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#435

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Q. What comes first, politics or garbage?



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Refuse

It all started with the Maoists hacking off the legs of UML activist Bibek Debkota, near the waste landfill site at Tiniple in Nuwakot three weeks ago. Although the UML and Maoists are both in government, the highway to the dumpsite was blocked for two weeks by locals demanding better compensation for allowing the capital to dump 400 tons of garbage a day in their backyard.

And just as the government sorted out that problem, Debkota's neighbours resumed the blockade demanding medical treatment for him, employment for his wife and free school for his children. Local development minister Ramchandra Jha said his ministry could do nothing and said the prime minister should intervene. He added, "There is too much politics mixed up with

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Realism, then tourism p4

garbage." Meanwhile, life goes on amidst streets filled with stinking waste, like this view of Asan on Thursday. ●



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PICS: MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA



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TO THE FORUM

The word 'Forum' has entered the Nepali lexicon as the shorthand for a political party because of the spectacular rise of the Madhesi Janadhiwar Forum from a donor-funded NGO to the fourth largest party in the assembly in just two years.

It rode the wave of the Madhes Movement of the winter of 2007 to propel itself as the party that controlled the destiny of the people of the Madhes.

But this dramatic rise isn't matched by a commensurate institutionalisation of the party. The leadership is particularly faction-ridden (not that this is anything unusual among Nepal's fractious parties) because it is a party of defectors. Concerns peripheral to the livelihood of majority of the poor in the Madhes (the status of Hindi, and the contested One Madhes proposal) have consumed most of Upendra Yadav's energy.

But if there is one spectacular failure of the MJF in government, it is in relief of Kosi flood victims and rehabilitation of the damaged embankment, the highway and transmission lines. Two of the MJF ministers in the coalition are from Sunsari and another is from Saptari, districts that lie on the east and west banks of the Kosi. Six months after the floods, these ministers have to little to show to their constituencies and the nation.

The MJF convention in Birganj is evidence why: the party is so obsessed with internal wrangling that it can't get anything done. It even failed to come up with a revised political blueprint to uphold the Madhes agenda.

Differences over strategy appear to have been papered over. But fundamental disagreements remain between MJF politicians who have defected from the NC, UML and Maoists.

Originally, the party was conceived as a forum of like-minded politicians from different parties, but now that it has succeeded in

establishing itself as an important player in national politics, the MJF needs to grow out of the politics of brinkmanship and extremism.

The party will probably find that it fills the right-of-the-centre niche in the Nepali political spectrum and serves as a bulwark against Maoist influence in the Tarai. Its name notwithstanding, the MJF needs to transform itself into a party that is committed to protect the overall interests of all Nepalis, something that it is imminently capable of doing with its sizable presence in the CA as well as the government.

The Maoists will do what they have set out to do. The NC will try to stop the Maoists from doing whatever it is they want to do. The UML will be there to cheer the winner and share the prize. The games the Big Three play may end up delaying the framing of the constitution, so it's up to parties like the MJF, TMLD and others to rise above intra-Madhesi differences and keep the CA on track.



RSS

Total control

There is no doubt that the Maoist goal is one-party communist totalitarianism

One cannot be half-free, or half-democratic. The media can never be semi-independent. As the fourth pillar of democracy, the free press is an inalienable part of this country's pluralistic landscape and political future.

The irony, of course, is that dictators and demagogues through history have also understood this. Lenin, Mao and Pol Pot all used the free media to propel themselves into power, and then



GUEST COLUMN
Narayan Khadka

promptly turned their sights on that very free press that helped them get to office.

The disciples of Karl Marx don't seem to have heeded his high regard for an independent media. Marx had said: "A controlled press is a sign of dictatorship, democracy needs the credibility, its logic and integrity of the media."

Communist leaders throughout history who regarded Marx as their guru, however, saw a free press as an enemy of the revolution and an ally of the bourgeoisie. On 25 October 1917, the day Lenin overthrew the interim coalition, he closed down the independent newspaper, the Ruskaya Volya and confiscated its printing plant. Two days later, a

further 20 newspapers that were accused of being "undisciplined" were shut down, and the order bore Lenin's signature.

Here in Nepal, the Maoists left the media alone during the war years. In fact, they benefited from the media's objectivity. It was tactically important to allow the papers to report freely on the excesses of the security forces and to struggle against crackdowns on the media by the royal regime.

True to historical precedence, the Maoist attacks on the media have followed their election to power. This should not surprise anyone, they are just doing what their mentors Lenin, Stalin and Mao did. Lenin made workers the vanguard of his attack on the press just as our comrades use the excuse of militant labour to muzzle the media.

Nepal's Maoists have adopted a two-track policy: to pay lip service to the free press while their cadre use violence, threats and intimidation against journalists. The party is riddled with its own contradictions. But the buck must stop somewhere, and the top leadership has to take responsibility over the action of its violence-prone cadre. It can no longer churn out one excuse after another. There is a clear motive that links the Maoist party with most of the attacks on the media, and the burden of proof to refute involvement lies with the Maoists.

Unless there is a credible disassociation by the party leadership from the actions of their cadre with a public directive to stop the threats, it will be clear that the party's goal is one-party communist dictatorship in which there will be no space for the free media.

History shows us that communist totalitarianism, military dictatorship or dictatorial monarchies can't tolerate a free press. The Maoist model is the same as Mao's China

and its oxymoronic 'democratic centralism'. Although their revolution has adopted the principles of democracy and human rights as a temporary tactic, there should be no illusions that they haven't given up on their end goal.

Statements, speeches and actions of the Maoist leadership and cadre provide ample proof to back this up. There have been repeated statements that the revolution isn't over and threats to go back to armed struggle. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's public warning last week that his party would take over power by force if voted out is the starkest reminder of the true intentions of the Maoist party.

To be sure, the leadership is under considerable internal pressure from indoctrinated cadre which it brainwashed to follow a violent path to liberation under a cult of personality leadership. How to tell them that their sacrifices were just so the comrade leaders would sit in Baluwatar and Singha Darbar? The leadership knows fully well the dangers of a split and mutiny within the party.

