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Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 430

Q. The dissent within the Maoist party is:

Total votes: 1,967



- A charade to confuse people: 51.5%
- Normal intra-party disagreement: 23.1%
- Serious enough to split party: 25.4%

Weekly Internet Poll # 431. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

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No work

RAMESWOR BOHARA

A campaign by the Maoist unions in the past weeks has closed down factories, harmed workers and threatens to unravel the party's own plan to boost investment and create jobs.

Although the unrest is made to look like a labour issue, trade unionists say it is a guise to extort money, get jobs for cadres and relatives and a strategy to control the business sector.

"They are not trade unions but political pressure groups, and will not benefit the workers," says Bishnu Rimal of the Federation of Trade Unions.

In its latest campaign this month, the Maoists have broken an agreement they made jointly with other unions on the minimum wage and have forced the closure of hundreds of factories and firms across the country. It is using an ambiguous clause in the government's minimum wage decision in October to unilaterally push a populist agitation.

The campaign is led by the head of the Maoist trade union, Salikram Jamarkattel who during the war was involved in extorting money from businesses, bombing and kidnapping owners who refused. His union has also been targeting multinational companies, forcing many to close shop, thus reversing the gains Nepal made in the 1990s to attract foreign investment.

At this rate, there will be no more investment in Nepal

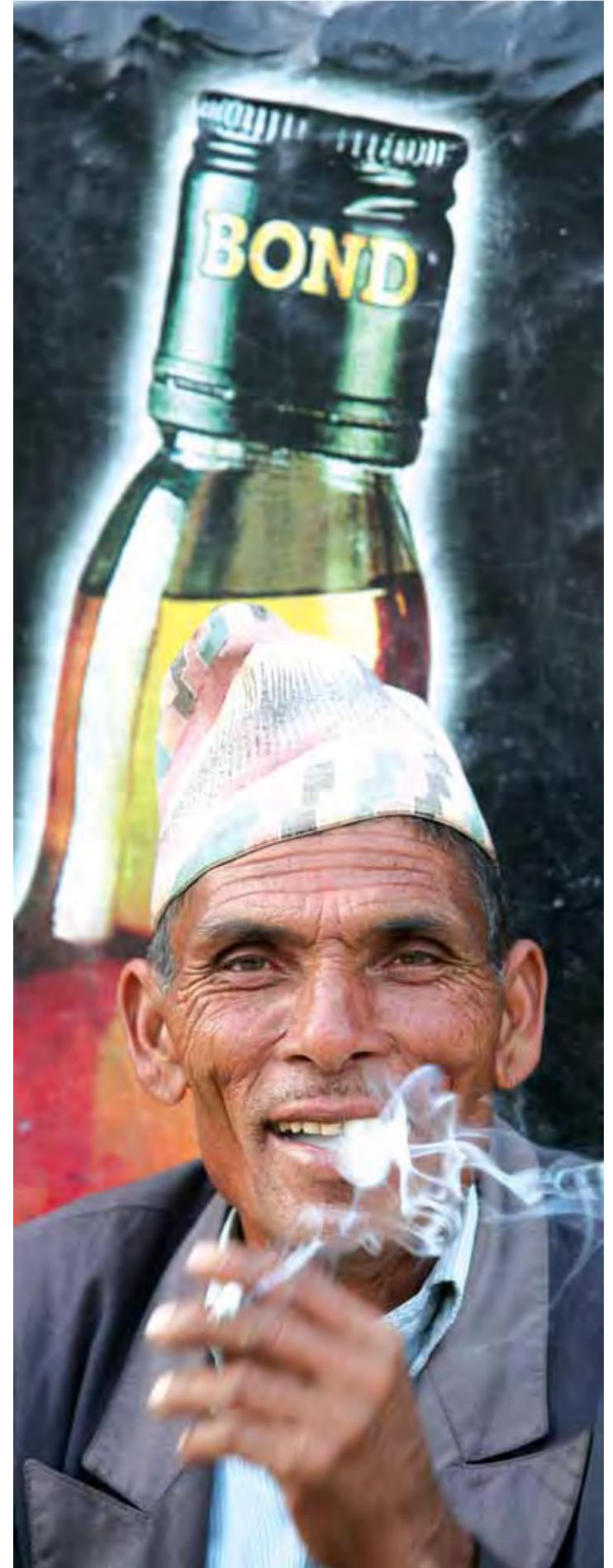
"It's got to a point now where even big domestic investors feel it's just not worth it," says industrialist and CA member, Rajendra Khetan. "If things don't improve we'll all soon be NRNs." Khetan's Gorkha brewery has just shelved its plan to open a new manufacturing unit for Carlsberg beer near Biratnagar and is moving abroad. Colgate Palmolive decided to quit Nepal, citing militant labour as one of the reasons. The biggest foreign investor in Nepal, Dabur Nepal, has put ambitious expansion plans on hold. Foreign investors who were thinking of coming to Nepal to set up manufacturing units are moving to Himachal and Uttaranchal, citing the lack of rule of law in Nepal.

"This is the worst investment climate we've ever had," says labour specialist Narayan Manadhar, "businesses are completely demoralised, and the unions have been cowed down by the Maoists."

Trade unions here have traditionally been beholden to their patron political parties and not to the workers. "Nepali trade unions were run like NGOs and were spoilt by funding," says Maoist-nominated CA member Hari Roka, who says the Maoist unions have just moved into the vacuum they left.

However, the Maoists are now determined to dominate the business sector even if it means getting the Labour Ministry that they control to illegally register unions. This has sidelined established unions that represented the genuine voice of the workers.

Although Maoist unions themselves have misgivings about this trend, analysts say, Prime Minister Dahal appears to be either unable or unwilling to control the militant ways of Jamarkattel and his team. ●



KIRAN PANDAY



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The India syndrome

Indians struggle to make sense of the recession and Mumbai attacks

COALITION

The UML isn't too well known for the clarity of its ideology or its unity of purpose. Sometimes it fancies itself as a left-of-centre political force committed to the principles of social democracy, then it suddenly remembers that its flag still bears a hammer and sickle.

In the past, they played second fiddle to leaders as diverse as Lokendra Bahadur Chand, Sher Bahadur Deuba and Pushpa Kamal Dahal without pausing for the effect these strange alliances would have on party rank and file. The party of the great flip-flopers seems to be about to flip-flop again.

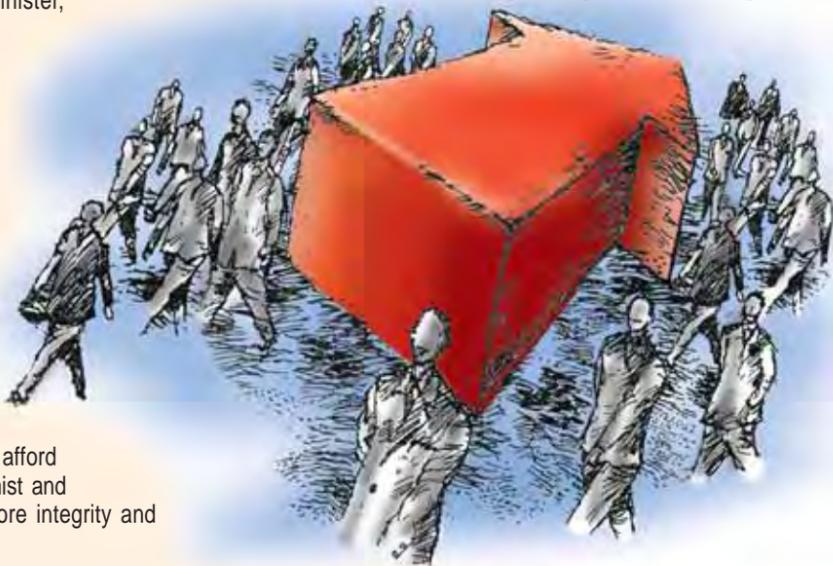
The UML leadership isn't too happy with its own performance in the Maoist-led government. K P Oli and Madhab Nepal have always been trenchant in their criticism of the Maoists, but now even Jhalnath Khanal is rattling his sabre. The only explanation is that the leadership is beginning to feel the pressure from below about being too cosy with the Maoists.

If unity of the Nepali left is its ultimate goal the UML would have to learn to live with Pushpa Kamal Dahal as leader. However, if Madan Bhandari's multi-party socialism path is still valid then the UML will have to rethink a conjugal relationship with the Maoists.

The MJF will also soon face its moment of reckoning. Their nominees in the government have done only marginally better than the UML, but only just. They risk losing more in political terms because their grassroots are different from the UML and the Maoists. It was courageous of Bijay Gachhedar to admit that 'One Madhes, One Pradesh' was merely a political slogan. Prolonged participation in government may even lead to fragmentation between radical and pragmatic groups in the party unless the Madhesi ministers in government start exhibiting accountability to the long-suffering people of the four districts of the eastern Tarai which they represent.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal threatened to quit the government to appease hardliners in his own party. But it seems to have given his coalition partners ideas that they could do the same.

As prime minister, Dahal needs to realise the unintended consequences of his statements. He must learn to stop speaking from both sides of his mouth. He should realise that as an elected leader he can't afford to be an extremist and should show more integrity and statesmanship.



KOLKATA- Someplace Else is among the fanciest addresses in east India's biggest city. The pub at Park Hotel is teeming with people on Saturday night. A live band is playing; the bartender is pulling pints of beer.

It is difficult to imagine there is a recession on, or that Mumbai was under attack less than a month ago. India seems to be not just shining, but swinging here.



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

But that is only an appearance. Beneath the surface, despite the indulgence of a few, the simplistic binary of the elite-subaltern does not hold. Indians are confused, insecure and struggling to comprehend the world around them.

The economic meltdown is gradually affecting the young professionals. Many of them began their working lives with

annual salaries up to INR1.5 million-earning more than their parents ever did, making India's per capita income look like a poor joke, and driving the economy with their relentless consumption.

Today, a business analyst who has to pay monthly installments for his apartment finds his plans go awry without the expected promotion and bonus. A friend at Goldman Sachs is relieved his job is still intact as colleagues are laid off. "At least we have not gone the Lehman way," he says.

