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

Q. How long will this government last?

Traffic is already picking up on the trails around the Annapurnas. Manang has seen early arrivals and hikers are striking out to Dolpo, Rara and even the Saipal slopes in far western Nepal. Lukla was just starting to look busy, but flights have been cancelled for the 10th straight day because of poor visibility. Trekkers and mountaineers heading for the Khumbu have been stranded at the airport for the past week.

Meanwhile, hundreds of mountaineers have begun arriving in Kathmandu for the 2008 post-monsoon season. Chinese restrictions on Tibet continue to affect expeditions using Kathmandu as a jumping-off point. Numerous groups trying to climb Cho Oyu, the world’s sixth highest mountain, via its Chinese northwest route were disappointed this season. “Tibet’s loss is Nepal’s gain,” said British expedition leader, Phil Crampton, whose expedition is among many that have switched from Cho Oyu to Manaslu.

Cho Oyu’s northern route is relatively easy, and the mountain is regarded as a training peak for Chomolungma climbers. Says Ang Tshering Sherpa of Asian Trekking: “If the success rate is high this year, expeditions will probably be back on Manaslu next season.” There have been only about 300 ascents of Manaslu since it was first climbed by the Japanese in 1956, compared to more than 2,600 on Cho Oyu.

Among the climbers on Manaslu will be Spanish female climber Edurne Pasaban and Italian Nives Meroi who have both scaled 10 of the world’s 8,000m peaks. They will be racing to make Manaslu their 11th peak. If they do so, they will be on par with Austrian climber, Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner, who is currently leading the pack to become the first woman to summit all 8,000m peaks.

Autumn will also be the season for extreme skiers. Swede Frederik Ericsson and Norwegian Jörgen Aamot will be trying to reach the summit of Kangchenjunga and ski down. They will be following the tracks of Italian extreme mountaineer, Hans Kammerlander, who skied down the southwest face from 7,600m in 1998.

Another first could be a traverse of Lhotse-Shar by Italian mountaineer Diego Fregona, who will attempt to solo climb Lhotse’s southeast ridge and descend the west face.

Billi Birtling
Nepalí's unique peace process has rarely gained outside attention since the grand truce two years ago. Yet, amid too many conflicting processes and failing peace processes around the world, a success story deserves to be discovered and recognised. I came to Nepal in mid-2005, when human rights violations committed by both sides in the Himalayan foothills, today account for half the population live in the fertile southern plains and land reform, transportation, industry, etc.) was classified as directly supportive of the people's war. While the armed forces of the Maoists and the army, must now be implemented. 'Democratisation' of the state. But the biggest challenges go beyond poverty, justice, and discrimination. One cost of the conflict has been the retreat of local people. The Maoists are also trying to develop in a desperately poor country. Expectations are high among diverse groups for greater control of their lives and resources. But what federalism means in practice, taking federalism as a feasible task for the Constituent Assembly, and meanwhile the Nepali people cannot be expected to agree that until a new constitution is drafted to see real improvement in their daily lives. But there is reason to be hopeful. The Maoist insurgency has been truly indigenous: it has not been mediated or managed by any external party. The UN has encouraged and facilitated the process—through good offices during the last years of the conflict, human rights monitoring, assistance to the monitoring, and armed forces and armies during the transition. The Maoist and non-Maoist parties have asked the UN to maintain a political presence while the insurgency is ongoing. But the process has rarely gained process has rarely gained...
INDIA-NEPAL-CHINA

I am appalled by Prashant Jhaís rambling (Two Dajus, Plain Speaking, #415). How much should we lean towards India to balance China? Playing China against India doesnít work but playing India against China does. Please clear my head.

Sandeep Dhungana, Preston, UK

• Indians and Chinese are going to be the next super powers in Asia and the world. Nepal stands to gain a lot by being smart. But we need to fix our mess. The most important thing of all is to safeguard our dignity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and nationally. There should be no compromise on this. The responsibility of this lies with our own leaders. Indians reaction to PKDís China visit (Love thy neighbour), #415) is childish. We need to be pragmatic, but a great country like India should not be so insecure.

Sirish, email

• It is the political parties who have created this perception that the real reason Nepal hasnít advanced is due to Indian meddling. Such India-bashing is a lame excuse for their own inadequacies. Indian companies have invested in Nepal and more would do so if the attitude in Nepal was not so anti-Indian. Chinese desire has been to isolate India in its own backyard. By destabilising the region the Chinese attitude in Nepal was not so anti-Indian. Chinaís invested in Nepal and more would do so if the Nepal hasnít advanced that the real reason created this perception parties who have not be so insecure.

Manoj Sharma, New Delhi

KOSI

As you point out in your editorial, itís time we all realise that we have to learn to live with nature and not against her (A flood of recrimination, #415). The strongest of human endeavours fail to stand in front of natureís fury. Corruption and careless attitude are two other reasons behind these devastating floods. The Indian government clearly failed to maintain the embankments properly.

Kapil Mishra, India

• Your editorial warned of the Kosi changing its course and bypassing the barrage and sweeping across Bihar as a worst-case scenario that will make the flooding in Nepal ëa picnicí. Well, it looks like the worst case scenario has happened, this is what we have dreaded all along. You suggest that we should drop block the Kosis path to the sea? How? By relocating tens of millions of people who now live in the flood plain? There is no alternative to the Kosi Dam, the sooner we get used to the idea the better.