Although the party is divided between hardline extremists and pragmatic moderates, the end goal of both are the same. It's just that one wants a short-cut and the other says let's take a longer road. One faction is trying to give the impression that it is just half-totalitarian.

The challenge before civil society and democratic parties in Nepal now is to understand that the Maoist attacks on the media fits a pattern, and the party should not be appeased.

Similarly, there are some in the international community who seem sold on Maoist slogans of liberation of the poor, discriminated and the downtrodden.

Some European countries, especially, are still giving the Maoists the benefit of doubt despite overwhelming evidence that they are against democracy and a free press. It's time to ask them some hard questions. ●

Narayan Khadka is an NC member of the Constituent Assembly from Udaypur.

LETTERS

OBAMA

'...To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West--know that your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy.' From Barack Obama's inauguration speech. Hope our PM takes note.

Saujanya Rana,
email

UMA

I was shocked to read of the brutal murder of the fearless young journalist Uma Singh "Flames of truth", #434. She has earned my awe and admiration at many levels. As a former journalist I am struck by her courage, passion against

injustices, and her exemplary commitment and dedication to freedom of the media. She died because she practiced the highest

values of journalism. As a woman I honour her for supreme courage in confronting the people who killed her father and brother. I admire her for continuing a crusade against impunity and injustice. She died serving the fundamental values of democracy: rule of law, and freedom of thought. There should be a Uma Singh Memorial Fund to honour those who follow in Uma's footsteps. This will be the best way to remember Uma Singh and her fight for freedom of expression.

Subhadra Belbase, email



● Thanks to Kanak Mani Dixit for a strong and insightful field reportage from Janakpur on the murder of Uma Singh. Uma did not die in vain, she went lighting the flame of truth for all of us to carry.

Gyan Luitel, Kathmandu

NEPALI ARMY

I support CK Lal's views on the army ('It is Nepal's army; #433) but I personally don't think this army is Nepal's army. If it were why was it fighting for the king when the people were struggling for democracy? If you say they were only obeying orders as they should then why are they not obeying orders now as they did then? Unlike one king in the past the orders being given now come from one-third of the seats in the assembly and 30 per cent of Nepali population. To be truly Nepali, the army should be above any

influence and follow what the elected government says no matter what.

Chan Chal, email

NEPAL'S PROBLEMS

I write this because I am very uncomfortable when I read the news coming out of Nepal. Power cuts have extended to 16 hours. This is the most treacherous thing to happen to a country. But that is not where our problems end, we have had dire shortage of clean drinking water for the past two decades. As a citizen I attribute this to mismanagement and bad administration. What are all our politicians doing? We are in the brink, and yet the leaders have the audacity to talk about a new Nepal. Nepalis died so that their lives would be better. It looks like the leaders fought for nothing but to get to power. They throw words at us every day, but where is the action?

D Gurung, Africa

Dismounting the tiger

Time for PKD to say what he means and take responsibility

Jaleswar had been the capital of Mahottari ever since this district was created about a century ago. It was from here that Bada Hakims, usually Rana cousins or their distant relatives, controlled the vast territory between Bagnati in the west, Kamala in the east, the Chure range to the north and India in the south.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

Mahottari's revenue was so huge that the office in Jaleswar came to be called Bhari Maal, or 'hefty takings', in official documents. During the Panchayat, the central government recognised the political importance of the place by posting heavyweight hardliners as Damodar Shamsheer, Lila Raj Bista and Shankar Raj Pathak as Anchaladhis of Janakpur. Attempts to shift the Janakpur Zone capital to Sindhuli was discarded once it was discovered that even the construction of the East-West highway had failed to move the weight of population northwards.

The sleepy pilgrim town of Janakpur thus emerged as an unintended beneficiary. It became de-facto centre of zonal administration and politics. Since 1990 the CDO has been operating from offices and residences built in Jaleswar during the Rana era for Bada Hakims.

Jaleswar has been seized with another existential crisis after 18 years. Early this week, protestors padlocked all government offices to oppose the transfer of some administrative functions to Bardibas on the highway.

Locals fear it's an attempt to shift the district headquarters by stealth and the lockdown is an indication of the statelessness in most Tarai districts where anyone

with a grievance can disrupt public services.

In Kathmandu, residents along the road to Sisdol landfill site always want some more privileges to let garbage trucks pass unhindered. Villages far away from the flow of Melamchi claim special concessions from a project meant for the capital. Almost every sector wants extraordinary exemption from load-shedding schedule with little or no concern for finding ways that can help reduce demand, improve supply or balance distribution.

There may have been many reasons behind Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's threat to revolt and seize power if any attempts were made to topple his government. For a Maoist supporter, it's difficult to see the difference between previous regimes and the one that is supposed to be theirs. The prime minister is probably under pressure to show that this government is different from those of Marich Man Singh or Manmohan Adhiakri in the past. He has to reassure his cadres that this indeed isn't their government but the one in the future is going to be truly Maoist.

The need to sound more radical than others could be another impetus behind Dahal's shrill rhetoric. In most leftwing parties, the leader has to appear belligerent in public to prove his purity. Restraint and modesty are not the virtues of a revolutionary.

Dahal sowed the wind during the insurgency, and he suddenly finds himself having to reap the whirlwind. He says he wants 'disjointed continuity' ('*krambhanga*'—a stark contradiction in terms that could only be coined by Maoists). If Dahal can say things like that and get away with it, so can everyone else.

So a communal bureaucracy in Jaleswar concludes that it will

be more comfortable in a town less dominated by Madhesis. If the decision hurts the interests of national unity, then that should be a matter of concern to the Maoist leadership rather than Home Minister Bam Dev Gautam. Similarly, Sisdol and Melamchi hold the capital to ransom.