A Chandigarh entrepreneur who had branched off on his own to start a gift-order firm for corporates finds orders drying up as companies cut costs. A dairy owner is worried about how the international milk prices and market will affect his margin. Those doing MBAs after paying up lakhs, and being assured of placements, suddenly find that recruitments are frozen.

A Mumbai-based Nepali professional (there are many who went to good colleges in India and availed of the boom) is wondering whether he can hold on to his entertainment industry job. A Nepali journalist in Delhi sees the Indian media shrink and new opportunities more difficult to come by: "Maybe I should come back for the Nepali media boom."

India's growth story has not ended, the country will still fare better than most emerging economies. But the belt is being tightened across sectors. The share market will no longer swing wildly with little correspondence to the economy on the ground. Job cuts will affect all sections,

from the educated MBA to the unskilled construction worker.

The Mumbai attacks have also shaken the confidence that many Indians had in their own government and left them struggling for responses. In a hotel restaurant, a group of middle aged Punjabis react to the attacks in a typically brash way. "We must show it to them this time. These f***** Pakis. The problem is our government is a cowardly. We need an Advani or Modi."

The media-induced hysteria, orchestrated campaigns against the political class, the projection of the security forces as sole heroes, the simplistic portrayal of all of Pakistan as villainous and the fact that their social class has been targeted is feeding into raw and chauvinistic middle class nationalism. And despite recent state assembly elections where Congress did surprisingly well, the far right is all set to benefit from the anger in the medium term.

On a train from Gaya to Patna, in an overcrowded general compartment with people fighting for space to stand in front of stinking toilets, the conversation is about Mumbai. A Muslim lower divisional clerk says hauntingly, "We get killed in the process. I hope there is no war. Muslims will again be seen suspiciously."

The cacophony of voices always makes it difficult, and hazardous, to generalise about India. The events of the last few months have provoked reactions ranging from quiet introspection to anger. It is certain though that Indian confidence has suffered a setback. What remains is a deep fear of the future. ●

LETTERS

COURSE CORRECTION

Having a political party play the role of the opposition is a crucial component in making a democratic system function properly as you suggest in your editorial ('Congress course correction,' 429). However, the NC needs to play *constructive* opposition role as opposed to the traditional slimy, undermining and destructive role oppositions have played in Nepali politics. NC needs to change its focus of being a party that is hell bent on fulfilling GPK and Sujata Koirala's political ambitions. If the NC hopes to be relevant in Nepal's political future it needs to revamp its image drastically. As it stands, the Nepali Congress could

very well change its name to the Koirala Congress.

Atul Adhikary, email

THE BUCK STOPS



I liked Prashant Jha's analysis ('The buck stops with PKD,' #429) especially on the two important points he makes: he is still positive about the future development, but at the same time advises the Maoist party about their future steps. Second, he is more analytical than putting the ideas for unknown purposes. It is time for everybody including journalists and

analysts to be neutral and present their views that may guide our leaders in taking crucial decisions.

Kesh B Malla, Dubai

● I guess leading a war is a lot easier

than leading a peaceful nation. But we should not underestimate PKD. He is really good at 'distraction politics'. Let's make people look the opposite direction so that they are unaware of what is going on. Better yet, let's ignore the issues altogether so that people will forget. Prior to the Maoists coming into the mainstream, their actions were covert and at least illegal, now with PKD and YCL in power their excesses go unchecked and occur in the open. Isn't it great, now the buck stops with the culprit.

Abhishek Bhandari, email

REFUGEES

Thank you for your coverage of the third country resettlement of Bhutan refugees ('A fresh start', #429). While it is true that there is now more support for the relocation process, there are plenty of us refugees who do not want to go anywhere but home. We will not force our will on those who want to leave but we will wait it out. The fascist Bhutan regime and its comrade-in-arms, the Indian government,

should not be allowed to get away with its ethnic cleansing and should be under moral pressure.

G P Pradhan, Beldangi

CORRECTION

Due to a layout error, the captions for the pictures in Happenings (page 15, #429) got mixed up. The right captions are on www.nepalitimes.com

LETTERS

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

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An appropriate time for technology

Let's make better chulos for the poor, the information superhighway can wait



KIRAN PANDAY

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's much-discussed threat to go back to the jungles was an expression of his frustration rather than a true intent to wage war again. Despite pretensions of being in charge, he has taken over three months to realise that a prime minister in a parliamentary system is only first among equals, not the boss. The premier in a coalition government



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

is even less of a boss, his role is limited to being a facilitator.

Dahal's problems begin with his own party members. Few Maoist nominees in the government realise what the limits of their powers are. And their followers still think they can arm-twist and threaten perceived enemies at will.

The UML has packed the cabinet with congenital demagogues. Whether Jhalnath Khanal has done it on purpose to undermine the Maoist-led government or whether it's just his way of hitting back at party rival Madhab Kumar Nepal is unclear. What is obvious, is that none of the ehmaleys in the government have brought the party any glory.

Ministers of smaller parties have actually done better. Not everyone needs to endorse the way Upendra Yadav has recalled newly

appointed ambassadors from India and the US, but at least he has succeeded in restoring the pride of professional cadres in the foreign ministry. One need not agree with the ethnic politics of Jayprakash Gupta, Bijay Gachhedar or Renu Yadav to appreciate the way they have been trying to get their ministries to start working again in the face of the violent antics of the YCL and YF and the militant wing of the MJF.

Ganesh Shah, the minister for science, technology and environment, represents a minor faction of the leftwing. He got a cabinet berth in the coalition in recognition of his steadfast loyalty to his CPN (United).

Shah is an engineer and is supposed to know a bit about what he is expected to do. Unfortunately, even he can't resist wearing outsized badges and cutting ribbons and lighting inaugural lamps. When he is free from these inanities, he flies abroad to attend seminars where Nepal can neither contribute nor gain anything. A ministership transforms even a creative individual like Shah into a lab mouse going round and round in his wheel. But to his credit, he is at least consulting fellow-engineer Baburam Gurung about appropriate technologies that could improve lives of rural Nepalis.

Gurung was trained in Czechoslovakia and his

suggestions were simple: stop chasing the pot of gold at the end of the Information Technology rainbow and concentrate on simple things that will change lives.

The humble Nepali chulo has remained unchanged for millennia even though it wasted firewood. Improved chulos that are more energy efficient and don't belch out smoke have been available for decades. But the penetration of smokeless chulos in rural Nepal is negligible. We need to build on the improved chulo so that it takes new fuels like husk, brickettes and dung cakes and get people to use them.

Pit latrines were introduced in Tarai back in the sixties. Half a century later, villagers are still forced to defecate publically. During the rains in the hills and floods in Tarai, typhoid and infections are the result. Isn't it possible to devise a technological solution for this problem? If we can build ultralights and if Nepali software engineers are contributing to Silicon Valley, improved loos shouldn't be out of our grasp.

Appropriate technology has become a forgotten expression, but there is no other way to make living in rural Nepal a little more bearable for all those who have neither the wish nor the means to migrate to overcrowded cities. Nepal needs better chulos. The information superhighway can wait. ●

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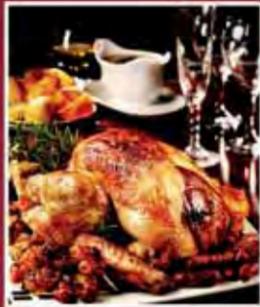
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Himal Khabarpatrika
16-30 December issue



Cover: Labour pains

- The Maoist trade union resorts to hooliganism and gives the labour movement a bad name

Maoist lifestyle

- Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Ram Bahadur Thapa, Khimlal Debkota

Editorial: Justice denied

- Government interference in the appointment of judiciary

Smuggling racket

- Busting a scheme to cheat the government of million in revenue

Constitution Supplement:

"The country should not fragment"

Public debate on federalism

Last installment of interview with Prof Krishna Khanal

Presidential or parliamentary system? Lok Raj Baral and Hari Roka

Himal Khabarpatrika There is No Alternative



COMING HOME IN A COFFIN: Boys at Pashupati paddle in the coffin of a dead Nepali worker as they look for valuables that have fallen into the Bagmati at the cremation site.

SRINKHALA SHARMA

Working to death

DEWAN RAI

Fatalities among Nepali migrant workers reached a peak in the second half of 2008 and the government is scrambling to set up a scheme to compensate relatives and help pay to bring the bodies home.

Laxman Kharel was working at an electrical company in Dubai. He had been there just seven months when he had a stroke and died at age 26. The company entrusted a colleague to take the body to Nepal.

Laxman's sister-in-law Mina Prasai had talked to Laxman just two days before. "He told me that he would be in Nepal next Dasain," she recalls. His wife Pushpa broke her right hand as she collapsed when she heard the news.

Since the roads had been destroyed by the Kosi flood in August the fare for the journey from Kathmandu to Taplejung had risen from Rs 2,000 to Rs 7,000. It did not seem practical to take the body to his village for the funeral, so the body was cremated at Pashupati.

As the number of Nepal's migrant workers exceeds 15 per cent of the population, the number of fatalities have also increased. Records from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs show that 158 migrant workers died in 2006/07, but in 2007/08 the death toll had climbed to 237. The number peaked at a record 154 deaths between April and December this year. Most occurred in the Gulf countries with 80 per cent in Saudi Arabia followed by Qatar. The ministry's statistics do not include fatalities among the estimated 2 million Nepalis workers in India.

Interestingly, none of the death certificates mention the cause of death. Where it is noted, a substantial number are given as 'cardiac arrest', and officials say there are a surprising number of Nepalis who have reportedly died in their sleep.

Krishna Dawadi, joint secretary at the Department of Labour and Foreign Employment Promotion says Nepali workers are mainly unskilled, often employed in risky jobs and are vulnerable to fatal accidents.

Transporting the body home is a lengthy and complex process. The incident is first reported to the Nepali embassy. If the worker has a legal work

labour attaché in the countries where 5,000 or more Nepalis work. But Nepal has signed bilateral labour agreements only with Korea, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE—although it has embassies in 18 countries. It is the employer who fixes the pay and perks of workers in the remaining countries. If there were bilateral labour agreements, Nepali labourers would be paid according to the law of the country.

A Foreign Employment Promotion Board was set up this month to have compulsory insurance that will compensate families with Rs 100,000 in case of death as well as providing medical treatment abroad for the injured. The board has already

Stacks of coffins in Pashupati indicate the rising fatality rate among Nepali migrant workers abroad

permit, the mission then verifies the information with the Department of Labour and then corresponds with the foreign ministry in Nepal.