Ritesh Thapa, email

• Alternative to the Kosi Dam: tap the Sun. Kosi at multiple points and bring the water down through the Tarai to Bihar first so that the water is uniformly distributed in the plains. The height of the Kosi High Dam can thus be reduced in this seismic prone area. Water can be better controlled, siltation would be a problem and it will be much cheaper. Let there be a national debate on this issue.

Name withheld, email

• Looking at the wheeling and dealing in the formation of the new government, it looks like the sacrifices of the disappeared and killed like Ram Kumar Bhandaris father (Justice delayed, #415) have been in vain. Is it for this that all that blood was spilt? Even now you see a Maoist prime minister only pay lip service to the plight of the relatives of the disappeared. We have to put pressure on the army and the Maoists to disclose information on the people they disappeared.

Yamlal Aryal, Odense, Denmark

• There has to be justice for the families of people like Ram Kumar Bhandari. Thank you Mr Bhandari for carrying on the struggle in such a humane and heart-warming way. A New Nepal canít be created until the suffering of those who lost dear ones is recognised.

Leeza Sharma, Virginia, USA

CORRECTION

Ram Kumar Bhandarís father was ëdisappearedí (Justice delayed, #415) by the army in 2001 and not 2004 as inadvertently reported.

A non-profit group I lead here, Community Members Interested (COMMITTED), conducted a fund raiser to help the families of the Jogimara 17. Within Nepal, some more money was raised. Money may help, but families need a more long-term redress and a belief that justice has been carried out.

Jayjeev Hada, Virginia, USA

VAIHES

Kishor Kayasthaís photos (Vanished without a trace, #415) made me sad. It is cruel for these families to suffer this way. No amount of money will bring back their near and dear ones, but the new government of Nepal, which is built on the blood and sacrifices of these families, should properly compensate them for the tragedy they have suffered, and at least lighten their financial burden. This sort of negligence and injustice is unacceptable.

Daniel R., Valencia, USA

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Jayjeev Hada, Virginia, USA

Sandeep Dhungana, Preston, UK

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CRONIC labour problems decimate Nepal’s promising tea industry

Tea break

RABIN GIRI in DHANKUTA and ROSHAN SAWA in ILAM

April to August is peak picking time for tea, but this season most of Nepal’s tea gardens in Dhankuta and Ilam have been closed because of strikes by workers. The tea bushes are slowly growing into trees.

Private tea gardens and processing centres, Ilam’s privatised Nepal Tea Development Corporation, and Dhankuta’s Guranse, Kuwapani and Jun tea estates have all been closed after workers either locked down or occupied the estates. Annually, workers either locked down or occupied the estates. Annually, workers either locked down or occupied the estates.

The workers stopped work in Ilam and Dhankuta two months ago, with similar demands: a wage increase to Rs95 per day of tea picked, permanent contracts, insurance and other facilities. Protests in both districts are led by the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal Tea Estates Labour Union which wants the implementation of earlier agreements as well as fulfillment of new demands. “If these demands are not met, we will intensify our protests,” said the union’s Dhankuta coordinator, Nanyan Tamang.

The three tea estates in Dhankuta that together employed 700 people have still not been opened, although Guranse has reportedly reached a deal with management. Complicating matters is the fact that there are at least five unions affiliated to the various political parties involved. They had reached a deal with management mediated by the labour ministry last month, but Triveni says the unions have since come up with new demands.

In Dhankuta, tea estate owners say they had reached an agreement with a consortium of unions in 2006 that was supposed to be valid for three years when the new demands were put forward. Union leaders, however, say management of the estates are acting in bad faith and are refusing to listen. “We are not demanding anything new, only wages and facilities that are within the law,” says Shanta Kumar Rai, president of Nepal Free Labourers Union, Maoist-affiliated union.

As the stalemate continues, thousands of people who depend on the earnings of tea estate workers in eastern Nepal have been affected, government revenue from the trade has taken a direct hit and the market for Nepali tea abroad is being damaged.

In Ilam, some workers are plucking leaves from the 534 hectare Triveni estate and selling it to local businessmen to make a living, FNCCI has criticised this move, saying it is illegal, but no one has been able to stop it—least of all the government which still owns 35 percent of the Triveni estate.

Says Triveni’s Sukesh Shanghvi: “We are already running at a loss. We can’t raise wages anymore, we must work together to save this company from liquidation, it is our national property.” He says the company lost Rs70 million last year, mainly because the government hadn’t kept its end of the bargain to help increase production. On paper, the tea estates have been in profit even for Soktim and Tokra brands are grown, could produce 1.3 million kg of tea a year. But it produces only 500,000 kg. In Dhankuta, too, private estate owners say their wages were raised last year, and they are already higher than most other tea gardens in eastern Nepal.

But the issue has now become political, with the NC, Maoists and UML supporting the district administration in sending a memo to Kathmandu saying the demands of workers were justified. The only hope, district officials say, is for the political parties to work with their unions to mediate with the management of the tea estates.

Tea pickers living on the estates have not made any moves to meet their demands. “We want the implementation of earlier agreements as well as fulfillment of new demands,” says Narmada Niraula, 40, who works on the Kanyan tea estate in Ilam.

She has been working here for 20 years, supporting her husband, two sons and one daughter. The family has been living in a temporary shed on the estate. Like her, about 75 per cent of the estate workers do not have their own land. Despite working here for many years, she has never been able to save any money. “The price of commodities has already gone through the roof and the Rs 80 per day wage can hardly buy two meals a day, so how can we save?” Narmada asks.