Dahal's threatening growls are sounding more and more like whimpers of supplication. The antidote to his vulnerability lies in cultivating the leadership of his coalition partners and other political parties. He would be merely whetting the appetite of

hardliners in his party by promising revolutions that this country can no longer afford. Dahal has been riding a tiger. Till now, he was scared of getting off because it could eat him up. Now, despite the risks, he will have to dismount the tiger. ●

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Still a mess

The only hope for the Madhes is sensitive and sincere dealings by Kathmandu

Two years after the Madhes movement altered Nepali nationalism, the Tarai is in a mess.

Anger against Kathmandu was the defining feature of this period. Now, a mix of disillusionment, rage, helplessness and fear prevails. Macro politics in the region is more fragmented than ever, across party and caste lines. And at the micro level violence has become the only tool to resolve both political and personal disputes.

In terms of party politics, the MJF managed to prevent a split this week. All leaders realised they needed each other (Uendra needs Gachhedhar's Tharu base and JP's manipulative skills, and both recognise that Uendra remains the face of the Madhes movement).

All this is happening as the polarisation in national politics deepens. With inter-party relations improving somewhat in Kathmandu, the mood at Bhadrakali, Maharajganj and Lainchaur will continue to determine MJF realignments.

The TMDP has begun protests demanding implementation of the eight-point agreement. Apart from a few committed activists, people are in no mood to come out into the streets. But this is a chance for the party to expand its organisation and caste base, get its leaders out into the Tarai and occupy the moral high ground.

There is a churning among the armed groups. The government talks drama has had a few unintended consequences: intermediaries have made money, ragtag groups have gained legitimacy, some serious groups have been forced to introspect and the security situation has become even weaker with the police told not to upset the process.

There are mixed signals about the unification of the three armed groups. Goit, Jwala and Pawan's representative, Azad, did meet in Patna last week to get together but whether this translates on the ground is to be seen. All three are planting different versions of the meeting.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Jwala unilaterally issued a statement saying Goit would be a 'ceremonial' head, Pawan deputy chairman, while he would be general secretary and the military commander. Goit immediately refuted the statement. Pawan's other representative, Kautilya, who has been talking to the government, rejected the efforts. Either Pawan is playing both sides (talking to the state while strengthening the armed movement) or has a genuine problem balancing the contradictory impulses within.

If all this is not confusing enough, add the Maoist and Matrika dimension. The biggest challenge for the Maoists would be a cohesive Madhes. The present fragmentation gives them ample opportunities to play off one against the other. Control of the state apparatus has allowed them to build links with key actors, both mainstream Madhesi leaders and militants.

Matrika is a maverick but not a fool. He realises that there is a political vacuum in Madhes with people unhappy with the state, Maoists, Madhesi parties and armed groups. He wants to set up a party that would allow him to get rid of the Maoist baggage but snatch away their landless base, besides tapping into the loyalties of other Yadavs. While some believe this is an elaborate Maoist ploy to set up Matrika as a radical face in Madhes by distancing themselves in public, others believe Matrika is too much of an anarchist to become a cog in such a conspiracy.

And where does the Kathmandu establishment stand in all this? It is either totally insensitive or incompetent or is deliberately letting this fester. In their jumbo central committee, the unified Maoist party has less than a dozen Madhesi members. Think of the message this sends to the Tarai.

The presence of so many groups, with mixed motivations, will neither help the Madhes cause nor will it help the state assert its authority. Policymakers will end up prescribing easy solutions to increasingly intractable problems. Growing rage and discontent will translate into semi anarchy, ethnic and caste clashes, silencing of moderates and a continued call for secession from some quarters.

What Kathmandu can do is appoint a credible minister or task force for Tarai affairs that supervises developments there 24/7 - political grievances, local killings, micro disputes, administrative weakness, agreement implementation. Full time, sensitive, and sincere engagement with the plains is the only hope. ●



KIRAN PANDAY

Realism, then tourism

Instead of ambitious targets, the tourist industry waits for power, water and stability

KONG YEN LIN

Amidst jitters over the global financial recession, Nepal's hotels and tour operators say they are already seeing a downturn in business.

Their woes are global and local. The recession has hit Nepal's main sources of tourists from Europe, the United States and Australia. But fears of instability, the power cuts, shortages and labour problems have dented Nepal's image as well.

Osho World Travel in Thamel reaped revenues of Rs 100 million last year, but says sales have halved. Trip cancellations are coming in at hotels across the capital and in Pokhara.

"The tourism industry is facing high volatility, Nepal will start feeling the pinch in the next six months," says Mahesh Baskota, professor at Kathmandu University, "when developed countries catch a cold, Nepal gets pneumonia."

Nevertheless, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation has decided to go ahead with its Visit Nepal Year 2011, a campaign that aims to raise tourist arrivals to one million annually. But for that the current seat crunch will have to be addressed by adding flights, Kathmandu airport needs to be upgraded and the lack of investment in tourism infrastructure during the war years needs to be remedied.

"We are trying to establish an air service act to create more intimate connections between India and Nepal," Tourism Minister Hisila Yami tells *Nepali Times*. She says Kathmandu's

overcrowding has eroded its architectural charm. "The challenge will be to rejuvenate it and make tourists stay longer."

The ministry also hopes to add planes to Nepal Airlines, decongest Kathmandu, fly international traffic directly into Bhairawa and Pokhara, and make sure Nepal can deal with the numbers.

In 2008, Nepal received 800,000 visitors, up 30 per cent from the previous year. The last 1998 Visit Nepal Year campaign had an inflow of 500,000 tourists.

"I think the private sector is quite excited because we have tried to cut through the red tape and get things done," Yami says, "if there is capacity and viable routes, I want to let airlines add flights."

But industry players are skeptical. They have heard it all before from successive government since 1990. They say preserving Kathmandu's urban environment from decay has been on the cards for decades and needs a multi-sectoral approach. It can't just be a wish.

Meru Harsha of Shanker Tours says the government must first provide basic amenities like power, petrol and water to Nepalis before getting ambitious about one million tourists by 2011.

"If they can't even satisfy the basic needs of Nepalis, how can they take care of so many tourists?" he added.

Providing better transportation from airports and tougher crackdowns on touts are imperative as they create poor first and last impressions on tourists, operators say.