The ministry contacts the local agency and the next of kin is informed. The local agency then writes to the ministry establishing the claimant's relationship with the deceased. The relative needs to take all the relevant documents and apply formally at the foreign ministry for the body to be brought home.

If the worker has no government labour permission to work abroad, it is the employer who corresponds with the dead person's family.

The Foreign Employment Act 1985 had provision for a

started receiving applications for compensation from the relatives even before it has actually started its work.

"We have a fund of Rs 450 million and will begin the compensation process soon," says Thaneswor Debkota, member secretary of the board.

He believes this provision will also encourage Nepali migrant workers to go through the correct legal channels before leaving to work abroad. Half of the estimated 2.4 million Nepali working in countries other than India do not have work permits.

Debkota told *Nepali Times*: "If we halve the number of illegal workers, the risk will go down significantly and it can also help in increasing remittances." ●

Labour pains

Politicians don't know how to tame militant unions that they unleashed

Last Sunday, the Beed along with family members and some other people got stuck in the lift at the Hotel Grand. We later came to know this was a regular occurrence. The emergency phones did not work and neither was anyone apologetic about the mishap as the hotel employees had gotten used to rescuing



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

people from the elevator. This perhaps reflects the current state of Nepali business: an indifferent workforce that works for an indifferent set of employers.

The perception is that there are few businesses that are really suffering because of the current labour problems and as long as people can find ways to find individual solutions, no one is interested in looking at a common one.

But the business community has to speak with one voice. Having myriad disconnected organisations is counterproductive when it comes to getting the government to agree on providing security to businesses or resolving labour issues.

The workforce had become an empowered group, patronised by the political parties. Workers who believe in productivity and hard work have no place as they are constantly coerced by politically motivated workers who have no intention of working for the betterment of the business. But now the political parties are wondering how to tame these people whom they let loose for political gain.

The service charge issue, which the Beed continues to harp on about, is a perfect example of how the myopia of businesses and labour has now led to a serious crisis in the hospitality industry. The employers gave in since they could pass on the cost to the customers

anyway. Now, there is no incentive for staff to offer the highest level of service because irrespective of their effort everybody makes the same tip. Anyone who recalls service levels at hotels and restaurants in Kathmandu 10 years ago will know what we are talking about.

Nepali businesses and industry will have no future if the worker issue is not resolved. The country faces the threat of being relegated to a country with

many trade unions but no real business or industry. The government and the political parties need to realise that if they do not rein in their workers and make them agree to the fundamentals, then they have to start finding ways of getting revenues from sources other than business. Where else in the world does a government survive on revenue apart from taxing businesses?

The business community needs to unite based on the workers they



employ and the taxes they pay and create an advocacy group that starts to force the government to act. For the government, it would be then to go along with other political forces to ensure that the worker leaderships agree on a solution that will be beneficial for both workers and businesses to operate in Nepal.

Otherwise, the finance minister's goal of boosting job creation by attracting investments will just be a pipe dream. ●



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Rich man, poor man

When a colleague from United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) suggested the refugee camps in Jhapa as a possible location to take pictures for his book, Howard Graham Buffett, 54, son of Warren Buffett, the world's richest man, couldn't believe his ears.

As a businessman, philanthropist, photographer, agriculture and conservation expert, he had worked extensively in Africa and South and Central America, but he didn't know much about South Asia.

"When you think of Nepal you think about the mountains and religion, but you don't think about the high malnutrition rates, the war, or the floods in Kosi and you would have no idea that there are refugees living here," says Buffett.

And so the ambassador for WFP came to Nepal as part of his project to compile a photography book on hunger. He worked with WFP in Pakistan during the earthquake and has been to several countries with the organisation.

Buffett is no stranger to issues surrounding food production. He farms 1,000 acres of land at home in Nebraska and is on the board of directors for the world's largest food retailer ConAgra food, as well as food and beverage giants Archer Daniels Midland and Coca Cola Enterprises. He is also the founder of Nature Conservation Trust, a non-profit Trust in South Africa to support cheetah conservation.

In Nepal, he visited WFP's maternal and child health project in Solukhumbu, flew over the Imja Glacier, visited Bhutani Refugee Camps in Jhapa and the make-shift camps for the Kosi flood victims.

He also studied the country's agricultural patterns, concluding that Nepal has serious challenges relating to food production. It may be fortunate to have abundant water resources, but without the infrastructure and training for irrigation, would be unable to deal with the challenges of food security.

"To reap benefits from the irrigation system you need a system of crop development, which in turn depends on extension services," says Buffett. Most seeds used in Nepali farms are indigenous and haven't seen any improvement in yield or resistance for years. Buffett stresses that improved training to develop higher quality, higher yielding seeds is critical.

In addition, Buffett says that Nepal has to be able to take advantage of the successes that its neighbours, China and India, have achieved. "It's about regional integration—if countries around you have higher fertiliser use, you should have better and cheaper access to fertilisers as they develop research and put development dollars into crops." ●

Mallika Aryal

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Not so humble ministerial habits



PRESIDENTIAL SUITE: Prime Minister Dahal's bedroom at his official residence—Baluwatar.

DINESH SHRESTHA

Himal Khabarpatrika, 16-30 December

हिमाल

A meal that Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal thoroughly enjoys is ghee, rice and local chicken or goat meat. He doesn't mind cauliflower and potatoes or spinach either. Besides his food, he also likes clothes—he has 20 pairs of trousers and around a dozen suits, says his personal assistant BK Shrestha. Also a fan of black leather shoes, he uses Nepali brands like *Basbari*, *Sky* and *Tiptop*.

There was also a time when he used to sport a Rs 50,000 Rado watch, which was given to him by a famous industrialist. However, after a lot of public speculation and opposition from his cadres he stopped wearing it. Another thing that has stirred speculation since Prachanda became PM is the Rs100,000 bed imported from China. However, Shrestha claims, "Contradictory to the rumours, the bed only cost Rs 70,000 and was bought by the president, vice-

president and the speaker."

The PM's daily routine consists of waking up at 4AM, reading and playing badminton with his son Prakash and his nephew Samir for half an hour. He also loves listening to music and watching movies. When he has time, he also enjoys singing challenges with his 10-year-old granddaughter Smita. Besides the news, the PM is fond of the show 'Tito Satya'.

Other Maoist ministers such as state reconstruction and culture minister Gopal Kirati who used to cane people during the People's War for drinking wine, now likes drinking wine and even scotch after a hard day at work. "People who come to meet me gift red label and black label. It would be rude to return a gift, so I drink one or two pegs before I sleep," says Kirati.

There has been a drastic change in his lifestyle. Kirati now wears coats that cost Rs 20,000 and watches worth Rs16,000. But he says, "I don't buy expensive things—friends who live abroad give them to me as gifts."

Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa 'Badal' likes classical music. His favourite singer is India's Shova Mudgal. Besides the news, he never misses the program 'Sare Gama'.

Labour and transport minister

Lekhraj Bhatta uses red Mehendi on his hair once a month and loves the Hindi movie *Sholay*. But he claims his lifestyle hasn't changed much from the years when he was fighting in the war. He says, "How much you choose to change your life depends on the person."

Maoist spokesperson and communication minister Krishna Bahadur Mahara's favourite pastime is watching political movies. He likes *Balidan* best. He also likes to travel but due to lack of time he hasn't been able to treat himself to this pleasure, says his PA Khagendra.

Maoist CA member and advocate Khimlal Devkota's biggest indulgence is his suits. He says, "I have four suits that cost Rs 12,000 and many ties that match my shirts." He also has two laptops that clients gave to him when he won their cases.

Maoist central committee member and CA member Top Bahadur Rayamaji who got married in a second-hand coat that cost Rs 35 and shoes that cost Rs 25, now owns numerous suits. Since 1973, Rayamaji has kept a written diary.

After winning the CA elections Maoist member Jhaku Prasad Subedi, received many gifts such as bikes from friends and well-wishers. He says, "Industrialists tried to gift cars as well but I didn't take them."

Not in denial

Interview with Prachanda, *Naya Patrika*, 13 December

नया पत्रिका

What's changed since you became prime minister?

Initially, I thought it would be easy to work according to the people's expectations and the spirit of the commitment letter. But it's been challenging—although not impossible. We've already made solid changes though, in terms of budget, international relations and infrastructural development.

Are you disillusioned yet?

Work is being done. It may be slow due to procedural matters but it hasn't yet got to the stage where we are disillusioned. With the commissions, for instance, we just want work to be done quicker.

Why haven't the departments for women and land improvement been formed yet?

There's no rush. We've taken steps but it'll take time due to 'bureaucratic hurdles'.

What did you mean when you said that you may leave the government?

I mentioned something when I spoke at Chitwan and Kathmandu. However, what I said was exaggerated by the media. What I meant was that our government is not obsessed over the 'chair' and if we aren't able to bring positive change here, we don't see the use of staying. We're not going to stay by force. Instead, we'll question why we couldn't bring changes and go to the people. I mentioned this as a broad possibility; I didn't mean that we'll leave today or tomorrow.

Isn't that like giving up due to your own incompetence?

The Kangresis think that we are using this as a threat, it's not true. We're not losing hope either. It's just that we wanted some things to be fast-paced, and that hasn't happened. But we're not denying our weaknesses.

If you had to give yourself a score out of 100 since you became prime minister...

[Laughs] Between 60 and 70.



Outside force

Dristi, 15 December

दृष्टि

The process of army integration, already highly debated and drawn out, is being further delayed because of the differing proposals being put forward by India and China.

It's not just the Chinese and Indians that are interested in Nepal's army integration, the British and the Americans are also rushing to Baluwatar and Singa Darbar with their ideas.

The Chinese have suggested that the Nepal Army should take in as many PLA recruits as their standards allow and the rest should be deployed in security in the eastern and northern borders. While China is ready to support that force because it believes it will help curtail pro-Tibet activities, India is not very keen on the idea.

India is putting more emphasis on the management than on integration of the PLA troops. It has proposed that rather than integrating the PLAs in the army, they should be employed in other security organisations, should be given

vocational training or should be given opportunities for foreign employment.