The tea estates have been privatized since 28 July. If this continues, there won’t be any Dasain for us,” she says. Last year, too, the Dasan spirit was dampened by a strike.

The tea pickers living on the estates have no skills other than plucking tea leaves, nor do they have their own home or land.

She says it is the labourers who suffer most from such frequent strikes and wage disputes. “The management may lose some money, but it is we pickers who suffer the most. The sooner the tea estate opens, the better.”

A

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ILAM For the families of hundreds of tea pickers, it is going to be a sad Dasain. Without their daily wages, it is difficult to survive, let alone save up for Dasain shopping.

It has been a month that we haven’t been paid, we can hardly manage to buy food,” says Narmada Niraula, 40, who works on the Kanyan tea estate in Ilam.

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Investment worries

Economic growth needs a confident private sector

The news that Tata Motors is packing its bags and leaving Singur district in Communist-ruled West Bengal has sent a chill down the spine of Indians’ corporate world. The Nano project succumbed in the fight for political ego. The corporate world that always takes the word of the political leadership with caution will be shaken by the events that are unfolding in Singur. If Singur lost the opportunity to become a Detroit, the West Bengal government lost a lot of credibility for being unable to defend its land acquisition process.

There are lessons Nepal can learn from the Singur episode. While private sector growth can be facilitated by governments and political parties, without the right involvement of the local communities, processes may be delayed. Government may be relied upon as a facilitator, but only to the extent of the legal structure. It is up to companies or institutions to go beyond and actually see what the communities think.

Countries in the region such as Thailand are experiencing a big rural-urban divide between what urban dwellers and rural folk consider to be acceptable development parameters. Particularly in rural areas that are dependent on agriculture, it is important to find labourers alternative livelihoods when land is no longer available.

The recent CNI economic summit did not introduce any groundbreaking thinking on the role of the private sector, but it was at least possible to hear the new governments take on economic growth. Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai has rightly pointed out the four key areas, but we must wait and see if anything actually happens.

● How does a country with fragmented land holdings achieve economies of scale through land reform that causes further fragmentation?

● How does a country with high community expectations implement land acquisition for infrastructure projects?

● How does a country suffering from a decade of deteriorating tourism service quality develop a sustainable tourism industry?

● How does a country attain its health and education targets when private providers have no guarantees and there are not sufficient resources to pump into the public sector?

● How does a country encourage the private sector when rights to own property and to run businesses are not fully guaranteed?

Globally, it has been observed that private sector development accelerates the pace of economic growth more than anything else. For the private sector, the key is also to embark on action along with the government and other stakeholders using the right models of partnership.

Private Public Partnerships should not be modelled around party workers forced into work by private enterprises creating unproductive institutions.

The private sector also needs to engage beyond the usual speeches and hobnobbing with the centres of power. The time has come to collectively support an economic policy centre that will both help the private sector to think and also help the government to take action. ●

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People’s republic

Deshantar Saptahik, 31 August

Senior Maoist minister Mohan Baidya, guru to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, has always stuck to, and fought for, his vision of establishing Nepal as a people’s republic. Excerpts from an interview with Rishi Dhamala:

Are you more fond of Bamdeb or Baburam?

This is difficult to answer, but because it raises questions of whether I’ll stay in the government or not, I am compelled to make a decision. Since we’ve decided to give the responsibility of setting things right to the Chairman Comrade, I accept his decisions.

Inside the party, they say that you’re next after Prachanda.

It’s only in Parliament that there is such specificity as to who leads and who will follow. It is not that way inside parties. When we brought about the revolution, we had no protocols. Since entering parliamentary politics, we have learned a lot about things we didn’t know existed.

Didn’t Baburam say that he wouldn’t work under anyone?

All of us are under the party, no one is above it. Even the Chairman isn’t bigger than the party.

How long do you think this government will last?

If the government gains support, it will last for its term of office. But if it doesn’t gain the support it requires, the government will not last for even a short while.

Is it true that the government is facing a threat from the Maoists themselves?

There is no threat from the Maoists. We will always work towards making our government successful.

When will you become the party’s acting chairman?

Our central committee has to agree. Whether I am granted the responsibility of being the acting chairman is something decided by the party, not something for an individual person to decide. If and when the party decides to give me that responsibility, I am ready. But till then, I won’t demand anything.

Why did you resign from the assembly?

Things happen internally. I don’t want to comment on them. There is always discussion and debate inside the party.

Hasn’t Baburam said that it’s not necessary to give anyone the post of acting chairperson?

There’s no problem if they don’t make me the acting chairperson. In fact, it’s better if they don’t.

When will Nepal become a People’s Republic?

Making Nepal a people’s republic is our goal. That day will definitely come.

Royal ways

Samaya, 28 August – 4 September

The Maoists had asserted that their relations with diplomats would be less formal but more fulfilling, but in practice the new government does not seem too different from the old. Public and private vehicles are still forced to take a detour when our PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal decides to take a drive.

For Dahal’s ‘informal’ visit to China, all the ambassadors were invited to the Tribhuvan International Airport to see him off. The absence of Indian ambassador Rakesh Sood was viewed by most as an expression of India’s dissatisfaction over China being chosen for the first official visit of the PM. But Sood was not alone in boycotting the event. The British and American ambassadors also chose not to see Dahal off.

