his 15-year-old daughter was kidnapped. Fortunately, the family was able to get her home after paying a ransom. As a responsible citizen, Devkota assisted the police in arresting the kidnappers, and called for a campaign to promote media ethics. He accused a particular publishing house of 'criminal journalism' by publicising his daughter's name.

If the media had a sense of business morality, they should have made a public apology to Devkota. Unfortunately, they didn't. Devkota went public because he did not want any other parents to suffer the way his family did. It might be possible that under his leadership, not just as a victim but as a campaigner, this issue will be able to attract the attention it deserves.

Devkota's fury was understandable. In delicate situations which involve children or raped women, media ethics demand that they should not be named. The Nepali media need more self-monitoring because it would be regrettable if they were perceived to be irresponsible and insensitive. The named publishing house should heed Devkota's advice, and view his suggestions positively. It would consequently raise people's respect and trust for the media.



Bam Deb Gautam : "We want the deputy prime ministership."

Manmohan Singh: "No, we want it."

Basu Kshitij in *Budhabar*, 27 August

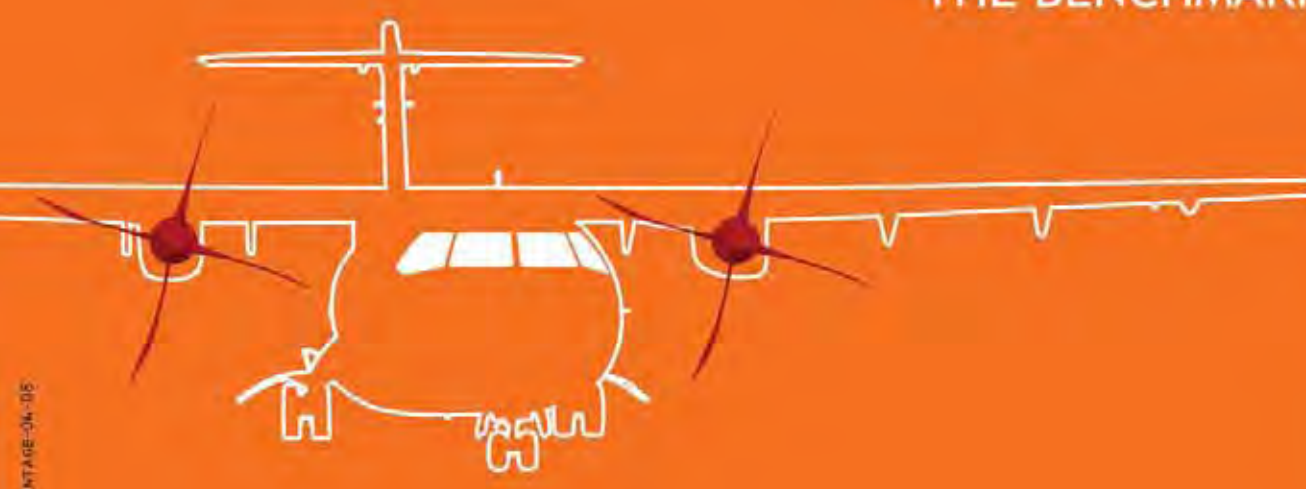
QUOTE OF THE WEEK

// If we examine history, we find that every incident of treachery against the nation has been committed in **daura-suruwal**. Flashback: were the prime ministers who signed the Kosi, Gandak or Mahakali agreements, dressed in suit or dhoti or in **daura suruwal**? //

-Krishna Pokharel
quoted in

Naya Patrika, 28 August

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Team Prachanda

Nepal, 21 August

नेपाल

When CPN Mashal decided on the strategy of a long-term people's war, Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Biswas' and Rambahadur Thapa 'Prem' went to Manang in search of weapons. They returned with 303 rifles from Maniraj Gurung of Dharapani. Biswas and Prem evolved into the 'Prachanda' and 'Badal' duo. And Deb Gurung from Dharapani was pulled in by loyalty to an old friendship.

When the Mashal joined the class struggle, Deb Gurung and Krishna Bahadur Mahara stood for

Bhattarai, worked to lay the conditions for protracted war. Now he is finance minister.

Non-Maoists in the cabinet are MJF Chairman Upendra Yadav, JP Gupta, Bijay Gachhadar and Renu Yadav. Upendra Yadav was a UML, became a Maoist and then became the face associated with the Madhesi Movement after January 2007. His relations with the Maoists grew worse after the Gaur massacre, but he is now foreign minister.