Lately, the British too have been pressing for the rehabilitation of PLA troops rather than on integration. This has shaken the Maoist leadership because it was the British who, according to the Security Sector Reform (SSR), had first proposed that the PLAs should be integrated into the army.

The Nepal Army has also started to oppose the SSR model fearing it could be just a strategy to appoint Maoist leaders into the army. Maoist leader CP Gajurel of the Foreign ministry was the one to introduce SSR as a concrete idea. The Maoists were trying to implement the SSR model and integrate the PLAs into the army, as well as keep UNMIN and the UN happy. However, it is unlikely that the UN will support the Maoists in their plans unless the US, which has not been very positive, agrees. The rumour now is that the Maoists are in search of a brand new model. The extension of UNMIN for six more months is actually a ploy to buy time and remain in the UN's good books.



ROBIN SAYAMI

Prachanda: "If it goes on like this, we will raise arms again."
Farmer: "During the election campaign, he used to say he'd raise our living standards."

The Unrepresented

SUBHAS DEBKOTA

Madhesi ministers prove themselves powerless to effect change in the Tarai

In spite of the fact that the Madhesi has hefty representation in the government the security situation in the region has not improved at all. In fact it is deteriorating.

Janakpur-based professor Surendra Labh says Madhesi leaders changed their language once they gained power. He argues the constitution, legislation and mentality of leaders must be changed if Madhesi issues are to be addressed. "The government should come up with an immediate relief package for the people. It is sad to know that the movement was purely for power and not for the people," he says.

But Madhesi ministers argue the present government will not take care of the Madhesi community. They say security will not improve because the government has failed to address armed groups' demands.

Supply Minister Rajendra Mahato, who claims to have understood Madhes issues because his party's founder leader, the late Gajendra Narayan was the first person to bring the issues to light, says, "Even if a Madhesi leader is made the prime minister nothing will happen unless a federal constitution is made. The present government should implement the past agreements reached between the



government and the Madhesis."

Foreign Minister Upendra Yadab, who is also president of MJF, the largest Madhesi party and fourth largest party in the CA

holds a similar view. "The police and the army are still not inclusive. There is the same old law. How can the government do any good for Madhesi under this

system?" he questions.

He blames the clash between the Maoists YCL and UML Youth Force and dispirited police force for the deteriorating security. As for the terror meted out by the Tarai armed groups he adds, "If we address their reasonable demands then we can take action against their criminal activities."

Another MJF leader, Agriculture Minister Jay Prakash Gupta says the number of Madhesi leaders in the government does not necessarily determine the activities of the government. He points to another spanner in the works—that Madhesi ministers could not forge a united view regarding Madhesi concerns.

He blames the government for the violence as it failed to come up with an integrated vision for the armed groups and address the reasonable demands of Tarai armed groups in spite of his proposals.

Others say that three months is not long enough to improve things. UML leader and Local Development Minister Ram Chandra Jha says security will improve once the dialogue with the Tarai armed groups concludes. "The formation of

commissions to address the issues of Tarai and Muslim communities, reservation provision for Dalits and related laws which are in the offing will definitely bring relief. The new constitution and state restructuring will give a long-term solution," he says.

Rameshwar Kapadi, president of Mithila State Struggle Committee, says the Madhes problems have remained unaddressed thanks to the popular political slogan of 'one madhes, one pradhesh' which overlooked geographic, ethnic and cultural diversity. He also claims the Madhesi leaders joined the government with the right sentiment but they did not understand the real problems.

Perhaps everyone is expecting too much too soon given the seismic changes this scarred country has undergone.

But the ministers themselves are not taking the initiative to bring relief to the people when they say the government can do nothing. Madhesi represent a hefty one third of the leaders in the council of ministers.

The country's president, vice president and Madhesi ministers hail from Sarlahi, Dhanush, Saptari, Sunsari and Morang districts - the origin of Madhes movement. It shows the effectiveness of the movement and its achievements. But the people who were in the frontline during the movement in these districts are now living under constant threat.

"We will have one identity—Nepali"

Conclusion of the interview with Krishna Khanal, political science professor at Tribhuban University, about federalism.

What are the merits and demerits of federalism?

No political system is good or bad in itself. There is no ideal system. But the country might face some challenges once it embraces federalism.

The issue of ethnicity could be one while the division of provinces could be another. Ethnic, linguistic and regional issues need to be taken into consideration when dividing provinces but they are not the sole determinants.

Let's take Limbuwan province for instance. There might be people who think non-Limbu should not be allowed to live there, that they should be driven away. This is against the spirit of federal democratic norms.

The emergence of regional parties will be inevitable if the issues of identity remain unaddressed. That's not to say regional politics is wholly bad but possible challenges should be identified on time. If political parties do not adapt to fit the federal system, that could pose another problem.

Federalism is expensive as there will be many governments and parliaments. But there again the federal system could promote economic growth.

There are many challenges, which is why political parties appear reluctant to embrace it.

Some argue the country would break up if it goes into federalism.

The past experiences of federal countries do not prove so. Yugoslavia disintegrated because the federal system was not based on democratic norms. India is a federal

country which has been facing the problem of separatist movements from the very beginning but it has not disintegrated in over 60 years. In 1947, the separatists demanded independence for Tamilnadu but the issue evaporated when MDK party won. From Nagaland to Manipur, the issue of separatism is being raised but the state mechanism has been functioning perfectly. In other words, it is through federalism that integration has been protected.

With the exception of Tarai Democratic Front, no other parties or groups have raised the issue of a separate province so far.

How should provinces be created?

In more than one way. In India, federal structures are based on language (Gujrat, Tamilnadu etc), geographical situation (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh etc) and ethnic settlement (Punjab, Bengal etc). The provinces should be created according to the density of the population and topography.

National unity is also important. The state should be self-reliant in terms of economy, administration and internal security. It should be capable of implementing central government policies, programs and plans.

It must be considered whether a province is viable politically and administratively. For instance, a separate province of Chepang with a population of 50,000 could not be administratively and politically viable.

What are the widely accepted norms of federalism?

There are essentially two concepts of federalism that are widely accepted—territorial and non-territorial. America is an example of territorial while Ethiopia is non-territorial. Under the former, provinces or states are demarcated in a certain size and their inhabitants are known as citizens of that particular province. The latter refers to demarcating provinces on the basis of ethnicity.

In Nepal, it is not possible to apply either so the federal structure of our country should be based on ethnicity, language, population density and geography.

What are the basic requirements for a federal system to function?

The basic principles of a democratic system apply. The only difference is the level of ruling. In a federal system, there are different governments and parliaments at the centre and provinces. The duties and responsibilities of the central and provincial government will be as provisioned in the constitution. In many federal countries, the provincial government has a different constitution from that of a central government, while some have a single constitution. In America, Canada and Switzerland, provinces/states have their own constitution. If any state wants a separate constitution that should not be negated.

Another important question is about the type of system. It could be presidential, parliamentary or mixed. I think an executive presidential system will not be appropriate because of the diversity. Under the presidential system, it is unlikely Dalits, women, Madhesi or Tharus would be elected. We need a ceremonial president and an executive prime minister.

What should be the political, economical and administrative relationship between the central and provincial government?

The constitution will specify the fundamental relationship. Some responsibilities will be shared, some separate. For instance, the issue of environment. When it rains in the mountains, landslides takes place in the hilly regions and the Tarai suffers from flash floods. These are shared issues.

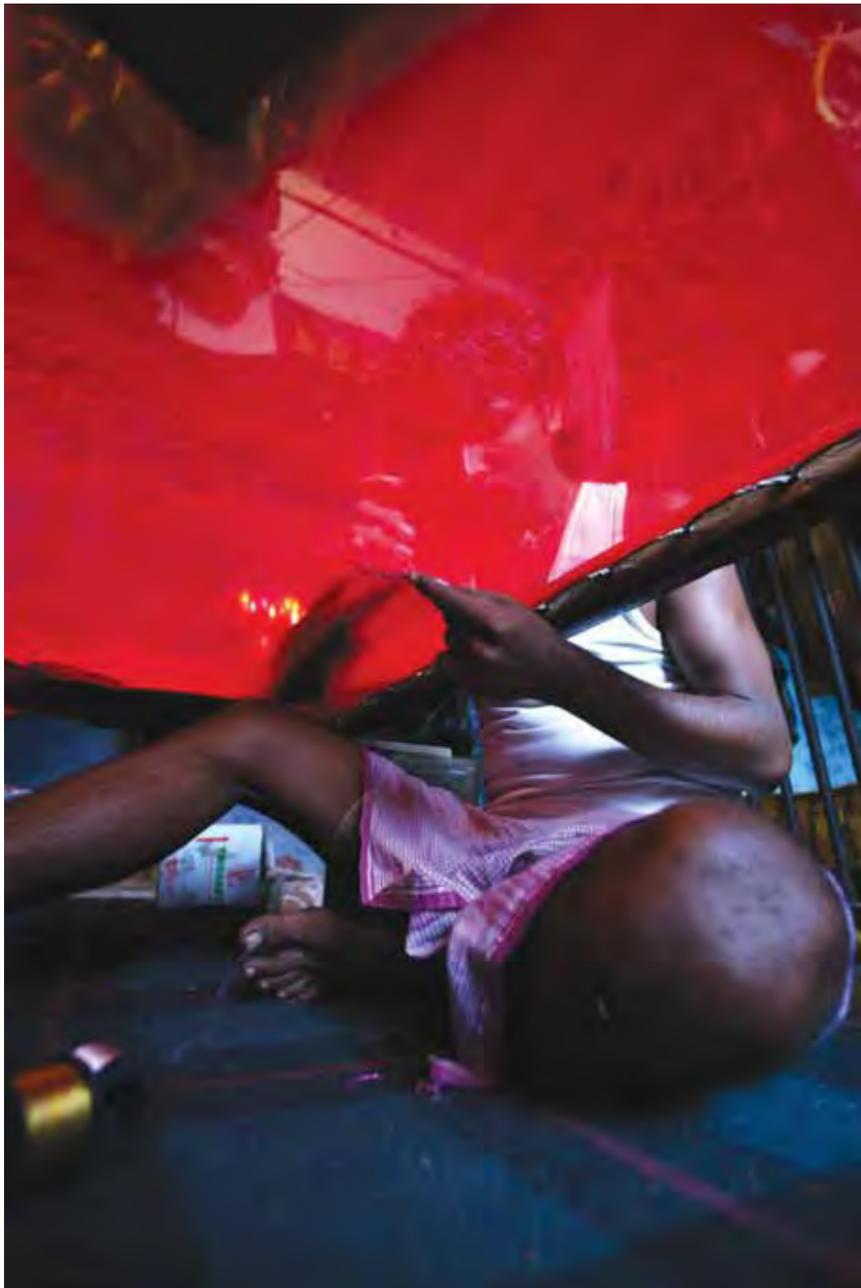
In principle, defence, foreign affairs and treasury remain at the centre and the rest goes to the provincial government. Hydropower can be of national interest. In this situation, the central and provincial work together.