“Normally only the ambassador of the concerned country is present at such occasions. It would have been appropriate if others were not invited,” a South Asian ambassador told Samaya.

Another ambassador asked: “Why is Prachanda behaving like the king?”

The ambassadors and diplomats are also annoyed that much of their time is wasted in waiting. Whether it is formal and informal visits of officials, or the sessions of the interim Parliament and the Constituent Assembly, none start on time. It must be noted that because there was no mechanism for translation in the interim Parliament and still isn’t in the CA, it has been impossible for the foreign diplomats to understand the proceedings.

US of Nepal

Singhabhun Palgun, chairman of the Federal Limbuwan State Council in Himal Khabarpatrika, 1-16 September

According to the five-point agreement with the government, ethnic autonomy needs to be ensured now.

If our demands are not met by 30 August, we will officially declare the Limbuwan State, leaving only the foreign, currency and military centres to the government. This action will be the last stage of our peaceful protest.

Roshan Sawa

Kiran Panday

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Prithbi Narayan Shah united sovereign states, not sentiments. The end of the monarchy has marked freedom for those constituencies. Nepal now needs to be referred to as the United States of Nepal in the constitution. Only then can these states be held together.

We are preparing for a possible armed struggle in the future. Our LVs (Limbuwan Volunteers) are undergoing training to use guns.

In the distribution of power between the parties, talk of dismantling local government can be heard. This is against federalism. It can only invite civil war.

We have been preparing the army in case the state tries to oppress us. In our fight for self-governance, we can die or win our motherland.

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We have been preparing the army in case the state tries to oppress us. In our fight for self-governance, we can die or win our motherland.

We will get 90 per cent in the next elections, and we can easily rule for another 20 years. After that, the Nepali people won’t feel the need for any other party except the Maoists.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal in interview with BBC Nepali Service 2 September

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• Lead on the delivery of the Embassy’s Public Diplomacy Strategy and show initiative in suggesting new and creative ways of improving the Embassy’s engagement with Nepal including by: organising press conferences/media interviews; drafting press statements; answering media enquiries; and managing the Local Information Budget.

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Phone enquiries will not be entertained.

The British Embassy places high priority on staff development and career growth. The British Embassy is an equal opportunities employer that values diversity.

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Pushpa Kamal Dahal in interview with BBC Nepali Service 2 September
HAPPY HOUR

Moksh Bar, Pulchok
Moksh Bar’s friendly staff and homely décor give it the feel of a local pub. Owned by famous musician Nirakar Yakthumba, Moksh opened in 2002 and is best known for its music and pizzas. But the drinks at Moksh can’t be overlooked, for the menu lists an array of international cocktails made with good quality spirits. Try: Sex on the Beach and the Moksh Special.

Casablanca, Baber Mahal Revisited
Just five months old, Casablanca is very white and very chic. With décor inspired by the eponymous film, this bar serves a total of eight cocktails and four shooters. But if you are hungry you’ll have to satisfy yourself with Korean cup noodles. It’s a typical bar minus the noise—a relaxed place to hang out with friends young and old. Try: Lychee Martini and Sangria.

Roadhouse Café, Thamel
Although most famous for its excellent wood-fired pizzas, Roadhouse Café also offers one of the best range of cocktails in town. Feeding the epicureans of Kathmandu since 1992, the Kayastha brothers seem to have got it right, as getting a table at any of their outlets in the evening can be hard. A Caipirinha coupled with cheese-covered potato skins provides a refreshing break on a hot day. Also try the Margarita.

Fusion Bar, Dwarikas Hotel, Battisputali
A peaceful place reflecting the Nepali culture right beside the hustle and bustle of Battisputali, Fusion Bar offers a blend of cultures, drinks and food with live bands on Wednesdays and Fridays. Manager Arjun Raj Giri assures us the Mojito and Bloody Mary are different here. Enjoy a drink by the poolside or just relax at the bar.

Absolute Bar, Pulchok
Opened with an eye to creating the perfect lounge bar in Kathmandu, Absolute Bar has a relaxing seating area with live fusion and classical music with Anil Shahi on Wednesdays, Rock music with Rashmi on Fridays and Sufi music with Hemant Rana on Saturdays. Try the Mojito with cold meat platter.

Bhumi Restro Lounge, Lazimpat
Bhumi Restro Lounge only sprang into action two months ago, but it’s already considered to be a hip and happening place. Try: Mojito or Manny’s own invention, the “Liquid Viagra,” to get the evening underway.

Manny’s Bar, Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka
The orange and yellow walls cast a warm mellow glow in this small cozy bar. The man beside the bottles, Manoj Basnet, refined his skills with a 10-year stint in Manhattan. Says Manny: “I want to develop the culture of an after-work watering hole.” Try: Mojito or Manny’s very own invention, the “Liquid Viagra,” to get the evening underway.

Splash Bar, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat
A bar that’s good for any occasion, and open from 11AM till late. You can enjoy more than a dozen cocktails on the breezy fifth floor and the view there is terrific. The Blue Margarita and Mocktail Sunrise go down well with BBQ Chicken or, for vegetarians, the Mushroom Pineapple Shashlik. Go after the barbecue hits up at 6.30PM.

Barhopping in ‘Mandu’

Filled with the promise of showing you a good time, a cocktail should be as appealing to your eyes as it is to your taste buds—an art form of sorts. At great risk to their sanity, Nepali Times reporters sought out the capital’s best watering holes. Let’s face it, somebody had to.