TAKING FLIGHT: Entrepreneurs are attempting to diversify tourism products by opening up paragliding as an adventure sport for the first time in Kathmandu valley.

Uncertainties about the peace process are also casting a pall over the spring tourist season. The bottom line for most in the tourism industry is that there should be political stability, fewer hiatuses and shutdowns. The three-day hotel strike in Pokhara did untold damage to Nepal's image, they say.

"If tourists were to choose among India, Nepal and China to visit they wouldn't choose us because there is so much uncertainty and unanswered questions," says Baskota, "we just haven't learnt from our mistakes."

Nevertheless there is still something to look forward to in the coming months, where tourism arrival rates are expected to peak. Greenwich Village Hotel in Sanepa, which saw 90 per cent occupancy rates last Spring is expecting similar or better returns this year.

"Business slowed down dramatically during 2002 to 2006 but has been picking up since 2007," says Operation Manager Bhuban Bahadur Baral.

Director of Airway Travel and Tours, Mahesh Adhikari also expresses optimism: "Currently, we're having an average of 50 to 60 airline bookings per month but hopefully the numbers will reach 150 to 200 during the peak season. This would be a critical period for tour agencies to boost earnings." ●

Growing investment

Nepal Investment Bank has opened new branches at Boudha and Hetauda. Both the branches will be linked through ABBS (Any Branch Banking Services) to all other 23 branches of the bank and will provide all standard services. An ATM has also been installed at Boudha.



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Breaking grounds

Gorkha Brewery will construct a new building for Shree Durga Primary School in Mukundapur to upgrade it to a



GORKHA BREWERY

secondary school. The Brewery will also provide furniture, drinking water, electricity and monthly salary to the teaching staff. The foundation stone was laid down by the Danish ambassador Finn Thilsted.

Defence up

Tara Services has partnered with Bit Defender, an international anti-virus software. Its sister organisation, Tara International will market and promote the 2009 version of Bit Defender in Nepal.

Info ties

Infotech Computers has become the authorised distributor of Taiwan based Elitegroup Computer System (ECS). Infotech will distribute ECS's motherboards.



Real dealers

Dabur Nepal organised 'Real Mango Bonanza Lucky Draw & Prize Distribution Ceremony' for its dealers and wholesalers. Surbir Dhajistha of Dhajistha Traders won the first prize.

In a mismanaged state

Since we don't implement our plans, problems mutate into disasters

If management is about looking ahead and carrying out actions today to prevent problems from coming up, then it's time to declare Nepal a mismanaged country.

Since 1951, we've had our fill of elaborately drawn-out five-year plans. But since we execute little of what we plan, problems mutate into disasters and we then get busy playing the blame game.



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

Even when the evidence of mismanagement is plain for all to see there is a reluctance to frame Nepal's broader failures in terms of management. Civil society pundits would rather use the euphemism 'failure of governance' than be caught saying that Nepal's same-old politicians have failed us as the nation's managers.

Almost 100 years after electricity was first introduced in Kathmandu, this nation of glaciers and rivers suffers from crushing daily 16-hour power-cuts. Why? When elected leaders repeatedly fail to plan for the rising demand for electricity, why doesn't that strike us as a man-made disaster?

Lanes meant for buggies in the Rana era are clogged as pavement-less roads today, with motorcycles jostling for space with cars and buses. The Valley's first urbanisation plan was made in 1972, yet we carry on as if



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crowded streets and squalid urban sprawl must continue to define our surroundings. Holy rivers have turned into open sewers. Yet we put the blame on politicians in general terms, but never make their lack of management skills an issue to consider when sending them back to the parliament again.

One reason why it's hard to talk about the lack of management skills is that management remains an odd discipline. Indeed, most otherwise well-educated Nepalis don't know what to make of it.

Universities may offer a degree in management, but rarely do they teach the nuts-and-bolts of management. The craft of management can be honed only through intensive, multi-year apprenticeship in the real world, just as it is in law and medicine. At best, business courses dwell on *functions* of management such as finance, marketing and sales. And the thinking is that if one takes a bundle of such courses, one somehow emerges as a manager. That is as helpful as saying that the best way to master swimming is by waddling in a tub.

Besides, when it comes to management, everyone thinks that their prescription skills are well above average. Even the self-conscious preface of "I am not a manager, but..." does not stop confident-sounding amateurs

from doling out patches to problems that require fine-grained judgment on multiple levels, on balancing resources and personalities with timing and results. With most articulate people thus assured of their own superior managerial know-how, honest, searching conversations about actions that achieve results for most Nepalis become rare in the public sphere.

This rarity offers an opportunity to smart young politicians in the Constituent Assembly to start seeing their career arc as being national managers. To reduce power-cuts, they should be asking: What have we learnt from previous mistakes? How can we effectively deploy large pools of capital to generate power within a few years? How much will it cost, who will get the benefits and how will we find the money to pay for it all? If plans go wrong, how will we get back on track? Who should be held accountable for the results?

Granted, asking those questions alone will not solve the problems. But they change the emphasis from discussing problems to finding solutions. And finding solutions to problems (i.e. good management) is what we should demand all the more from our politicians. ●

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“My heart breaks to see the country’s state”

Excerpts from the interview with human rights activist Krishna Pahadi, *Drishhti*, 20 January:

दृष्टि

Is this the republic you want?

We fought for a democratic republic to bring long-term peace. Even after the king was gone, the priority of the parties was to strengthen themselves, not the people. The people’s republic that the Maoists are talking about is against the 12-point agreement. This never-ending bickering has weakened their political strength achieved so far and has provoked a resurgence of anarchy. Now, the political parties are engaging in backstabbing that will only undermine the spirit of a true republic.

So whose fault is it?

The party that’s leading the government is encouraging anarchy. What we want is a collaborative and inclusive democracy, not the retributive people’s democracy that the Maoists talk about. Instead of utilising their power and working with other parties, the Maoists view their partners as enemies. But there can’t be an ‘enemy’ party. They have chosen to disregard the results of the election.