JP Gupta was among the powerful Madhesi kangresis who left the NC in 2007. He had major



RAMBAHADUR THAPA



DEB GURUNG



KRISHNA BAHADUR MAHARA



BABURAM BHATTARAI



UPENDRA YADAV



BIJAY GACHHADAR

elections in Lamjung and Rolpa, while Prachanda put himself to work to develop a country-wide underground organisation for the 'people's war'. Meanwhile, Badal got involved in the 'Sisnejaljala Abhiyan' and preparation for a class struggle in Rukum-Rolpa. Badal is now defence minister, Mahara is information minister and Gurung is minister of law and justice.

Another member of Team Prachanda, Baburam

differences with Upendra Yadav, but is now agriculture minister in the Maoist-led government. JP used to get along well with Gachhadar even when they were in the NC, and both have problems with Upendra Yadav.

Renu Yadav is a Madhesi RPP who defected to the MJF because she saw no political future in the royalist party. She has been minister twice and is now education minister under the Maoists.

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Bel Bahadur Shrestha with a picture of his son Raj Kumar, who disappeared in 2002. Today, six years on, he has no tears left. “No father should have to perform his son’s funeral,” says Bel Bahadur. “It breaks my heart to think that I’ll never see him again.” After rumours of his son’s death reached the community, Shrestha performed the funeral rites according to tradition. He has never received an official response from the authorities informing him about the fate of his son or recognising the fate of his family.



Sanu BK’s 23-year-old wife Buddhi Maya BK is trying to live one day at a time. Sanu’s daughter was only one years old when he left and is growing up fast. She has started asking Buddhi Maya about her father’s whereabouts. “I don’t know how to explain to her that her dad has been missing for over six years,” says Buddhi helplessly. Sanu’s brother, Tek Bahadur BK, vanished with him. The brothers’ father, Gyan Bahadur, now lives with Buddhi. “Can memories of loved ones be erased?” he asks. “I will never forget my sons, but I’ve stopped showing my suffering to others. I weep quietly at night.”



Man Bahadur Gurung is the grandfather of Gokarna and Tek Bahadur Gurung, who disappeared in February 2002. “A 105-year-old man is alive while his young grandsons are missing. They should have been performing my last rites, not the other way round.”



The 17 who went missing in Jogimara left behind 10 wives. Beli Maya Chepang, former wife of Ram Bahadur Chepang, remarried after a few years (above). When Ram Bahadur disappeared, she was left with nothing. “I am so poor that I haven’t even performed his funeral rites. It costs a lot in our community and I can’t afford it,” she says, adding that she remarried because she could not afford to bring up her children alone.

Vanished with a trail

In Jogimara, Dhading district, a small village on the highway, there’s an eerie sense of loss. In 2001, 20 young men left from here for construction at Kotbada, 800 km away. They never came back. To this day, their families search for them and there has been no official word.

Some families still nurture the hope that one day, but most accept that they are dead. They performed funeral rites in their absence. The loss has been devastating for the 10 wives left behind. Almost every house lost a breadwinner under the age of 21.

Their families don’t know what happened to the Jogimara boys

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has urged the authorities to explain the fate and whereabouts of the missing as a result of the armed conflict. This would allow the authorities to provide support programs that could address the problems of inheritance and marriage, provision of counselling and material support in connection with the disappearances. This would also open the way for families to begin the process of reconciliation.

To commemorate the International Day of the Disappeared on 30 August, the ICRC and Nepal Red Cross Society are organising an exhibition of black and white photos of the missing in Kayastha in Kathmandu from 30 August to 3 September.

Missing Persons in Nepal
Indigo Gallery: 30 August
Darbar Squares: 7 September
(Kathmandu), 9 September

ALL PICS: KISHOR KAYASTHA

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and access to judicial procedures in
This 'missing' status is also crucial in
the process of mourning and

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er (Bhaktapur), 8 September
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When Raj Kumar Shrestha left home in November 2001, he also left behind two young sons and a pregnant wife. His wife had a stillbirth a few months after his death. Unable to bear the shock, his mother committed suicide. Today his sister-in-law, Kopila (above), takes care of both her own family and Raj Kumar's.



Suka Maya Chepang, wife of 60-year-old Chitra Bahadur Chepang, with her young granddaughter in their corn field in Jogimara. Chitra Bahadur was oldest of the 17 who left for Kalikot. He left Jogimara because there was no work, the family's debts were piling up and they had no more cattle, goats or crops to sell. So shocked was Suka Maya when she heard about her husband's disappearance that she did not speak for months and her teenage son had to take care of her and four other siblings.



Raj Kumari Gurung (above) lost both her brothers-in-law, Gokarna Gurung and Tek Bahadur Gurung. Their mother, Moti Maya Gurung, is convinced her sons will come back one day. "They went to earn money. I still think they'll come back, but it's been so long. What can I do?"