SHITU RAJBHANDARI, PRAVAT J GURUNG, MALIN GURUNG

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place. A decent location, attractive décor and comfortable seating all complement the equally good food. Bhumi’s cocktail special is its Electric Margarita, which swaps the normal tequila for aila. Teetotallers should try the Virgin Flamingo. Groove to funk blues with the band Looza every Friday. Open from 11AM to 11PM.

Tamas Spa Lounge, Thamel
Located in the heart of Thamel, Tamas Spa Lounge is an oasis amid the hustle and bustle. Proprietor Alok Yonjon has been a bartender for 10 years, which is reflected in the bar’s professional approach. Tamas boasts a wide range of original cocktails, live music every night and a DJ on Fridays.

Bourbon Room, Lal Durbar Marg
Nabin Tuladhar and his partner Suresh Manadhar opened Bourbon Room just a few months ago after successfully running the Liquid Lounge. Bourbon Room is quiet with a relaxed ambiance. Great food and drinks are accompanied by soothing live music every evening. An ongoing promotion titled Mojito Mania offers 20 varieties of Mojito.

New Orleans Cafè, Pulchok
New Orleans boasts a great selection of music, often performed live by various bands. It has a quiet candlelit ambiance accompanied by great food and drinks. Proprietor Sudesh Shrestha is a frequent traveler, and that is reflected in the menu as well, which has dishes from around the world, including a good range of vegetarian food. Apart from the regular cocktails, New Orleans also has a wide selection of non-alcoholic drinks.

Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency, Boudha
Head for Rox if you want peace, privacy, good service, chic décor and top quality food and drinks. This month Rox is promoting Mojito and Herbal cocktails, which taste amazing. Try spicy potato wedges and fish croquette snacks. There is also live jazz on Sunday at lunch.

Drinking responsibly
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with soft drinks or low-alcohol drinks.
- Know your limit. If you don’t know when enough is enough at least have a friend or family member present who can tell you.
- If you do need to drink, don’t drink alone.
- Don’t drink on an empty stomach because the effects of alcohol will hit you harder and faster.
- Stop drinking if you start vomiting. This definitely means your body has had enough.
- Always limit yourself to one type of alcohol.
- Do not take sleeping pills or any prescription or non-prescription drugs when you are drinking alcohol.
- If by any chance you see someone who has passed out and has not vomited after extreme amounts of alcohol, take the person to the hospital. Complete unconsciousness may mean the person is subjected to alcohol poisoning.
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New Orleans Cafè, Pulchok
New Orleans boasts a great selection of music, often performed live by various bands. It has a quiet candlelit ambiance accompanied by great food and drinks. Proprietor Sudesh Shrestha is a frequent traveler, and that is reflected in the menu as well, which has dishes from around the world, including a good range of vegetarian food. Apart from the regular cocktails, New Orleans also has a wide selection of non-alcoholic drinks.
Everybody loves a good flood

LAUKHI, SUNSARI-The story from the Kosi is of incredible human resilience and a strong social fabric. Despite the tragedy, traditional networks of kinship and solidarity, fatalism and hope are helping resilience and a strong social fabric. Despite the tragedy, traditional

PLAN SPOAKING
Prashant Jha

Kochila State Committee, women and children crowd around waiting for their chance. Sanita Devi, from Supaul in Bihar, waded through water with her child for a day to reach her relatives on the Nepal side. Her husband stayed back to take care of others. She found her sister but discovered there was no trace of her brother-in-law, who had gone to his native Haripur VDC for the rakhi festival right before the breach destroyed the village. We don’t know where our men are. Our children are unwell. But at least we have each other,‘’ she says.

The border has become meaningless because of family, logistical convenience and better relief operations in Nepal. At Jogbani station across the Biratnagar border, we met a man who works in Gujarat. After hearing about the floods, he rushed back to Sunsari and took a boat from Laukhi to Birpuriripune because that was the only way to get there. He rescued his wife and two children, brought them back via Nepal and was waiting for a train to return to Surat.

As P. Sanath said of droughts in India, everyone here seems to love a good flood. ‘’District administrators are thrilled with the relief money and hatch plans to skim it off. Boatmen are charging as much as Rs 12,000 at key points to take people back to their villages to find relatives or recover goods. Party activists have turned relief operations into patronage dispensation exercises. A new politician-contractor nexus is already taking shape for the repair work. Engineers at the road and irrigation departments are salivating over the money that will come in for reconstruction. The Bihar transport cartel knows if their highway does not give way, they can make a neat profit off Nepali passengers and goods. The present disaster happened because of what water expert Dipak Gajwali calls the confluence of wrong technological choice, wrong institutional arrangements and Bihar-style politics. Indian policy makers preferred to live on in Nehruvian fantasies rather than heed warnings from their own activists. Bihar politicians and contractors looted state coffers annually. There was no co-ordination between the Kosi engineer in Birpur, the government in Patna, the MEA in Delhi and the embassy in Kathmandu when the crisis was brewing. And what can you expect from the illiterate Indian media which was busy accusing Nepal of releasing water?"

On our side, a weak district administration did little to rein in local contractors blocking work. Some were MUF and Maoist supporters and their parties protected them. The authorities were criminally negligent by not acting on repeated warnings about an imminent breach.