Are the Maoists headed for a downfall?

Yes. A government that betrays the trust of its people and cultivates enmity instead of accord can be headed nowhere but down. Their actions will lead to their own destruction. That’s why Prachanda looks so helpless now. People who have been charged with criminal activities have been given positions in the central committee. It shows that the gun still holds the upper hand inside the Maoist party.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Will the government draft the new constitution on time?

Doesn’t look like it. The Maoists haven’t even set an agenda on national reconstruction. Some party activists haven’t even thought about what the new constitution is going to look like. They may fear that revealing their agenda will expose their failings. Meanwhile, they distract us by fighting over petty details. Other parties are preoccupied with army integration. For most parties, the constitution and national reconstruction are still not a priority.

Isn’t the One Madhes demand an indicator of national fragmentation?

Only a few Madhesi parties want a united Madhes. However, a united Madhes is inconsistent with federalism because it will not fulfill what the Madhesi movement stood for. In reality, creating a united Madhes will only result in a shift from one unitary system to another. The Madhesis demanded for federalism, not for a unitary system. That demand was met. If they don’t realise this, they will lose what they have.

When will peace come?

My heart breaks to see the country’s state. We want political parties to become stronger but they are the ones causing conflict. The politicians themselves are fishing in murky waters. This is not my hopelessness talking, this is a call for a new generation of politicians to come forth. It’s clear that the current politicians can’t do much.

Why do you always dress in yellow?

Yellow signifies peace and harmony.

Dirty politics

Front-page editorial in *Rajdhani*, 17 January

राजधानी

The garbage in the capital has not been collected for over a week. Heaps of waste have become a common sight. It is impossible to stand the stench. The garbage sticks to the shoes of pedestrians and makes its way to people’s homes. The Maoists now have not only lead the government but also hold the key to the country’s resources. However, their inability to address the simple demands of 26 households at the Sisdole dumping site has forced the people of Kathmandu to live in a stinking hellhole. The government is so incompetent it can’t even ensure its people a clean environment. Kathmandu is a historic city and a world heritage site, but it’s now one huge rubbish heap. This not only shames the Nepali people, it also damages the image of our country internationally. What happened to the Maoists who once picked up brooms and cleaned the city?

Two-track

Krishna Bhattachan in *Naya Patrika*, 21 January

नयाँ पत्रिका

The present Adibasi and Janajati movement is waiting and watching. The movement has now adopted a two-track policy:

First track

If the Constituent Assembly drafts the new constitution ensuring Adibasis and Janajatis their rights including that of self-determination, autonomy, ownership and authority over their land, the country can head towards peace and prosperity. Those in the movement believe that their issue will be taken up by the Adibasi and Janajati leaders in major parties. If they are disappointed, they will rebel against their own leaders and parties. The formal caucus built by all the parties and independent Adibasi and Janajati CA members is an indication that their efforts will soon take a concrete form.

Second track

A section of Adibasi and Janajati leaders, intellectuals, party activists and CA members do not

believe that the CA will ensure their rights. There is growing sentiment that the government will not listen to them unless they burn tyres on the street or pick up the gun. They believe that rights are not given, but have to be forced out and this can be only done through revolution. If the draft gazette of the constitution does not guarantee the right to self-determination and establish Adibasi and Janajati autonomous regions, the present movement may take an extreme form.

Let’s hope that the government, parties and the CA will immediately work to address Adibasi and Janajati grievances and give them ownership.

Missing drugs

Tufan Neupane in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 14-28 January

हिमाल

The government increased the budget to buy medicine for free health care, but here in Dolpa the drugs haven’t arrived. A patient at the Dolpa Public Health Office, Chandra Prakash Budha Thapa says: “Nothing significant has happened in this last one year.”

The decision to provide free health service was a hasty one, taken without assessing support services, manpower and infrastructure, especially in remote districts. The government

provides essential medicines to health centres and posts and an additional grant of Rs 6,000-42,000 to buy the rest. Organisations like INF, UMN, GTZ and UNICEF also provide support for medicine in the Karnali. However, health posts here have medicines only for fever and headaches.

There is no zonal hospital in the Karnali. The posts of the health-workers are vacant in all the five district hospitals. Three doctors have been appointed to the Jumla District Hospital, but only one is working. The hospital has provisions for six staff nurses but there are only four. Lab assistants and radiographers don’t exist.

In Dolpa there are positions for public health officer, medical superintendent, doctors, staff nurses, family planning assistant, assistant statistician, dark room assistant and assistant administrator, but none of them are filled. Among the 14 sub-health posts of the district, four do not have assistant health workers. Kalikot District Hospital does not have a health education specialist or even a lab technician. The situation is worse in villages—the primary health centre in Kopal village has neither a doctor nor a nurse, an assistant health worker is running the place. In Chilkhaya, even the assistant’s position is vacant.



Take action against the killers of journalist Uma Singh

“Quiet, quiet! Necessary actions are being taken to nab the murderers!”

कान्तिपुर Batsayan in *Kantipur*, 19 January

संविधानसभा राष्ट्रिय हितको संरक्षण समितिको राय सुभाब संकलन सम्बन्धी सूचना

संविधानसभाको कार्यतालिका बमोजिम भावी संविधानको अवधारणा पत्र सहितको प्रारम्भिक मस्यौदा तयार गर्ने प्रयोजनको लागि नागरिक समाज, विशेषज्ञ र नागरिकहरूबाट संविधानसभा नियमावली, २०६५ को नियम ६६ बमोजिम यस समितिको कार्यक्षेत्र भित्रका देहायका विषयहरूमा नयाँ बन्ने संविधानमा के कस्ता प्रावधानहरू राख्न उपयुक्त हुन्छ राय सुभाब लिनु पर्ने भएकोले उल्लेखित विषयहरूमा आ-आफ्ना लिखित राय सुभाब मिति २०६५/११/१५ गतेभित्र यस समितिको सचिवालयको निम्न ठेगानामा आईपुग्ने गरी उपलब्ध गराई संविधान निर्माणको महान कार्यमा सहभागी भई आफ्नो सहभागिता जनाउनु हुन स्वदेश तथा विदेशमा रहेका आम नेपाली नागरिकहरू सबैमा समिति अनुरोध गर्दछ।