We should understand one thing – the centre is not a separate entity without provinces. The central government consists of representatives from provinces. No laws are made without the participation from provinces. The centre is the common ground.



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

STICHING TIME: A Muslim detainee embroiders a sari in Mahottari Jail.



Behind



DOWN-TIME: Four Mahottari prison inmates watch television in the room also used for worship.

TEXT AND PICTURES by KIRAN PANDAY

Prisons in Nepal are dilapidated, but their deterioration is not limited to their cracked roofs and crumbling walls.

Most were built during the Rana regime. They are overcrowded, mismanaged and the inmates underfed and angry. In the Siraha jail, the roof leaks and it is on the verge of collapse. The Mahottari jail holds 339 prisoners when it only has enough space for 135.

There are 73 prisons in the country containing 8,810 detainees, 538 of them women. In addition, 62 dependents also live inside the jails with their parents. There are 166 juveniles and 488 foreigners.

Whatever ray of hope one sees inside the jails, is due to the determination of the inmates to make their lives behind bars bearable. In Dilli Bajar prison in the heart of the capital, the detainees association purchased two computers and is conducting training for detainees, 35 prisoners currently attend the course.

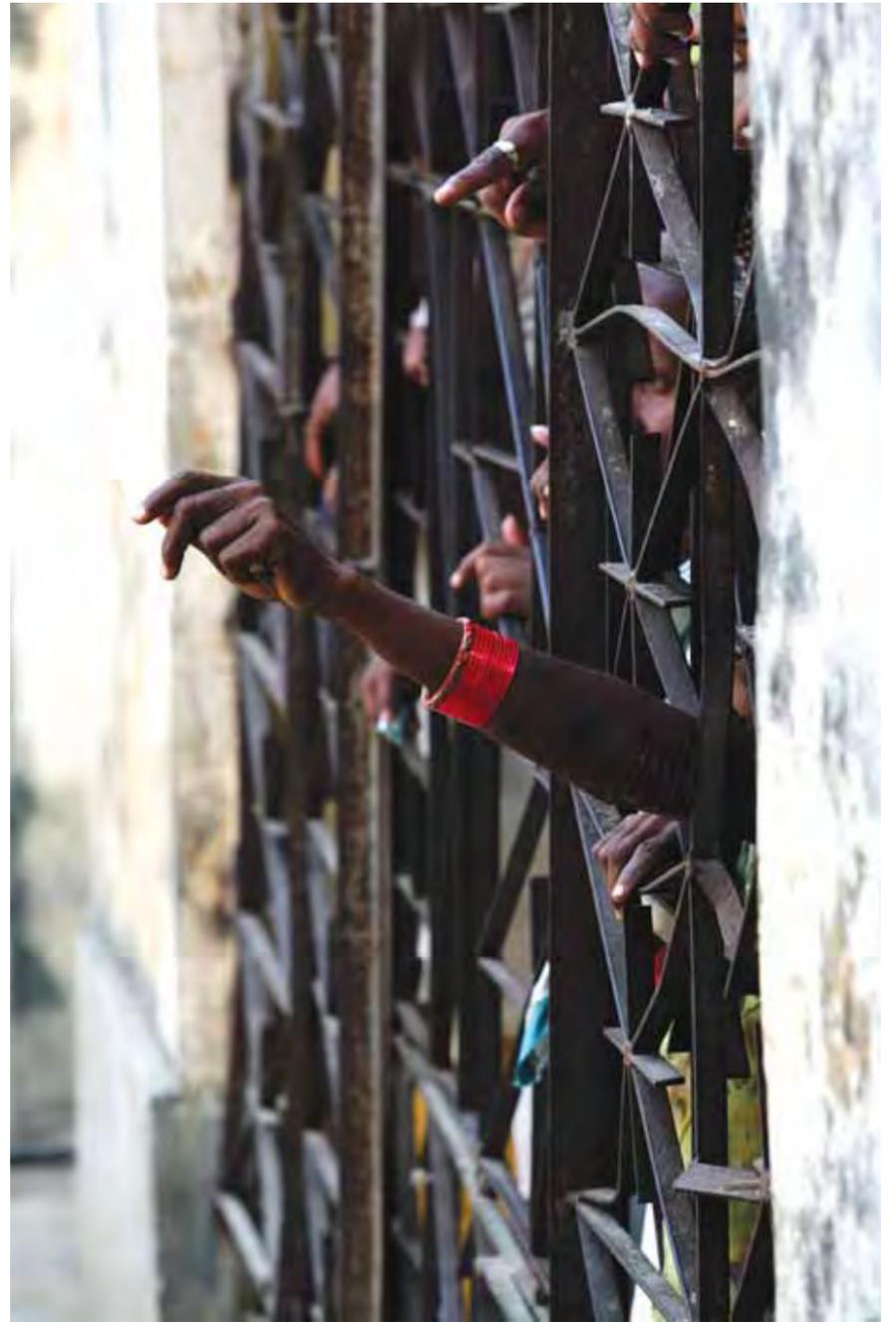
In Dhulikhel jail, prison is divided into three sections, one for severely mentally disabled detainees. This is the only prison in the country that can handle the mentally handicapped, but it is clear that many of them should be in a hospital, not a prison.

Pictures selected from an exhibition by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Kathmandu last week.

PLEA FOR FREEDOM: A woman inmate reaches out for a visitor at Siraha Jail. After prisoners broke out of the prison some two months ago, visitors cannot come within 50 metres.



LONG NIGHTS: With no other form of pastime, the women detainees sit together and while away the evening.



d bars



A LONG WAIT: A detainee stares idly as he waits for customers in the small store run for prisoners at Central Jail.



ANYWHERE BUT HERE: A young child who was born in Mahottari Jail gazes out beyond the prison walls.



REFRESHING: A male detainee enjoys a bath after a long day of work in Siraha Jail.

Into the darkness

Nepalis voted for peace, not for leaders who make threats when the going gets tough

In the last few years the cold dark evenings have become unbearable during this load-shed winter. With 10 hours of power cuts every day, there isn't much one can do but mull, snooze, meditate or worse, think about the state of the country.

The Nepali political situation in the last week turned as dark as the powerless nights. We have had an earful of threats, accusations and no end of whining from senior politicians and party leaders. While Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, leader of the party with one-third of the seats in the parliament, has been threatening to quit the government and take up arms again, UML's Madhab Kumar Nepal has been spreading the word throughout the country that the government, which his party is a part of, is a total failure.

The changes taking place in the country in the last few months have been rapid and overwhelming. Sometimes it is hard to keep track of how much things have changed. In all this, one characteristic that hasn't changed is politicians'



INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

habit of complaining and not watching what they are saying when things don't go their way.

Is it so difficult to understand that one of the reasons why Nepalis went out and voted in such large numbers was because they were tired of the same old way of doing things? Many in the villages of Nepal voted for the Maoists because they were fed up with the war, the killings, losing family members, the threats and the lawlessness war had brought home. Last week in Panauti a local resident Mahesh Karmacharya said what many Nepalis have been thinking but have been too afraid to say, "In the last few months since the Maoists started leading the government they haven't done anything to prove that they are different from the other politicians who have been in charge since 1990."



SAM KANG LI

Moreover, for a senior leader like Madhab Nepal, whose party is part of a coalition government, it is absurd to hear him say that the government has failed.

Leaders threaten to prove a point either to the opposition or to the people. What they don't understand is that such threats create cynicism and hopelessness in the people. They can't trust a party that threatens to go back to war when diplomacy gets a little hard to handle. Nepalis went out in overwhelming numbers and voted for the Maoists, but not all the votes came from die-hard supporters. After ten years of waging war the Maoists have to do a lot more to gain the trust of the people than win an election. The little credibility they may have gained is lost when they bare their fangs.

Meanwhile, instead of thinking of ways to reorganise their parties so that they can gain back the support they lost in the CA elections, older parties like the NC are busy trying to find fault. In the eyes of the people such backbiting just makes them look like very bad losers.

During the CA elections people in the villages were promised education, roads, food, employment, development. Eight months have passed and nothing has been done. Nepalis in the hinterland don't care about internal party rifts, they don't care about who was promoted in the party ranks or which invisible foreign hand wants what from Nepal or who said what in Kathmandu.

People want promises to be kept. They want to know that their children are safe and their neighbours won't die of a curable disease. They have had enough of the war. Twelve years of living in fear is enough. ●

When a prime minister threatens to quit the government because unnamed international powers are not allowing them to work, it makes the people wonder if their intentions for the country are genuine. And these threats come at a time when the media has been reporting on how the lives of the comrades have changed since leaving the jungle, how most of them are now living in the lap of luxury.

Integrate or

PRERANA MARASINI
in NAWALPARASI

The political parties are debating whether to allow en masse integration of the Maoists' combatants into the Nepal Army or discard the idea completely. UNMIN's term is about to be extended by another six months because of the uncertainty over the integration of the two armies.

The debate is raging even within the Maoist cantonments, where the former guerrillas undergo regular military training. While many see integration into the national army as the ultimate goal, others want the PLA to remain a separate armed force of the state.

Here in Jhyaltung Danda of Nawalparasi, many of the guerrillas believe they should stay under the party rather than under the government.

Twenty-six-year-old PLA member Nirmala Bantha Magar (Pratistha), a company commander, which is a rank equivalent to that of major in the army, fought in 12 battles during the 10-year people's war. She is hopeful that the party will take care of the PLA members in the right way. "We believe in our



PRERANA MARASINI

party, as it has the right vision," she says. "We will accept whatever the party decides for us."