The truth is little can be done immediately. N Sanyal, an octogenarian who headed the Ganga Flood Control Commission in the past, has been called back by the Bihar government to suggest measures. He told us: ‘’Our action plan for now includes surveys, feasibility studies and procurement of material. We need to see how the river behaves. The actual closure will be an adventure.’’ Other sources tell us work can begin only after March.

When asked about the weakness of the Kosi project, Sanyal remarked: ‘’Our biggest weakness was overconfidence in the strength of the project. We were too complacent nothing would happen.’’

PRIYA JOSHI in SAPTARI

Driving across the Kosi Barrage it finally hits you: the mighty river has been reduced to a trickle. Most of the Kosi now flows through densely populated villages in Nepal and India along a course that the river abandoned in 1867.

The Kosi’s western embankment here in Rapids has become one long refugee camp stretching up to 14km. Those fleeing the floods in neighboring Bihar have also settled along the levee banks. They have come with their livestock and belongings and have set up tents along the highways where relief supplies are most plentiful. One Indian family say they walked six days to get here because everything was flooded, relief camps were crowded and they wanted their three daughters to be safe.

Every day, more people come from Sunsari and Bihar. In tractors, pick-ups, and bullock carts piled high with women and children. Once the family is safe, the folk look back to their villages to try to salvage what is left and guard their houses. Most have put up anything they can: tarp, plastic sheets, bamboo, reeds for shelter. The stench of human waste is pervasive, disease is rife and children are especially vulnerable. Drinking water is scarce. For most, there is just the muddy water of what is left of the Kosi. Everywhere, there is the destitution, confusion and misery of people who have lost everything. From one camp to the next, what is most apparent is the vast number of children everywhere. Children ferrying water, children foraging for dry straw and twigs to cook, children tending livestock. There are now hundreds sleeping in the laps of their of emaciated mothers. Little Neha, barely a week old, is all coiled up and groomed by her mother, for whom the neighbours brought food. Even the goats have given birth and the kids scamper around their mother with human children.

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BEFORE AND AFTER: Time lapse NASA images from 8 August before the embankment breach (left) and on 24 August, one week after the levee collapsed in Nepal (right). The Kosi’s heavy sediment load makes the river very mobile along its 200km alluvial fan after it breaks through the mountains in Chitara. But new embankments built in

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the flood

Families fleeing floods have settled where the Kosi used to flow

Grandparents look after the children while able-bodied family members go to fetch relief supplies, food, shelter and food. Families sleep on the floor, lucky if they have a plastic sheet to lie down on at night.

The children are resilient, they find things to do: playing in carts, painting their nails with ballpoint pens, or making mud cakes. But there are also sick children, many suffering from diarrhoeal dehydration.

Older children, especially the girls, babysit younger siblings, fetch water and do the household chores, and where men are not present, help their mothers set up shelters.

This boy from India, Jaimul, was separated from his family when the Kosi changed course. He was found alone in the buffalo shed, crying. A family has taken him in, even though he is an extra mouth to feed.

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Head of the EU delegation in Nepal, Eduardo Lechuga-Jimenez spoke to Nepali Times this week at the end of his eventful four-year tenure here.

Excerpts:

Nepali Times: In the four years that you have been here, Nepal has gone through a dizzying political transformation. What are your impressions?

Eduardo Lechuga Jimenez: When I came here, I never realised we were going to witness such a historical evolution. In 2004, Mr Deuba was prime minister but I could see the government had no future because his capacity to maneuver was impossible. Then on 1 February 2005, when the king took over, we came to an autocratic situation. A year later we witnessed a social revolution and now we not only have a democratic government but a prime minister who is a former fighter. I have never been through such a fantastic and intense situation in my professional life.

Would you say that the visit of the EU Troika at that time and your embargo on aid to the royal government had an impact on the eventual sidelining of the king?

I think so. The Troika is a political instrument that analyses the situation in a country. We were already very worried when the first Troika came in December 2004, and we made that public. But I don’t think the king’s government was listening to our advice. We had to stop our cooperation because the regime was not a democratic one. I think it had a big impact because it was the biggest political message we gave to the government. Nevertheless, we continued our aid to the poor, to civil society and NGOs. What was remarkable was the fantastic response of the Nepali people and the political parties in dealing with the new situation.

Now that the political issues have been addressed, how is the EU placed to help Nepal with the economy and development?

Before development, there is still the challenge of political stability. One thing is to have a government, now they have to prove that it works. I think it is still too early to say, but what the government has to do is to deliver, and to prove to the people that it can govern and to the rest of the world that it is capable of facing the new task ahead. Apart from that, Nepal needs development, not just aid of which we are the biggest contributor, but also the preferential treatment for Nepali goods in the European market. Basically, we have to modernise the country’s capacity to create wealth.

Have you had to change your Country Strategy Program 2007-2013 because of the political changes here?

No doubt. And that is why we came out a bit late, but it gave us time to adapt the program so well that we will have a better quality of aid. What we are looking out for till 2013 is social development: education, health, and inclusiveness in our programs. We are also going to look at the peace process and stability. And the economic part of the country strategy is that we will develop Nepal’s trade with the rest of the world. We will also look at climate change, which is a priority for the EU.

How is third country repatriation of Bhutan refugees going, and is your aid now going to be phased out?

The American scheme is a very positive one, we are working with them and we will be phasing out by 2010. We have been supporting the cause and a solution to the problem for more than 20 years. Also, we have extended a one million euro aid for flood victims last week, on top of the 40 million euros of humanitarian aid to Nepal last year.