Dhan Maya Thapa, the 40-year-old mother of Bhim Bahadur Thapa, has been living with the guilt of having made her son work at the airstrip. "We didn't have enough to eat so I made my young son go to work in Kalikot," she says with tears in her eyes. "Now look what happened to him."



Two Dajus

We need to get our act together on foreign policy—and fast. For starters, Nepal's diplomacy vis-à-vis India needs to be less insecure, more subtle.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal should be focusing on forming a full cabinet, dealing with the Kosi embankment collapse and kick-starting governance. Instead, he has landed himself in a diplomatic soup. Extracting himself, and Nepal, from the mess will take more energy and political capital than he may possess.

"Why is India upset?" is the favourite question doing the rounds. Delhi's reaction should be seen in the context of China's role in the

neighbourhood. Beijing and Dhaka get along very well even as India's relations with its eastern neighbour remain strained. China gives arms to

Colombo while India watches the civil war from the side because of its domestic political constraints in Tamil Nadu. Sino-Pakistani relations have always been a source of concern.

And now add Beijing's stepped up activities in Kathmandu, which even China had conceded lies in the Indian sphere of influence. The media reported on the presence of the RAW station chief at Dahal's house immediately before the UML and Maoist alliance broke off during the presidential polls. Interestingly, the UML delegation had come over to Naya Bajar the same night after a dinner at the Chinese embassy, which was understood to be backing such an alliance.

China has stepped up contacts with the Maoist military leadership. And it is making increasingly public assertions, through former envoys and academics, warning of Nepal's 'Sikkimisation'.

Playing India and China off against each other never worked

There is a school of thought in the Delhi security establishment which views China's South Asia policy as intended to "encircle" India. And they are skeptical of Nepali Maoists who they dub "Chinese agents". The liberal diplomats at the MEA and PMO in Delhi do not necessarily share this view. They see the broader relationship with China as competitive but not confrontational. They had to fight a long battle within the system to back Nepal's peace process, welcome the Maoists win, and not block the formation of their government.

In one stroke, Dahal's Beijing visit reinforced the views of the hawks, and weakened the position of those who have given the Maoists the benefit of doubt. No one in Delhi accepts that this was an "Olympics visit". China is seen to be sending out a message to India that it can create trouble in its backyard if it wants, a message that attains more salience since the nuclear deal that brought India and the US closer. Prachanda is sending out a 'nationalist' message to his constituency that he is different from those who bowed down before 'Indian expansionism'.

India, too, needs to be more confident about its influence in Nepal. If its core policy goal is to create a stable Nepal, then why is it growing perturbed? China is not engineering instability. If India and China can have trade worth more than \$50 billion, why can't Nepal and China engage more closely? If there were concerns, India should have expressed them subtly and not by planting stories through Delhi-based Nepali journalists that PM Singh is 'pained'. The views of sources in South Block, as reported in *Kantipur*, have led to impressions of India being petty.

But the Nepali side must be indicted for its callous attitude to the apprehensions of our most important neighbour. Prachanda needs to think of ways of extracting benefits from China without antagonising India.

Upendra Yadav's equidistance statement flies in the face of the facts. At least half of this country has close family and cultural ties on the Indian side, millions of our workers benefit from employment in India, our natural resources are intertwined, even life and death do not recognise the border—as we are seeing in the Kosi. Delhi has engineered every key political shift in this country, and our politicians have no hesitation in pleading before even junior bureaucrats and mid-ranking leaders in Delhi. Who is Yadav trying to fool?

If the Nepali political class wants equidistance, it needs to get its act together and think from a national perspective and not a party perspective. What does Nepal want from India? What is it willing to give in return? Let us do a similar exercise with China. Right now, parties and politicians are playing off one against the other for their own personal benefit.

As Birendra learnt in 1989 and Gyanendra later, playing India and China off against each other doesn't work. And the country will suffer in the process. ●

DEWAN RAI

Women now make up one third of the constituent assembly and come from a more diverse range of social and geographical backgrounds than ever before. Does this mean that a wider range of voices and opinions will be heard? The initial signs are not good, but perhaps it is too early to tell.

Not all the women were politically active before being selected for the assembly, and many have had only a limited education.

Shanti Chaudhari (UML) was sold as a kamlari at the age of eight and since suffered what she describes as an "unspeakable torture". She took part in pro-democracy protests and was imprisoned. She has attended adult education classes and can now read with difficulty but still cannot write. The UML selected her as a candidate because of her involvement in the land reform movement in Dang.