Pratistha's husband who was also a PLA fighter was killed in action. Her daughter was born after her father's death but Nirmala does not want to quit the PLA. "We've sacrificed so much

for the people and the country," she states. "And I can't imagine my life beyond the PLA."

Vice commander Ram Lal Roka Magar (Madan) says the PLA wants to retain its own identity. "We don't want assimilation," he says, adding, "a merger will erase our identity."

The question of loyalty after

Unearthing the



NHRC

SEEKING CLOSURE: Forensic experts, human rights activists and police investigate alleged graves of the disappeared in Shivapuri earlier this year

samples," said Ranta. The NHRC has ruled out the possibility of a mass grave at the site, but says it wants to investigate the area further.

Mandira Shrama of Advocacy Forum says the probe will pave the way to investigate other suspected sites in the future, but she is worried that the issue will fade from the headlines. "The investigation has to be detailed, so that the issue is kept alive," she says.

In an effort to build local forensic capacity for future investigations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has brought in two experts from Geneva, Ute Hofmeister and Oran Finegan, who have been training NHRC staff, Nepal Police, local forensic experts, medical students and human rights activists in exhumation procedures, the collection of ante-mortem data and other skills relating to the identification of human remains.

"It is not clear how many bodies need to be identified, but now that that the conflict is over the need to develop appropriate

MALLIKA ARYAL

Last year Nepal's National Human Rights Commission received a tip-off from the locals in the Shivapuri National Park north of Kathmandu about the location of where the 43 disappeared from the Bhairabnath and Yuddha Bhairab Battalion were buried.

The Alle area was cordoned off and the NHRC, with a team of forensic experts and human rights activists started investigating. They combed the jungles and recovered pieces of clothing, sacks, charred wood and plastic bags.

Two months later Finnish

experts Helena Ranta of University of Helsinki and Pekka Saukko from the University of Turku were brought in to further analyse the samples. When the tests on coal-like black substances and black soil brought no results, NHRC asked that the samples be sent for further tests.

The report of these further tests were released by the NHRC in Kathmandu this week, and the Finnish experts state that the remains of at least one male were found in the objects they collected in Shivapuri last year.

"From the six different samples we could extract DNA evidence from only one of the

disintegrate?



Not all Maoists in the camps want to be part of the Nepal Army

NO TIME FOR SCHOOL: (l-r) Sunita, Samiksha and Niruta quit school to join the people's war. Now that the conflict is over, they want to resume studies but they say military classes and trainings leave them with no time to return to formal education.

members and children orphaned during the war still use the term 'dushman' while referring to the Nepal Army during the insurgency.

There are 1,000 PLA in the camp, which includes young mothers, some teenagers, and some wounded, in addition to the verified combatants. Ram Kumar Thapa (Mahan) who has lost a hand and eye, says, "We knew we could be wounded or killed but we fought for the liberation of the people." But what about his future? With his disability he will not qualify for integration. "The state should provide us with the right alternative," he says.

Another ex combatant, Khum

Bahadur Lamsal (Sonam) who lost a leg during a battle in Arghakhanchi in 2002 raises concerns about the injured combatants the Nepal Army has. "If integration is to take place, all of us should be integrated, otherwise those injured soldiers in the NA should also be withdrawn."

The Nepal Army has 2,625 wounded soldiers while the PLA has over 3,000 personnel wounded during the war.

Nursing mothers in the camps complain of inadequate food for their babies. Although they enjoy a leave of six months, which is four months more than government employees and female soldiers of the Nepal Army get, they have difficulty being able to afford to care for their children.

"We don't get an extra something for the baby, apart from the regular Rs 2,100, which is not enough," says 21-year-old Shanta Bhattarai whose four month old son has pneumonia. ●

integrating a politically indoctrinated army has also cropped up, but vice commander Magar thinks it could be resolved. "When we (PLA and NA) work together for a common goal, we will forget our past grievances," he says. 'We will also be giving up our party membership,' he adds.

However, almost all PLA

truth

The forensic investigation into the 43 disappeared on Shivapuri finally begins to address impunity

skills and build local capacity for identification is imperative," says Hofmeister, who has worked on exhumations in Bosnia and Latin America.

She adds: "Society may not be ready but the loved ones want to

know because they never forget."

Under international humanitarian law, the authorities are responsible for determining what happened to those who went missing during an armed conflict. Accurate information is

impossible without forensic expertise. Identification and evidence is extremely important not just for prosecution but also for humanitarian purposes.

Ranta says that forensic evidence has to be dealt with very carefully and has to be done by experts. Dealing with the past is one of the ways the authorities can build confidence amongst people. She says, "These issues keep coming back and society, government and people will have to deal with them one day. There's no use trying to shove them under the rug." ●

See also:
'Forgiving but not forgetting', #380
'Prison diary', #290
'Many have died in detention', #267

No frills

Getting married simply is a wise move in lean times

ROMA ARYAL

A quarter-page ad in *Kantipur* announced the wedding of Archana Dahal and Subash Bhattarai on 24 November— but theirs was no ordinary wedding. No extravagant ceremony with pricey invitations, dowry and lavish party. Instead the couple opted to give all the money their parents had set aside for the occasion to charity and have a small, humble gathering at a temple.

Less than a week after the ad appeared, the couple received an overwhelming response with more than 700 emails and 400 SMSs from Nepalis who had read the announcement from all over Nepal and abroad. Some were deeply touched while others wished they had foregone a lavish affair in favour of something less costly.

A man from Qatar seemed irked that the couple hadn't decided to marry earlier: "If you had," he wrote in his email, "I wouldn't have to leave my pregnant wife, so I can pay off the loans we took for our wedding. I would've known that there was another option."



PRICELESS: Archana and Subash wrote in their wedding announcement in *Kantipur*, "We want to publicly announce that we began our married life on 13 October without any unnecessary costs, and will donate the money to various charitable organisations."

Subash, who works for the Jaycees and Archana who works at Nabil Bank in Damak, are an educated and savvy couple who want change. Subash wanted to set an example in Damak and he fought hard to convince his parents to sanction his marriage, while his wife was easily convinced. "It's not about rejecting your culture," she says, "you should be able to spend only as much as you can."

"We thought what we were doing would be something new," says Subash, "but there were lots of people who replied to our ad, saying that they were doing the same."

Chakra Bohara and Gita Mainali Bohara in Dang are one such couple who spent as little as they could when they tied the knot five years ago, while Rajan and Durga had a similar approach. "Instead of using the money for our wedding," said Durga, "we saved the money to finance our further studies."

But marriage counselor for the online matrimonial service nepalmatrimonial.com, Shrijana Singh Yonjan says that cases like these are exceptions. Many young people such as Chakra and Gita who have intercaste marriages usually conduct the marriage by themselves, often fresh out of college and have no choice but to be frugal. They do it because their decision hasn't been accepted by their parents. "The majority of Nepalis," she says, "still attempt to prove their affluence with lavish weddings." While many youngsters are now opting for court marriages, it's still usually the parents who decide on the format of the ceremony. ●



escape

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अब हप्ताको सातै दिन फरक विशेषाङ्क सहित



जब छ

SHRADHA BASNYAT

Nepal may not be internationally recognised as a great engineering nation but there is one area in which it excels. Bridges. This mountainous country has built more than 4,000 suspension footbridges.

And now Nepal is exporting this expertise to other developing countries. There are 11 engineers and three sociologists from Ethiopia and Honduras in Nepal this month learning how bridges are made in Nepal.

With 80 per cent of the population living in rural areas, in rugged terrain, bridges are of vital importance. Without them, isolated valleys and remote villages have no way of communicating with the outside world. Ethiopia and Honduras have similar terrain and socio-economic conditions.

The Swiss aid agency, Helvetas, has been involved in training Nepali engineers in suspension bridge-building for the past 40 years. Now, Nepali companies have their own indigenous capacity to build the bridges.

"Instead of people going abroad, engineers from abroad come here to learn how to build trail bridges," explains Jan Roukema of Helvetas in Kathmandu.

Nepali engineers have learned how to build high quality bridges on tight budgets and also how to place them at the most strategically appropriate locations so that they benefit the maximum number of users.

Sashi Shah, Karnali program co-ordinator of Helvetas says, "We don't just build bridges but follow a holistic social approach. We involve the community in the construction and planning and bring down costs."