What would you say are your more striking memories of Nepal?

For me it is the capacity of the Nepali people to be so democratic to always give a very peaceful response to the difficult challenges that Nepal has had in these four years. I am really amazed by the peaceful revolution. Nothing is perfected, and I would be very naively if I didn’t say that many things were not right. I have to congratulate the people of Nepal for the lesson they have given to the rest of the world about how you can evolve from a difficult political situation towards a stabilised one.

On a more personal basis, I was impressed 20 years ago when I came here, and now I am even more impressed. I am almost about to cry as I leave here in a few days. The beauty of the country came from the mountains and fields of Nepal, but also from the people. My wish is that I will be accepted as a friend of Nepal forever.
Weaving magic

Tapestry artist ties up threads to make ends meet

Raju Tuladhar sits at his loom and starts to weave the wool through the fine warp threads that have been carefully fixed on the frame. His hands move with a swiftness that can only come after years of practice. As he works, the shape of hills slowly emerges from the interwoven green threads of wool.

“I have a special attachment to threads,” Raju says with a smile. “They have been a part of my life for 18 years now.”

While Nepali carpets are well known to the outside world, few people know about Tuladhar’s tapestries. He was 12 years old when he began to learn the weaving techniques at the Nepal Srijanatmak Kala Ghuti, a privately run arts and crafts institute in Bhaktapur. Urmila Upadhyaya Gang, who established the institute, has been his mentor from the beginning and today is himself an instructor.

“You never know how long it will take to make a tapestry or how the design will emerge,” he says. “As I play with the ideas and blend the colours, my tapestries often turn out different from how I first imagined them.” He has tried his hands at Mithila-style folk art, Australian aboriginal painting and western-style modern art. But he always comes back to his preferred landscapes, which give him the freedom to merge shades and textures of wool, cotton and silk threads. A Picasso lover, he has tried to emulate the artist’s brush strokes in his weaving. From a distance, his work can appear almost impressionistic.

“Producing the right texture is a challenge because it requires precision in the adding and merging of colours,” says Raju. “But the satisfaction you get after completing your work is worth every effort.”

More than 50 of Raju’s tapestries decorate homes and galleries around the world. Although his work has a strong following abroad, Tuladhar says few Nepalis respect tapestry as an art form, but he plans to hold a solo exhibition of his tapestries in Nepal. He is selling his latest work, a tapestry depicting a Nepali landscape of hills and mountains, measuring 60 by 39 inches to Canadian collectors Sherry and Dennis Holyk for $2,000. “It is difficult to sell something you’ve worked so hard on,” Tuladhar concedes. “It almost becomes like your child.”

Say the Holys: “This is a treasure for us, and will be passed down through our family for generations to come.”

Paavan Mathema

Football fever

In an attempt to give sport in Nepal a kick up the backside, Nepa-laya and Kathmandu Khel Mandal have joined forces to organise a nationwide promotional football tour for 4th Division side New Road Team, which will play against local teams in eight cities.

“The main objective behind organising this tour is to push-start sporting activities, which have been affected by both internal and external politics,” said Kiran Krishna Shrestha of Nepa-laya.

During the tour, the team will run football clinics for local children conducted by NRT coaches Yogamber Suwal and Maheswor Mulmi, while FIFA-recognised referee Siriram Ranjitkar will hold workshops for local referees when he is not refereeing the matches.

As sports is largely neglected in Nepal, Nepa-laya and KKM are hoping the publicity generated by the tour might encourage more Nepalis to participate in sport.

As the recent Beijing Olympics showed, Nepali athletes attend international sport events woefully under-prepared, with minimal government or private sector support, and little hope of winning. Aspiring sportsmen and women often find themselves having to deal more with political wheeler-dealing over sponsorship and financial issues than being able to focus on their training and improvement.

The NRT tour, managed by Nepa-laya and with KKM lending its sporting expertise, will kick off in Janakpur on 6 September. The tour will then continue to Kakarvitta, Itahari, Kawasoti, Mahendranagar, Nepalganj and Baglung before finishing on 27 September in Gorkha.

Narendra Shrestha, chairman of KKM/NRT said: “We are glad to be working with Nepa-laya in making this tour happen. This kind of sporting initiative is a positive step and we do hope it will have a positive impact in the sporting sector of the nation, especially football.”

Paavan Mathema

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EXHIBITIONS
- Missing Persons in Nepal: The right to know, photo exhibition organised by ICHR and NRCS, Indigo Gallery, till 30 September, Darbar Square. Bhaktapur 7 September, Kathmandu
- September, Lalitpur 9 September, 8AM-6PM. Free entry
- Buddha and Nature, a painting exhibition by Nar Bahadur Bhasa Karna till 10 September
- Sunday-Monday 1-6 PM, Tuesday-Friday 10.30-6PM at Park Gallery, Lazimpat. 4419353
- Bridges of Love, an exhibition of paintings by Toney Monsanto, 12-26 September, Siddhartha Art Gallery. Saturday- Sunday: 11AM-6PM. Saturday 12-4PM. 421808

EVENTS
- Launching of the book New Nepal, New voices, 5 September, Alliance Francaise, 6.30 PM
- The Stevie Wonder Project, a tribute concert by 1974 AD, 9 PM, 6 September at Mohak. Free entry
- Photo Circle with Kishor Kayastha, Rini Amatya and Sushan Prapjai, 6 September, 9.45-AM-12PM, The Bakyery, Sundhara
- Monsoon madness package at Shangri-la Village Resort, Pokhara. Rs. 5999. 4435741