"I had mixed feelings about coming to Kathmandu—happy and a little nervous," she told *Nepali Times* this week. First, Shanti had trouble persuading security guards she was an assembly member, then she was robbed in Baneswor after an assembly session last month. Some assembly members ignore



In the 10 assembly sessions so far, only two women have spoken

her, she says along with others from similar, underprivileged backgrounds like her.

Rather more prepared for the rigours of the assembly is Bimala Nepali (NC), who completed secondary school but has no political experience. She says many new assembly members,

especially women from rural areas, know little or nothing about how parliament works. "The party should be responsible for training them and teaching them," she says.

Neelam Barma (MJF) has 15 years of political experience in the Madhes movement but it is the first time she has seen a parliament

CA PAs



A majority of the Constituent Assembly (CA) nominated under the proportional representation system have not completed high school. A majority of the elected members of the CA do not have a college degree.

They may be seasoned politicians but when it comes to parliamentary business—drafting bills and ordinances, researching and identifying areas of public concern—they need help.

Hasina Miya Begam, UML member who can read but can't write Nepali, takes the help of her daughter. Dhan Raj Gurung of the NC and the UML's Ram Nath Dhakal, like a majority of the house members, do not think it is necessary to have a personal assistant (PA).

Every CA member gets a monthly allowance of

Rs11,000 to hire a PA.

However, the secretariat has found that most CA members without PAs register the names of relatives and take the money.

Personal assistants are needed to help the CA member to manage schedules, plan appointments and research issues. They are supposed to correspond with the public and the government, reviewing documentation, researching, scheduling committee hearings and briefing journalists.

Gagan Thapa, NC nominee in the CA admits that a majority of the CA members do not hire PAs. "It is either their own relative who assist them

or no one at all," he says.

Parliamentarians have more duties than just attending house sessions. They are expected to help cadres and constituents in Kathmandu and run personal errands around town, pay phone bills, drive or help in the household.

"There is no way they can do all this without an assistant," he says, "and this could be one reason why our representatives are so inefficient."

Thapa is the only CA member who has set up an office in Baneswor and is looking for interns interested in parliamentary affairs and politics. He says: "When I was preparing the proposal on the fuel crisis to be presented in the legislature, I felt I could have done lots with additional help to research the topic." ●

third of the sky



KIRAN PANDAY

at work. She is frustrated that the women seem to do little more than vote and applaud the men selected for the senior posts of government.

“We have seen the presidential and prime ministerial elections, the nomination of the house chairperson and even the cabinet formation, but we have only seen one woman minister so far,” she says.

Barma says the problem is that

many of the new women members are uneducated, and even those who had a decent education lack the confidence to speak up on political matters in this bastion of male domination. The MJF has 11 women members, four of whom had no education.

Even the Maoists, who have led the way with the largest number of women candidates, seem to be doing little to help new female members learn the ropes. Maya Chepang never

completed her primary education. “I had no idea about parliamentary affairs,” she says, and admits she just follows her party’s orders.

In the 10 Constituent Assembly sessions so far, only two women have spoken up: Sarita Giri (Sadbhabana-S) and Kalpana Rana (CPN-Unity).

Mukunda Sharma, joint secretary at the Parliament Secretariat, agrees that the political parties should be orientating new members. “The parties should take the



responsibility, but the secretariat is coordinating with donor agencies, local organisations and parties to train them,” he says.

Sharma says it’s not just the women who need training. Some of the men are equally inexperienced in the ways of the CA and on issues like federalism, inclusiveness and state restructuring.

Sharma says 26 technical committees have so far been

formed to help assembly members representing the various castes and communities voice their demands and requirements in the right manner.

Sujita Shakya, of the Beyond Beijing Committee which is involved in making women assembly members aware of parliamentary procedures, says: “By the time the CA’s real business starts, women members will be ready for the debates.”

If the new women members from different backgrounds are not sufficiently confident to speak in the assembly, Shakya says, then the old elite will prevail: “It’s not only about the physical presence of women, it is about their active participation in parliamentary business and in drafting the new constitution.” ●

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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

On the occasion of Malaysia's National Day on 31 August, Nepali Times interviewed Malaysian ambassador to Nepal, Ilankovan Kolandavelu. Excerpts:

Nepali Times: What is the Malaysian government's assessment of the situation in Nepal?

Ambassador Ilankovan Kolandavelu: We are pleased to note that the peace and democratisation process in Nepal is forging ahead, although there are some hiccups along the way. Malaysia made its contribution to the election monitoring process in April by sending a delegation consisting of the deputy chairman of the election commission and two election commissioners. They have reported that the conduct of the election has sufficiently met acceptable international standards.