विषयहरू

१. नेपालको राष्ट्रिय हितको पहिचान र परिभाषा
२. सार्वभौमसत्ता, अखण्डता र राष्ट्रिय एकताको संवैधानिक संरक्षणका उपायहरू.
३. नेपालको अन्तर्राष्ट्रि सिमाना व्यवस्थापन.
४. राष्ट्रिय प्राकृतिक सम्पदाको संरक्षण
५. अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय सम्बन्ध
६. अन्तर्राष्ट्रिय सन्धि सम्झौता
७. राष्ट्रिय सुरक्षा
८. नेपाली सेनाको कर्तव्य र यसको सञ्चालन।

ठेगाना

राष्ट्रिय हितको संरक्षण समितिको सचिवालय, सिंहदरबार, काठमाडौं।

फोन नं. ०१ ४२००२२९, ई-मेल pnrc@can.gov.np

फ्याक्स: ०१-४२०००८४, ०१-४२००२६१, पो. व. नं. २००८९ काठमाडौं।

Tharu autonomy

We want a real Tharu autonomy, not One Madhes Pradesh

Federalism is a mechanism to devolve power from Singha Durbar to the traditionally marginalised communities across Nepal. It is an idea whose time has come.

Genuine federalism can end discrimination and oppression and uplift groups, castes, regions and classes that have been oppressed by Nepal's feudal system for centuries. That explains the attraction of federalism to the oppressed: they see it as a path to their liberation.



COMMENT

Rajkumar Lekhi

But as the debate on federalism begins, we are also getting regional entities interpreting it in such a way as to encompass maximum territory to the detriment of indigenous and marginalised groups like Tharus, Muslims and Dalits within those territories.

Geographical division is one of the elements in federalism, but it should ideally be determined by the peoples living there. For instance, Antarctica is uninhabited therefore self-determination doesn't make sense there. Federalism, similarly, is not handing over of rights but distribution of rights.

During the Madhes movement, the Tharu community felt left out of the struggle because their needs were not addressed. The Tharu Welfare Council had submitted a memorandum to MPs through speakers one year before the Madhes movement clearly stating that the Tharus and the Madhesis are distinct communities.

The Tharus are indigenous to the Tarai, and they are caught between Hinduisation and Madhesiation. However, the interim constitution incorporated the Tharus into the Madhesi grouping. Tharu CA members who should be in the list of indigenous nationalities are instead listed as Madhesi.

The Madhes movement started long after we had submitted a memorandum to parliament. After that we approached the

DISTINCT COLOURS: Tharu youth stage a sit-in protest in front of the parliament, demanding Tharu autonomous provinces.



KIRAN PANDAY

prime minister and the leaders of the seven parties affirming that Tharus will never accept Madhesi hegemony in the name of One Madhes.

The Tharus used to have their own federal state in the past. We had our own laws and the Chaurasi and Badaghar. Tharu culture and religious norms still exist. But these federal states were encroached and outside rules were imposed on us. Now, we want freedom, but we are being sidelined again by the One Madhes Pradesh proposal.

One Madhes Pradesh is sure to be a unitary system. It may be called federal, but it is sure to be influenced by traditionally dominant groups. The slogan of One Madhes Pradesh is another tactical ploy to continue with the centralised state system. Madhesi politicians assure us that they want one Madhes Pradesh ensuring rights of indigenous people within it, but we have learnt not to trust their assurances.

Meanwhile, the hill Hindu and Madhesi Brahminists are trying to maintain the status quo. Federalism is a relatively expensive system but it is the only path to devolution. Isn't the 601-member constituent assembly expensive? Yet, the assembly serves to be the first inclusive elected body in Nepal's history. The autonomous provinces themselves will ultimately find ways to run less expensive administrations.

The proposed Tharuhat in the west has only 25 to 30 per cent Tharu population, therefore it is not going to be practical. Some Madhesi leaders have proposed that Tharuhat include parts of the eastern and western Tarai. The name is not as important as ensuring the rights of the Tharus at this stage. We want a Tharu autonomous province where Tharus are in a majority.

The Madhesi high class has a share in

state power at present. The same class has a monopoly in the Madhes. If there is one Madhes Pradesh, there would be a Brahmin monopoly, how can we ensure the rights of Muslim, peasants, Kushwadiya, Kumal, Gangai, Jhagad (Urau), Tajpuriya, Danuwar, Tharu, Dhanuk, Dhimal, Majhi, Meche, Rajbansi, Raji and Santhal in such province? I wonder on what basis these communities would be slotted in a Madhesi community in the new constitution.

Federalism or autonomy by whatever name we call it, the major issue is to ensure the rights of marginalised communities. If we make one Madhes province in the Tarai, the indigenous peoples, Muslims and Dalits will again get only empty plates while the high castes continue to dine at the table. ●

Rajkumar Lekhi is general secretary of Tharu Welfare Council

A role for experts

Nepal has a 70-year old constitutional history. Writing the new one should be based on the foundation of the past experiences. We need to analyse the past weakness but also build on what worked and what didn't in the 1990 constitution.

Words like 'federalism' and 'secularism' have their meanings and connotations, which we need to understand. The meanings must be seen in context and what they mean for Nepal at the present time. Nepali constitutional experts need to explain to CA members as well as the people what these words mean. It is the role of constitution experts to make public understand the complex legal and technical



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

EXPERT OPINION: Constitutional Committee, the biggest committee of the CA, starts consultations with experts to draft the new constitution.

aspects of the constitution. They should be able to relate the constitution to the people with the help of political parties and media.

Experts should not have preconceived notions or political prejudices, it should be an open and transparent exercise. They need to do a comparative study of constitution making process, complexities and its characteristics implemented in various countries and explain them to the CA members and the public.