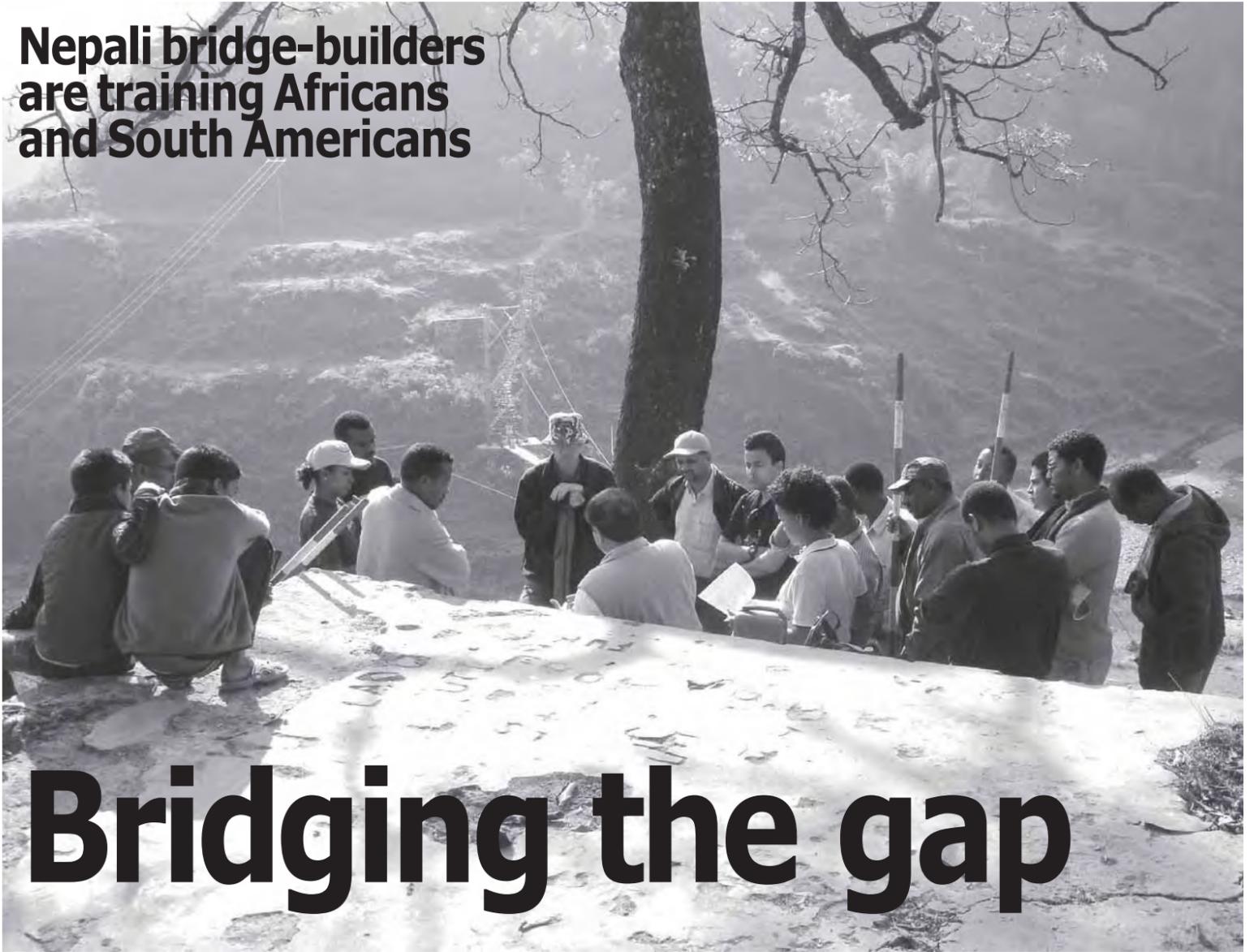
The visit from the Ethiopians and Hondurans is part of Helvetas' South-South collaboration project and will entail the engineering department at Pulchok Campus teaching the 14 participants both the technical and social aspects of trail-bridge construction in the four weeks up to 26 December.

The course covers design, planning and construction as well as ways to mobilise the community and seek government assistance. Five participants will stay on longer in Nepal and gain on-the-job field training experience.

Alem Shumiye, manager of the trail bridge program in Ethiopia told *Nepali Times*, "Ethiopia is similar to Nepal in terms of the need for footbridges, and we are learning a lot here."

Shah says Nepal still faces major challenges in bridge-building: governance, ensuring quality of materials and the brain drain. Last year's bridge collapse on the Bheri in which 50 people were killed was an example of what happens when quality standards drop. ●

Nepali bridge-builders are training Africans and South Americans



Bridging the gap

PB HAMAL

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INFRASTRUCTURE ADVISER A2

DFID, the Department for International Development, is the part of the UK Government that manages Britain's aid to poor countries. Our work is focused on achieving the Millennium Development Goals - the United Nations targets for fighting poverty that must be met by 2015. We work with the governments of poor countries, charities, and international organisations to find lasting solutions to the global problem of poverty.

DFID Nepal is responsible for managing the British Government's contribution to development in Nepal. Its objectives are to (a) support the implementation of the peace agreement, (b) to help to build a more effective and inclusive state, and (c) to promote inclusive economic growth.

The DFID office in Nepal now requires an experienced Infrastructure Adviser to work as part of DFID Nepal's Inclusive Growth Team. In particular the post holder will lead DFID's work on infrastructure, identified as a key barrier to economic growth and poverty reduction.

DFID Nepal is a fast moving environment that prides itself on being responsive to new opportunities. This is a challenging advisory position that requires a creative and pro-active adviser. They must have the enthusiasm and authority to build relationships with, and influence senior Government, private sector, civil society and donor partners to help address fundamental issues in infrastructure that hamper Nepal's growth and the ability of the poor to lift themselves out of poverty. S/he will need strong leadership skills in advising and influencing DFID Nepal and other donors on how best the infrastructure sectors can develop and good management skills to ensure effective delivery of DFID's infrastructure programmes.

Qualifications/Experience

- The post holder will have a degree (Masters preferred) in engineering, economics or planning, with a preference given to those qualifications that are directly relevant to the job description.
- At least ten years working experience in areas directly related to the job description i.e. policy, design, implementation and evaluation of infrastructure programmes in developing countries.
- Experience of working with the Government of Nepal and with Development agencies is also required.
- Proven ability to work at strategic policy and field implementation levels.
- Good communication and inter-personal skills and ability to work with people from a variety of backgrounds is essential.
- Commitment to poverty reduction and equality

Competencies

Candidates must be able to demonstrate being competent in a) Working with Others, b) Planning and Delivery of work, c) Influencing, d) Communicating with others and e) Analysis and use of information.

The position will be based in DFID Office in Kathmandu. There will be an attractive and competitive local salary and benefits package. DFID is an Equal Opportunities employer and appoints on merit by open competition. Applicants should be Nepali residents or have a relevant work permit to work in Nepal. We take a proactive approach to diversity in order to support positive social change in Nepal and are seeking to recruit more staff from excluded groups. Applications are welcomed from all parts of the community and we actively encourage interest from women, Dalits, disadvantaged Janajatis, Madhesis and those with a disability.

You can download an application form, diversity questionnaire and job description from <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/recruitment/> and send the completed forms to recruitment-nepal@dfid.gov.uk Only completed applications made on the prescribed application form and diversity questionnaire will be considered. If you are unable to access the forms contact recruitment-nepal@dfid.gov.uk Telephone enquiries after the deadline of the application will not be entertained. The closing date for applications is January 5, 2009.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Helvetas seeks candidates for the position of **Helvetas Nepal Programme Director**.

Overall Responsibility

The Helvetas Nepal Programme Director leads the strategic development and effective implementation of the Helvetas Nepal Country Programme. This position requires a visionary leader, who is an accomplished and credible manager with a high-level understanding of development issues in Nepal and the region. The position requires competencies across a broad spectrum of subjects ranging from development cooperation, strategic planning, acquisition and development dialogue to organizational and personnel management and financial planning.

The Programme Director is accountable for all financial, personnel and administrative matters. He/she will work closely with the Programme Coordinator at the Helvetas head office in Zürich, Switzerland. A close cooperation is required with the Coordination Office of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in Kathmandu and with other strategic donor partners in Nepal and the region.

Specific Duties

- Provide strategic guidance for the Helvetas Nepal Country Programme (HNCP)
- Implement the HNCP and take responsibility for managing and motivating a diverse country programme team
- Ensure implementation of the policies of Helvetas Nepal including gender, poverty orientation and inclusion
- Maintain and further strengthen networks and relationships with:
 - Central and local government
 - Strategic donor partners
 - Non-governmental development partners
- Negotiations with strategic partners and acquisition of new projects
- Maintain a transparent communication within Helvetas and with stakeholders to manage and further enhance the image and credibility of Helvetas Nepal
- Take a pro-active role in the development policy dialogue with the GoN and the donor community with reference to Helvetas Nepal's sectoral experiences
- Promote innovation, learning and knowledge sharing

Qualifications and requirements

- At least a Master degree in a relevant discipline
- More than 10 years of experience in a leadership and senior management position in development cooperation
- Visionary leader with a deep understanding of political and development issues in Nepal and the region
- Personality sharing Helvetas' development outlook and value system
- Motivated, proactive and enthusiastic individual showing judgement and initiative
- Excellent skills in human resources management, including the capacity to assess performance, consistently motivate people to excel and lead and motivate a competent team
- Excellent analytical, conceptual and programmatic skills
- Excellent communication, reporting and writing skills
- Excellent social and intercultural competence
- Track record of successful acquisitions
- Proven experience in financial planning, budgeting and efficient use of financial resources
- Fluent written and oral communication in English and Nepali
- Ability to work under pressure and on deadlines
- Strong interest to visit programmes and projects in remote areas
- Sound knowledge and understanding of the social, political, ethnic and economic fabrics of Nepal

Helvetas strives at an equitable work force diversity and gender balance among its staff.

Interested Nepali citizens who meet the qualification requirements are asked to submit their curriculum vitae (providing names and contact details of three referees including at least one recent employer) and a supporting letter of motivation in English to the following email address latest by January 15, 2009.

Attention: HR Consultant
hurdec@ntc.net.np

Only in case of inability to apply via email, use the mailing address: GPO Box 158, Kathmandu.

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

The Embassy of Denmark, Kathmandu invites applications from suitably qualified Nepalese Citizens for the position of:

Secretary to the Head and Deputy Head of Embassy of Denmark

Main Tasks:

- Handling of all telephone calls for the ambassador
- Assist with other work-related social functions hosted by the Ambassador
- Other tasks assigned by the Ambassador
- Handling the appointments and communications for Ambassador and Deputy Head of Mission
- Draft letters and correspondence for the Ambassador and Deputy Head
- Prepare invitations, receptions, official visits etc for Ambassador and Deputy Head
- Translation and Interpretation for the Ambassador and Deputy Head of Mission
- Organising of in-house meetings related to Ambassador and Deputy Head e.g. Utstein, advisors meetings etc.
- In-charge of the Embassy's contact list, e.g. ministries, embassies, media, donors etc.
- Practical arrangements in connection with official travel, missions etc. for Embassy officers
- Maintain the Embassy's library with the assistance of the Archivist

Qualification/Requirements:

- Minimum 3 years of working experience
- Possess a good command of English and Nepali (Oral and written)
- Knowledge about secretarial tasks
- Service minded
- Positive and dynamic attitude
- Ability to handle multiple tasks and to work under time pressure
- Proficiency in the use of office computer applications

Conditions of Employment:

- 3 year contract with possibility of extension
- Competitive salary and benefits

Embassy of Denmark is an equal opportunity employer committed to achieving a staff composition that reflects the social and ethnic diversity of Nepali society. We believe that social inclusion and diversity contributes to excellence. Low caste, under-represented ethnic groups, and women are especially encouraged to apply for available position.

Written application should reach the Embassy no later than 31st December 2008 and must include education certificate and two references. Only short listed applicants will be contacted for the selection process.

Phone calls on this matter will not be entertained.