Now that the new government has been formed, we hope that lasting peace and political stability will be established to enable the government to focus on nurturing economic development and prosperity. Though Malaysia is not in the category of donor nations, we have been contributing to the development of human resources and capacity-building in Nepal for more than 20 years through the Malaysia Technical Cooperation Program. Nepali workers in Malaysia remit about US\$400 million to Nepal every year. For Nepal, Malaysia is the biggest recipient country of Nepali workers, while Nepal is the third biggest source country for Malaysia (until 2007 Nepal was second biggest source country of foreign workers).

Would you say the Malaysian model of economic development has some lessons for Nepal?

The World Bank and IMF are fond of referring to Malaysia's growth model and prosperity as 'Asia's Miracle'. The former prime minister once responded that he did not believe in miracles and that Malaysia's growth

"Political stability for economic progress"

and prosperity were brought about by—in his words—"shedding our sweat, tears and blood". Malaysia, on its independence from British colonial rule in 1957, was grouped in the category of least developed nations. As we celebrate our 51st anniversary, Malaysians can take pride in the progress and development that their country has achieved. Through hard work, tolerance and consensus, our multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious population has turned diversity into an asset that brings stability and prosperity to the country.

Certain aspects of our experience in nation-building could offer some lessons to Nepal, particularly our ability to successfully forge a multi-party coalition government. Our economic policies relating to diversification of the economy and exploitation of domestic natural resources could be of value to Nepal. Of course some modifications have to be made to adapt to local conditions.

What would the new government need to do to entice Malaysian businesses to invest in Nepal?

First and foremost, sustained political stability and peace need to be established to realise the peace dividend. Some Malaysian businessmen have shown an interest in exploring investment opportunities in the country, particularly in hydropower, infrastructure and tourism-related projects. However, the government has to create an enabling environment that would reduce the risk of investing and doing business in Nepal. As businessmen, they are prepared to take a calculated risk, but Nepal needs to introduce business-friendly economic and financial policies to entice the Malaysian business community to invest in the country.

You met Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal recently. Did you raise some of these issues with him?

I met the Prime Minister in early July this year and we discussed a number of issues, mainly relating to Malaysia-Nepal bilateral relations. The prime minister requested my assistance to get Malaysian businesses to invest in Nepal in the sectors I just mentioned. He appeared very determined to foster economic growth and prosperity in Nepal and foster an enabling environment for foreign

investment. He also agreed with my views about the strong linkages between political stability and economic development. The Embassy of Malaysia will be working closely with relevant Nepali agencies to entice the Malaysian business community to invest in Nepal.

What can be done to ensure the healthy growth of Nepali migrant labour in Malaysia?

There are now about 300,000 Nepali workers in Malaysia. Most of them are hard working and have created very minimal social problems. However, there are about 500-600 Nepali recruitment agencies involved and there is a need to monitor some of them to ensure the workers are not misled or abused. The Malaysian government is also regularly strengthening labour and immigration policies relating to the recruitment of foreign workers and enforcement measures to ensure that the Malaysian labour agencies and employers respect the laws and regulations relating to the employment of foreign workers in Malaysia.

What else can be done to improve trade and education, and boost Malaysian tourism in Nepal?

To promote the tourism sector there is a critical need to have direct air connectivity between Malaysia and Nepal. Despite the lack of direct air connectivity, about 38,000 Nepalese tourists visited Malaysia in 2007—a 232 per cent increase compared to 2007—and 4,800 Malaysians visited Nepal in the same year. Malaysia and Nepal signed the MOU on air services in December 2007. MAS is expected to commence Kuala Lumpur-Kathmandu flights by the end of this year, while Air Asia is contemplating a Nepal link in 2009. The decisions of both Malaysian airlines are based on a market study on the passenger traffic potential.

Currently there are about 20,000 Nepali students in Australia and another 23,000 in the US. The escalating cost of higher education in these countries is discouraging many Nepali parents, and they are looking at the twinning programs between Malaysian colleges and the institutions of higher learning in Australia, the USA, the UK and Canada as an attractive option. Bilateral trade is small and needs to expand. We are in the process of organising a trade delegation to Nepal soon.

"A Second Home"

Foreigners, especially Singaporeans, are investing in Malaysian real estate and the government has given incentives to encourage this trend through the 'Malaysia My Second Home' program. It is open to all foreign citizens wishing to retire or reside in Malaysia on a long-term basis. It is fully endorsed by the Malaysian government and covers immediate family (spouse and children). Under the program, investors get a 10-year Visit Pass and Multiple-Entry Visa (renewable every 10 years), which will eventually entitle them to a perpetual visa. A car can be imported duty-free. The person can invest and own businesses in Malaysia, which is like owning a second passport or a second citizenship in Malaysia.