For that, it is necessary for national experts to have interactions with international experts. If foreign constitutional experts have direct interactions with committee members in the CA there is a chance that politics and historical complexity will

become more important than the constitution itself. The role of these experts is to adapt international experiences suit our country's need.

The most sensitive aspect of present constitution making is to settle the issue of identity politics. Pressure groups and lobbyists in the NGO movement have been involved in raising the demands. In some cases the demands are contradictory, and it is up to the experts to dispassionately study the contentious demands and assimilate them. Political issues were prioritised in the 1990 constitution, and this time social and ethnic issues predominate. It is the role of experts to explain and facilitate the settling of the complexities of constitution writing.

Weaving a



Villagers in Siddipur combine tradition with business to preserve a skill passed down through generations

Tara Maharjan works with precision and speed, weaving a straw mat. Sukul weaving is a traditional skill passed down through generations, but the Maharjans are now producing straw products commercially.



The head of the family, Ramchandra Maharjan, inspects the straw used to produce straw furnishings available on order. The straw comes from corn crops and is treated for softness and then coloured.



Measurements are noted on a chalk board for the different products made by the Thasi Recourse Mobilisation Centre. The template promotes efficiency and allows the five workers in the centre a standard to follow.

livelihood



TEXT AND PICTURES
BY CHONG ZI LIANG

A few strands of straw probably mean nothing to the average man on the street, but Ramchandra Maharjan weaves wonders with them. His deft hands thread the straw through lines of straw rope, quickly binding them together. With machine-like speed and precision, intricate knots eventually form and adorn the mat.

Villagers in Siddipur in Lalitpur have been weaving straw mats for household use for as long as anyone can remember. Maharjan's family has also been weaving mats, but he was the first to go commercial.

Setting up the Thasi Resource Mobilisation Centre five years ago, the villagers started selling the mats in the city. Maharjan is a French instructor in the French National School in Maharajgunj and coaches fellow-villagers in the skill of straw weaving.

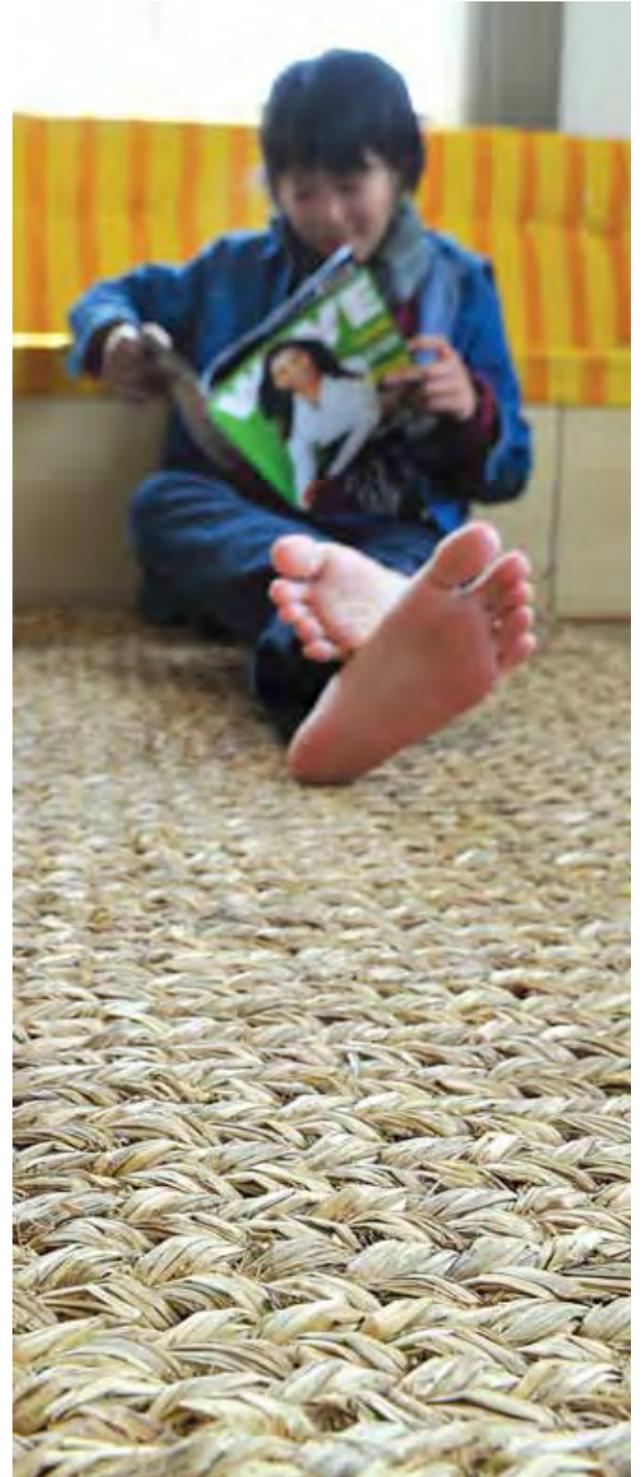
"Weaving straw is a traditional skill that is passed on to us, but now we are making a little money out of it," says Maharjan.

Since the market for straw mats is not big, the centre produces other straw items like doormats, penholders, shoes, coasters and backrests, to name a few.

Although the centre promotes tradition by making it profitable, there have been subtle changes to the weaving methods. The coarse straw is now treated to make it softer and coloured to make it more attractive.

Maharjan says some city folks are reverting back to traditional straw mats from carpets. The centre gets orders mostly from resorts and hotels. "Straw mats condition room temperature automatically," he says. One can even put a straw mat on the bed, a common practice in the village.

Villager Nawaraj Diyali says: "Siddipur has now a new claim to fame—our quality straw mats." ●



Sukuls are now increasingly used in homes in place of carpets. Maharjan says he is receiving many orders from resorts and hotels as well.



Straw weaving is no longer just about mats. Coasters, penholders, baskets and shoes are just some of the products the Maharjans can conjure up with simple straw.