Embassy of Denmark, P.O. Box 6332, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, www.ambkathmandu.um.dk

The search for quality on the web

RIZA BERKAN in NEW YORK

In the not-so-distant future, students will be able to graduate from high school without ever touching a book. Twenty years ago, they could graduate from high school without ever using a computer. In only a few decades, computer technology and the Internet have transformed the core principles of information, knowledge, and education.

Indeed, today you can fit more books on the hard disk of your laptop computer than in a bookstore carrying 60,000 titles. The number of Web pages on the Internet is rumored to have exceeded 500 billion, enough to fill 10 modern aircraft carriers with the equivalent number of 500-page, one-pound books.

Such analogies help us visualise the immensity of the information explosion and ratify the concerns that come with it. Web search engines are the only mechanism with which to navigate this avalanche of



information, so they should not be mistaken for an optional accessory, just another button to play with or a tool to locate the nearest pizza store. Search engines are the single most powerful distribution points of knowledge, wealth, and yes, misinformation.

When we talk about web search, the first name that pops up is, of course, Google. It is not far-fetched to say that

Google made the Internet what it is today. It shaped a new generation of people who are strikingly different from their parents. Baby boomers might be the best placed to appreciate this, since they experienced Rock 'n' Roll as kids and Google as parents.

Google's design was based on statistical algorithms. But search technologies that are based on statistical algorithms cannot address the quality of information, simply because high-quality information is not always popular, and popular information is not always high-quality. You can collect statistics until the cows come home but you cannot expect statistics to produce an effect beyond what they are good for.

The inefficiencies of today's search engines have created a new industry called Search Engine Optimisation, which focusses on strategies to make web pages rank high against the popularity criteria of Google-esque search engines. It is a billion-dollar industry. If you have enough money, your Web page can be ranked higher than many others that are more credible or higher quality. Since the emergence of Google, quality information has never been so vulnerable to the power of commercialism.

Information quality, molded in the shadow of web search, will determine the future of mankind, but ensuring quality will require a revolutionary approach, a technological breakthrough beyond statistics. This revolution is underway, and it is called semantic technology.

To achieve the level of dexterity in handling languages by computer algorithms, an ontology must be built. Ontology is neither a dictionary nor a thesaurus. Building an ontology encapsulating the world's knowledge may be an immense task, requiring an effort comparable to compiling a large encyclopedia and the expertise to build it, but it is feasible. Several start-up companies around the world like Hakia, Cognition Search and Lexxe have taken on this challenge. The result of these efforts remains to be seen.

But how would a semantic search engine solve the information quality problem? The answer is simple: precision. Once computers can handle natural languages with semantic precision, high-quality information will not need to become popular before it reaches the end user, unlike what is required by Web search today.

Semantic technology promises other means of assuring qualities by detecting the richness and coherence of the concepts encountered in a given text. If the text includes a phrase like "Bush killed the last bill in the Senate," does the rest of the text include coherent concepts? Or is this page a spam page that includes a bunch of popular single-liners wrapped with ads? Semantic technology can discern what it is.

Given humans' limited reading speed (200-300 words per minute) and the enormous volume of available information, effective decision-making today calls for semantic technology in every aspect of knowledge refinement. We cannot afford a future in which knowledge is at the mercy of popularity and money. ● Project Syndicate

Riza Berkan is a nuclear scientist with a specialisation in artificial intelligence, fuzzy logic, and information systems. He is the founder of Hakia.



POKHARA CITY.COM

The sky is the limit

Engineer overcomes bureaucratic hurdles to test fly the first Nepal-built aircraft



PRAKRITI PATHAK
in POKHARA

"This must be how the Wright brothers felt when their plane first flew," Bikash Parajuli remembers thinking when the ultra-light he helped build took off for the first time from Pokhara airport on 6 December.

For Parajuli, the first flight marked the culmination of years of planning, overcoming technical and bureaucratic hurdles to make Nepal's first airworthy aircraft. Called 'Danfe', the 400kg ultralight was piloted by Alexander Maximov of Avia Club and made six take offs and landings at Pokhara airport amidst cheers from hundreds of onlookers. Parajuli, 27, had been fascinated by the idea of flight from an early

age ever since he watched Twin Otters at Pokhara airport as a student at the Pratibha Higher Secondary School. When he was in Grade 10, he built a small model plane at the a Kaski district science exhibition but the model failed to take off.

"From that point I was determined to make a plane that would fly," says Parajuli, who enrolled at Pulchok Engineering Campus where he was a member of the Robotics Club. Along with fellow students, Parajuli spent three years designing and fabricating the Danfe. With support from Natasha Shrestha of Avia Club in Pokhara and guidance from their professor, Bhakta Bahadur Ale and another faculty, the plane was finally ready. The Danfe was ready to fly

but Nepal's civil aviation bureaucracy wasn't.

The government didn't give Parajuli the permit to make a test flight, even though Capt Maximov, who used to fly MiGs in Russia was ready to take it up. But the persistence of the Danfe team paid off and the permission for a test flight finally came. The Rs 2 million Danfe has tandem seating for two, has a ceiling of 6,000 ft and has a maximum speed of 200 km/h. But last week, the ministry gave permission for the plane to do circuits and landings at Pokhara airport not flying more than 25ft above the ground.

Parajuli believes that his prototype can be mass produced and boost Nepal's tourism

industry, and can also be used for rescue and patrolling. Enthused by the successful test flight the Pulchok Campus has decided to offer an aerospace elective in its engineering course. Given the right opportunity, Parajuli says Nepali students can compete with the best in the world because they have to overcome not just technological challenges, but also

lack of resources and bureaucratic hurdles. He feels lucky to be one of those rare individuals who gets to fly a plane that he himself built.

Parajuli wants to go abroad to finish his masters in aeronautical engineering and return to Nepal. He says: "It is better to be lion in your own country than than a monkey in a foreign land." ●

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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Symbolic Embodiment** by Bidhata KC, 23-29 December, 5PM, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 5553767
- ❖ **India's wild orchids and other plants** by Hemlata Pradhan, Siddhartha Art Gallery, till 1 January. Sunday-Friday 11AM-6PM, Saturday 12-4PM.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Short Tai Chi Course**, till 19 December at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal. 4410402
- ❖ **Christmas celebrations** at Dhobighat Catholic Church, 24 December. Nepali mass at 5.30 PM and English mass at 9PM. On 25 December, mass at 10AM. 5526732
- ❖ **Casablanca**, a film at Lazimpat Gallery Café, 25 December 6.30 PM. 4428549
- ❖ **Wisdom of Emptiness course** by Glen Svensson at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal, 23-24 December, Thamel. 4410402
- ❖ **Taichi Camp at Lakuribhanjyang** from 26-28 December, Base Camp Trek. 44 11 504

MUSIC

- ❖ **Idiosyncrasy Band** performing at Shital Restaurant and Bar, Manbhavan, near British camp, 19 December, 4PM onwards.
- ❖ **Christmas Jazz Special 2008** at 1905 restaurant by Possie & the fags, 1905, 24 December, Rs 400. 421506
- ❖ **Tuesday Melody** at Jazzabell Café, Happy hour 6-8PM. 2114075
- ❖ **74 Twister** playing live every Tuesday at Moksh, Pulchowk. 5526212
- ❖ **Robin and the New Revolution** playing live every Tuesday, 7PM onwards at Bamboo Club restaurant, Thamel. 470157
- ❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar
- ❖ **Live Sensation**, live performance by Yankey, every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency. 4491234.
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Sufi music** by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.
- ❖ **Fusion and Classical Music** by Anil Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, Sufi & Raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8 PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **Christmas festivities** at Kilroy Restaurant, 24 December-9 January, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Christmas Turkey Dinner** from 24 December-1 January at K-too! Beer & Steakhouse, Thamel, 4700043.
- ❖ **Christmas Special**, three-course menu, 1905 restaurant. 4215068
- ❖ **Nhuchhe goes Thai** at Nhuchhe's Thai kitchen, Baluwatar. 4429903
- ❖ **Christmas Goodies** at The Lounge, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4489362
- ❖ **Strawberry Etagere** at The Lounge from 4.30 PM-6.30 PM, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Organic Salad Bar and Steak** at Jalan Jalan restaurant every Friday from 6PM, Rs 650
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Pasta pesto passion** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Continental and café item** with live band every Friday at Vintage Café and Pub, Woodland Complex, Darbar Marg.
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Retro Brunch Barbeque** 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 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Kebabs and curries** at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- ❖ **Ily Expression Coffee** at Hotel Shangri-la, Lazimpat and Mandap Hotel, Thamel



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

Quest Entertainment



Jason Statham returns as Frank Martin, the ex-Special Forces operative who specialises in high-risk deliveries. In *Transporter 3*, Frank is pressured into transporting Valentina (Natalya Rudakova), the kidnapped daughter of Leonid Vasilev who is the head of the Environmental Protection Agency for the Ukraine, from Marseilles. Along the way, with the help of Inspector Tarconi, Frank has to contend with the people who forced him to take the job, agents sent by Vasilev to intercept him and the general non-cooperation of his passenger. Despite Valentina's cynical disposition and his resistance to get involved, Frank and Valentina fall for each other while escaping from one life-threatening situation after another.

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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The much awaited westerly front has just grazed far-western Nepal bringing light snow to the mountains. This satellite picture taken on Thursday morning indicates a stronger front will follow, building up atmospheric moisture as it moves eastward. Therefore, there is a good chance that this will break the 10-week drought that has affected central and eastern Nepal in the weekend or early next week. Depending on the strength of this frontal system, expect light snow and rain in the mountains, thick morning fog in the Valley, Tarai and inner Tarai. Valley residents should also prepare for a cloudy weekend.



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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

FLAMES OF FURY: Students from Thapathali Campus burn tyres on Tuesday to protest against the failure of the Public Transportation Entrepreneurs Association to drop public transport fares.



KIRAN PANDAY

LASSES-A-LEAPING: Young girls, dressed in modern and traditional outfits, participate in Sakela Sili, a Kirati dance form, on the occasion of Udhauri festival at Nakhipot on Friday.



KIRAN PANDAY

HONOURING THE MASTER: Veteran singer Bhakta Raj Acharya, seen here with his son singer Satya Raj Acharya, receives the Lifetime Achievement Award during the 12th Hits FM Music Awards at the Army Club on Saturday.



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