Malaysia is blessed with warm, moderate weather all year round. There are superb healthcare facilities, yet medical expenses and insurance can be very cheap and affordable compared to other countries. There is a good education system with many international schools to cater for expatriate children, and numerous colleges affiliated to well-known overseas universities.

A majority of Malaysians understand and speak English, and air connectivity is very good. Malaysia has a very low crime rate. Bangladeshis have become the biggest group of foreigners taking advantage of this program, and the Malaysian Embassy is promoting the 'Malaysia My Second Home' program in Nepal too.

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Feebl efairy tale

Guillermo del Toro has many of the qualities cherished by film critics: an audacious, singular aesthetic, a proclivity to serious, personal themes, and the skill to execute his vision. He has also moved back and forth adeptly between independent film and big studio



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

projects. Given his record—including the fantastical *Pan's Labyrinth* and the delightful *Hellboy* with its blend of block-buster sensibility and sensitivity towards the deviant misfit—his latest offering could have been special. But sadly, with *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, he has fallen woefully short.

For those of you who missed the first instalment, Hellboy is the literally diabolical hero—a red demon with horns and all, and one oversized sledgehammer fist—summoned to Earth to create Armageddon but rescued and adopted by a Professor Broom. He is then brought up to defend good under the auspices of the Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defence, a sort of X-Files department staffed by freaks. The story comes from the creative mind of comic book artist Mike Mignola, whose dark and grim vision is leavened with humour and humanity.

In the sequel, the baddies aren't infernal but fey—in a bad-ass way. Elfin Prince Nuada (Goss), resentful of the human

destruction of Earth (yes, he's got a point) and the fall of his people—reflected in their present subterranean haunts—plans to break a centuries-old truce with mankind. His twin sister, Princess Nuala (Walton) turns to the BRDP to try to prevent him from raising the dreaded Golden Army, thousands of unstoppable killing machines.

The comic book, packed with pathos and existential dilemmas, should have been fertile ground for del Toro. Yet he manages to squander the affection we might have had for the characters from the first film by reducing their

blue-skinned aquatic life-form, Abe Sapien (Doug Jones), or the bodiless ectoplasmic Dr Krauss housed in a clunky deep-sea diving suit and voiced by Seth McFarlane, the better.

Del Toro's much vaunted sense of the fantastical and macabre is sorely bruised by *Hellboy II*. Rather than wowing his audience, whole swathes of the movie have been recycled from old cloth, either from his previous work or cheaply derived from others'. A potentially phantasmagoric scene in the underground trolls' market beneath the Brooklyn Bridge is

Comic book adaptation suffers the curse of the sequel

complexity and caricaturing them apparently for attempted comic effect.

First to fall victim is the relationship between Hellboy (Pearlman) and his flame, the pyrokinetic Liz Sherman (Blair), which del Toro reduces to an unattractive bickering contest. Likewise, Hellboy ages differently from humans, raising questions about his maturity. This was previously a source of comedic tension, but is now simply a source of irritation, with his infantilism blown up to gargantuan proportions. And Hellboy's reliance on the Jack Bauer approach to investigation—hitting anyone he has to question—is made even dumber since most of the action is nonsensical.

The less said about the bizarre

instead a damp squib more akin to *Star Wars*.

The engine that drives the plot splutters along without any apparent internal logic or character development. The humour falls flat and the dialogue feels awkward. If the sets and costumes are pretty, they only serve as a reminder of what del Toro has achieved in the past. Skip this one, treat yourself to one of his previous offerings, and hope that he comes up trumps with *The Hobbit* a few years down the line. ●

Hellboy II: The Golden Army
Director: Guillermo del Toro
Cast: Ron Pearlman, Selma Blair, Doug Jones, Luke Goss, Anna Walton
2008. PG-13. 110 mins.

September sky

Autumn equinox and the Harvest Moon

In September we have the autumn equinox and the Harvest Moon, while mighty Jupiter dominates the evening skies. But before that, let's talk about the stars.

In September, the sky moves to its autumn phase, revealing another set of stars and constellations that were hidden for some time behind the glare of the Sun. In the evening, a couple of hours after sunset, you will be able to see the constellations of Pisces, Aquarius, Capricornus, Sagittarius and Scorpius from east to west along the Zodiac. The brightest of these are Sagittarius and



STARGAZING
Kedar S Badu

Scorpius, which are easily identifiable in the south and south-western skies.

Can you see the bright, star-like object in Sagittarius the Archer? This is Jupiter, the largest planet. If you have at least a four-inch telescope, you can see its four main moons—the Galilean satellites. Sagittarius lies towards the centre of the Milky Way, so with a telescope you can find many other colourful nebulae and star clusters nearby.