MUSIC
- Some like it hot every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai the Sound and the Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarka Khas Hotel. 441848
- Ladies night at Jatra Cafe & Bar on Wednesday with live music by D Shewan
- Hy Jazz Club every Friday from 8.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 448960
- Dance and Cocktails at Cube Bar, Kamaladi. 4438017
- Fusion and Lozza Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- Rudra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyan Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meriden.Gokarna. 4415112
- Sull 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, Sull & Raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8 PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5521408

DINING
- Sunday Jazz Brunch at Hyatt Regency with performances by Mariano and his band from 12-3.30 PM. 4491234
- Thai food festival at Shambha Garden Cafe till 12 September, Hotel Shangri-la, Rs 600. 4412999
- Pizza & Pasta every Monday and Tuesday at Rox Restaurant. Hyatt Regency. 449386
- BBQ at Splash Bar & Grill, 1 September, 6.30 PM onwards, Radisson Hotel. 441818
- Mediterranean Gallery Delights every Friday at Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Fusion of Marcella Reganis new menu and Mannies new bar at Dwarka Khas Cafe. 441848
- Masala, an Indian restaurant on Jawalakhel, St.Maryís school road. 4421634
- Pasta pesto pastatino Da Loltiva Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- Steak special with free Irish coffee at K-too! Beer & Steakhouses, Thamel. 4700403
- Continental and cafe item with Live band every Friday at Vintage Cafe and Pub, Woodland Complex, Durbarmarg. Home made pasta at Alresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273989
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Cafe, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarka Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4423541
- Steak escape with Kathmandus premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 441188
- Cocktails, mocktails and liquors at the Asiah Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- Ily Expression Coffee at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat and Mantra Hotel, Thamel
- Retro Brunch Barbeque with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday. 12-2PM at Le Meriden-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4412152
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with liveperformance by Ciney Gurung, Rs. 666, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- Socially Responsible coffee at Himalayan Java, Thamel

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

ENOUGH SAID: Deputy Prime Minister Bamdev Gautam appears deep in thought during a speech by Prime Minister Dahal at the inauguration of the new channel ABC in the capital on Thursday.

JUSTICE REQUIRED: Victims of Maoist atrocities, like this woman at a rally in Kathmandu on Wednesday above, have stepped up their campaign for justice and compensation after the Maoist-led government was installed.

KIRAN PANDAY
ENOUGH SAID: Deputy Prime Minister Bamdev Gautam appears deep in thought during a speech by Prime Minister Dahal at the inauguration of the new channel ABC in the capital on Thursday.

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I’s it just a coincidence, or are pundits genetically susceptible to infighting because of their supposedly superior brainpower? Just look at who can’t stand whom within the parties. They are all high priests: Jhalnath vs Oli, Baburam vs Mohan Baidya (yes, despite his surname Comrade Kiran is a true blue brahmin). Bamdeb vs Makunay, Pradeep Nepal vs Jhalnath, Prachanda vs Kiran, and in the Janamorcha Giriraj Mani Pokhrel vs Iswari Pokhrel. The NC may be in the opposition, but even there the pundits are at each other’s throats: Ram Chandra Poudel vs Govinda Raj Joshi, and Shekhar Koirala and Krishna Prasad Shaula vs Everyone Else.

The most serious rift is within the Maoaddies, where pundits in the politburo can’t get along. There is so much bad blood between Lal Dhoj and The Doc over the #2 position in the government that it seems to have reached breaking point ahead of the party’s central committee meeting this weekend.

Ever since he was in high school in Gorkha and at ISc at Amrit Science, the young BRB used to tell people “I will never be third in anything.” Indeed, he came either first or second in all exams he sat for in his life. Which is why the other day he said he’d rather resign than be #3 in the government’s pecking order. BRB refused to go to the deputy premier oath-taking even though PKD called him repeatedly from his motorcade en route to the Presidential Mansion.

Comrade Lal Dhoj was reportedly placated after his consort, Comrade Parbati, was inducted as Ministress of Tourism. To the many firsts that have transpired in the past two years of political transition, we get to add another: for the first time in Nepal’s history there is a husband-and-wife team in the cabinet.

But BRB was still hopping mad that his left-hand-man Top Budder was dropped from the lineup so he staged a coup at Gorkhapatra where he managed to bring his own henchman in as editor of The Rinsing Nepal, the only problem being that the gentleman in question hasn’t written anything in English in his life.

This week, there is a tie for first place in the New Name Contest between Dilip Rajbhandari, whose name for the new home minister is Bomb Deu Gautam, and Caroline Martin of Naya Bajar who has a new name for Nepal’s national dish: Dahal Bhatt.

Entries to the New Name Contest and any other asinine stuff should be sent to: ass(at)nepalitimes.com

Cockfight

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TODAY

AT The Everest Hotel

STATUTORY DIRECTIVE: SMOKING IS INJURIOUS TO HEALTH

Many ordinary shampoos provide short-term solutions but unfortunately, they can ruin your hair over time. Presenting for the first time Vatika Black Shine shampoo, which does not have any harmful chemicals. It has natural ingredients like Black Olives and Amla that help maintain the black colour of your hair without damaging it. Because it’s only when you are cheerful and worry-free, that you stay beautiful forever.

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100ml Free

100ml Free

FREE GIFT

FREE GIFT