Just west of Sagittarius is the brilliant constellation of Scorpius the Scorpion with the red supergiant Antares at its centre (see star chart), 400 times the size of the Sun. In the evening, the Summer Triangle marked by Vega, Deneb and Altair lies directly overhead.

This year the autumnal equinox, signalling the end of summer, occurs on 22 September at 2131 hours Universal Time. At that point, night and day are of equal length. After this the Sun moves into the southern half of the sky and for the next six months the nights are longer than the days.



KIRAN PANDAY

Early in the month, **Mercury** will be setting soon after sunset and will reach its greatest eastern elongation on 11 September. Using binoculars, look out for the gathering of **Mars, Venus** and **Mercury** on the western horizon an hour after sunset on 11 September. **Jupiter**, high in the southern sky during the month will be easy to spot. On 9 September, the **Moon** and **Jupiter** come close together and should fit into the same field of view of a pair of binoculars.

Saturn is directly behind the Sun on 4 September but by the end of the month should be emerging into the dawn sky. Look for it in the east just as the sky is beginning to brighten around 6AM.

The Harvest Moon occurs on 15 September. It is so named because its light helps farmers to continue harvesting their fields after sunset. Another attraction in September is the meeting of the Pleiades star cluster (the Seven Sisters) with the waxing gibbous Moon in the early hours of 20 September.

There are no major meteor showers in September, though there are various minor showers producing a few meteors an hour from radiants in Cassiopeia, Auriga, Aquarius and Pisces. But this is generally a good time of year for seeing sporadic meteors, which may appear at any time, in any part of the sky. ●

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Nature through Lens 4**, a photography exhibition organised by WCN till 31 August, Nepal Art Council, Babarmahal, 10AM-4PM. 2200438
- ❖ **Missing Persons in Nepal**: The right to know, photo exhibition organised by ICRC and NRCS. Indigo Gallery: 30 August-6 September, Darbar Square: Bhaktapur 7 September, Kathmandu 8 September, Lalitpur 9 September, 8AM-6.30 PM. Free entry
- ❖ **Buddha and Nature**, a painting exhibition by Nar Bahadur Biswa Karma till 10 September Sunday-Monday 1-6PM, Tuesday-Friday 10.30-6PM at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- ❖ **Amalgam-2008** an exhibition of paintings by national and international artists till 8 September at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, Sunday-Friday 11AM-6PM and Saturday 12-4PM. 4438979



EVENTS

- ❖ **Paleti** concert with Madan Krishna Shrestha at Nepa-laya on 29 August. 4412469
- ❖ **Help kosi**, a concert by Kutumba to raise funds for Sapta Kosi, 31 August, 5PM, GAA hall, Thamel, Rs 200.
- ❖ **The Third Man** a film by Carol Reed presented by Cine-Sankipa, Film Society of Aarohan-Gurukul. 1 September, 5.30 PM, Rimal Theater, Gurukul. 4466956
- ❖ **Finding Nemo**, an animated film on 2 September Lazimpat Gallery Café, 6.30 PM. 4428549
- ❖ **Lecture Series XXVI** by Andrea Nightingale on Emergent Forests, 4 September, 5PM, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka
- ❖ **Dancing/yoga-latey with Shabira Rao** 1-14 September, Rs 300 per session, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan. 9803673551

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 Café & Bar on Wednesday with live unplugged music by D Shewan
- ❖ **HyJazz Club** every Friday from 8.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4489800
- ❖ **Dance and Cocktails** at Cube Bar, Kamaladi. 4438017
- ❖ **Fusion and Looza** Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- ❖ **Rudra night** fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212

DINING

- ❖ **English Hi-Tea** at The Lounge in Hyatt regency from 4.30 PM-6.30 PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Mediterranean Culinary Delights** every Friday at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **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 Regan's new menu and Mannie's new bar at Dhokaima Cafe .5522113
- ❖ **Asparagus Promotion** at Hyatt Regency from 7PM onwards till 31 August. 4489361
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Pasta-pesto-passion** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Steak special** with free Irish coffee at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel. 4700043
- ❖ **Home made pasta** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Steak escape** with Kathmandu's premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 4411818
- ❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- ❖ **Ily Expresson Coffee** at Hotel Shangrila, Lazimpat and Mandap Hotel, Thamel
- ❖ **Scrumptious wood fired pizzas**, cocktails and more at Roadhouse, Bhatbateni 4426587, Pulchok 5521755 and Thamel 4260187.
- ❖ **Retro Brunch Barbecue** with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

A significant feature of this week's weather is the rebounding monsoon axis towards the foothills of the Himalaya. This monsoon trajectory from the Bay is fully active with a line of troughs bringing sustained precipitation. The result is heavy rainfall along the midhills from east to west, which is making up for the monsoon shortfall this season. The normal end of the monsoon is mid-September, so there is still time for some making up. Trouble is that the soil moisture is saturated and heavy rains now inevitably lead to landslides and floods. As this satellite radar image for Thursday morning indicates, the low pressure system over central Nepal and northern India will persist into the weekend making, it wet and overcast.



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KIRAN PANDAY

FIRM GRIP: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal shakes hands with senior army officers at Tribhuban International Airport before departing for Beijing last Saturday.



KIRAN PANDAY

WRONG NUMBER: Minister for Physical Planning Bijay Kumar Gachhadar is distracted by a phone call while greeting Army Commander-in-Chief Rukmangat Katuwal at the airport on Saturday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

BLOOMING MARVELLOUS: American ambassador Nancy Powell admires entries in a photo competition organised by Wildlife Conservation Nepal at the Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal, on Thursday.



FINLAND EMBASSY

SISTERHOOD: Women in Dadheldura welcome Dominique Hyde (WFP), Bella Bird (DFID), Gillian Mellsop (UNICEF), Susan Goldmark (World Bank) and Pirkko-Liisa Kyöstiä (Finnish Embassy) on a field visit last week.

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You stab my back, I'll stab yours

Upendra Yadav is probably going to get a real dressing down in Dilli for having uttered the 'E' word when discussing Nepal's relations with China and India the other day. That he should say "Equidistance" even as Comrade Premier was defying hints not to dare go to China before going to India was like rubbing salt on troubled waters, if I've got my metaphor right.



It was predictable that the Sinophobic Indian media worked itself up into a right royal frenzy over the prime minister's ping pong diplomacy, but what was surprising was how quickly the advisers at Golf Course Rd in a fit of pique decided to invite President Ram Baran to India first. Wasn't Sonia also at the Bird's Nest? After all, what does it matter where Dahal goes first?

The Injuns must know that the more outrage they express about this, the more Awesome's domestic popularity will surge. Now, if one really wanted to be conspiratorial, one could say it was all an elaborate ruse to leak India's displeasure about PKD going to Beijing to the media, thus indirectly bolstering his popularity both among the public and Dilli-bashers within his own party. Sheer genius.



One thing the Beijing visit did was at least partially settle the debate about whether Lotus Flower is a Dengist or a Gang of Fourist. First of all, if he was a G4-ista he wouldn't be reading the Ass and following our advice to wear a dark suit and red tie in his meeting with Comrade Hu. Second, the Chinese, who did not even mention Mao Zedong in the opening and closing ceremony of the Olympics, would never have invited him over unless he was a Dengist. Ok, that's settled then.



Finally they sorted it out, but the delay in completing the cabinet had more to do with discord among factions within the A-Maleys and Baddies than between the A-Maleys and Baddies. The Baidya-Gajurel combo vetoed Hisila continuing as minister. The duo were so dead against BRB being #2 in govt that they publicly endorsed Bum Dave as the caretaker prime minister. And within the UML, the Oli-Nepal faction has been so vehemently anti-Bum Dave that Makunay went into another one of his deep sulks and junketed off to Japan.

While the leftie bahuns all tried to outsmart each other by stabbing each other in the back, Mohan Baidya is making the tail wag the dog by positioning himself as party leader so that PKD and BRB will have to listen to his directives, thus making himself theoretically more powerful than both. Not to be outdone, Awesome coopted the young comrade Suresh Singh, a Biplop sidekick, as his gofer and even took him along on his China trip.

The Maobaddies try to do things by the book. When there was a deadlock last week over who should be Misinformation Minister, Maharabau or Top Budder, they put the matter to the vote in the central committee. But while trying to make all factions happy, the Maoists forgot all about getting fair representation for women in their government.



If you can break out of jail not once but twice, even if it is Tihar, you have to be smart. So it is not surprising that Charles the Sobraj has befriended the glamorous Nikita and got Khimlal Debkota's wife Comrade Laxmi to be his lawyer, who by the way, warned a THT reporter of dire consequences if he dared write about her client again. The client being who he is, that couldn't have been an empty threat. The Serpent gambled on the Maoists coming to power and getting him outahere, and he may be in luck because notorious dons Chakre and Manage have both been mysteriously released by the Supremo Court this month.

This week's New Name Contest is once more bagged by Ram Chaudhary for his new name for the vice president: Parmananda Ja.

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AT THE EVEREST HOTEL,
FRIDAY, 5TH SEPTEMBER, 2008

Official host: The Everest Hotel

Co-sponsors: aslan, Gajurel, SPEY LIVET, Gajurel, Gajurel

Official media: Perspectives

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