KIRAN PANDAY



अब हप्ताको सातै दिन
फरक विशेषाङ्क सहित

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट
गजब छ!
गजब छ है गजब छ!!



ऐन त गजब!

To tax or not to tax

CHONG ZI LIANG

The government is planning a tax raise on private schools to improve education, but the affected schools are not giving up without a fight.

At the heart of the disagreement lies a five per cent increase in taxes on private schools that the government says will be used for public school reforms in remote areas of the country.

Private schools, already taxed as private companies, are up in arms over this proposal and say the tax is an extra burden to parents and guardians of their students.

Leading the protest over the tax is the Private and Boarding Schools' Organisation, Nepal (PABSON) that says private schools registered as companies were already paying 25 per cent tax on incomes. Under existing rules, private schools also have to give scholarships to 10 per cent of students. "Most private schools will not be able to handle a rise of five per cent in taxes," says Bhoj Bahadur Sha, President of PABSON, "This is a violation of a fundamental human right to education."

PABSON submitted a strong memo to the education ministry and the prime minister earlier this month. PABSON and other educational organisations took out newspaper advertisements last week condemning the proposed tax rise.

The architect of the tax is Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai, and he asks schools to trust the government to use the money properly to improve the quality of the government

school system.

"We guarantee it is only used for public school reforms," Bhattarai tells *Nepali Times*. "It will strengthen the public education system, but it doesn't mean the private schools should be closed down."

Acknowledging the

want to transfer it to parents. We don't interfere."

But private educators feel they have paid their dues to society by providing quality education to Nepalis, something they say government schools do not. To drive home this point, Principal of Advanced International Model

provide a conducive environment for learning, says Dhakal, who is also secretary-general of PABSON.

To upgrade public schools, funds spent on these schools should be more accountable for and properly spent. Dhakal feels the money should be drawn from other sources instead of cannibalising resources from the private education sector.

Rajan Suwal, principal of Khwopa College in Bhaktapur, agrees that the five per cent tax is a bad idea, "The government thinks all private schools are rich and families who send their children there are wealthy but that's just not the reality."

Bhaktapur is a model for cheap quality education which is subsidised by the municipality. Some private

schools here charge only Rs 50 to 200 per month in fees—unheard of anywhere else.

Even private school owners who are supportive of the idea to channel more funds to public schools say they are not confident that revenue from the proposed tax will be used for reforms in public education.

"Unless there is a mechanism to ensure the money is distributed to the poor areas, it is unlikely it will happen," says Dhakal. He adds that funds spent on public schools are already mismanaged, resulting in a severe lack of basic facilities in institutions.

Umesh Nepal, principal of Manjushree High School, has even harsher words on the five per cent tax. "This money will never go to the poor. It will only feed the Maoist cadres." ●

Private schools are up in arms over proposed tax rise on the private education sector

dissatisfaction with the proposed tax, Bhattarai says the five per cent tax on admission and tuition fee was taken up from recommendations from a task force set up to study ways to improve public schools. He adds, "It is up to the schools to decide if they

School, TR Dhakal, says 14.2 per cent of government school students pass their School Leaving Certificate at the end of Grade 10, whereas more than 70 per cent do so in private schools.

Public schools are also sorely lacking in basic facilities to

Vacancy Announcement

Senior Programme Officer Human Rights and Good Governance

The Embassy of Denmark invites applications from qualified Nepali citizens for the position of **Senior Programme Officer for Human Rights and Good Governance**.

The embassy is actively supporting the protection and promotion of human rights, democracy and good governance in Nepal, *in particular* through the human rights and good governance programme (DanidaHUGOU), which includes three components 1) Inclusive democracy, 2) Human rights and justice, and 3) Local governance.

The senior programme officer will be based at the Embassy of Denmark in Kathmandu. He/she will work under the direct supervision of the Counsellor for human rights and good governance and the Ambassador, and be part of a team of highly skilled Danish and Nepali development professionals.

Duties and Responsibilities

The main tasks of the senior programme officer will be as follows:

- Assist the Counsellor in facilitating and supervising implementation of activities in the human rights and good governance programme, including reporting and monitoring.
- As part of the above task to provide the Embassy's inputs to the implementation of the MLD Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP).
- Participate in the preparation and implementation of political dialogues on human rights and good governance issues and political party reform.
- Responsible for communicating with relevant authorities and development partners on programme issue.
- Undertake administrative tasks related to programme management, including budgeting, financial oversight and upkeep of project databases.
- Monitor general developments in human rights, democracy and governance in Nepal and advise the Embassy on appropriate actions.

Required Qualifications

- Advanced university degree (Master's Degree or equivalent) in social science.
- At least six years of relevant working experience.
- Experience from management of development assistance.
- Experience with local governance and decentralization will be an advantage.
- Good analytical skills
- Excellent command of English and Nepali (oral and written).
- Skills in report writing.
- Good knowledge of Microsoft office.
- Good knowledge of national and international human rights instruments, the peace process of Nepal and the national regulatory frameworks in relation to decentralization.

Conditions of Employment:

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

The 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. Under-represented caste and ethnic groups, and women are especially encouraged to apply for the available position.

Written applications should reach the Embassy no later than 6 February 2009 and must include education certificate and two references. Applications may be forwarded by e-mail accompanied by scanned copies of associated documents. Only short listed applicants will be contacted for the selection process.

Phone calls on this matter will not be entertained.

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Obamania

It's not just the US that's optimistic about Obama

JIM LOBE in WASHINGTON

Never in human history have the hopes of so many people for positive change in international relations rested on one person as they do on Barack Obama.

A new 17-nation poll released by the BBC World Service on the eve of his inaugural showed that of more than 17,000 people polled two out of every three respondents, and majorities in 15 of the nations, said they expected US relations with the world to improve under Obama.

"These are really big numbers, and they're on a remarkable trajectory," said Steven Kull, director of the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA), which helped design and analyse the BBC survey, along with GlobeScan Incorporated, a London-based consultancy firm.

"As a global phenomenon where so many people are looking to one person, this is probably unprecedented," he said.

Nearly three out of every four respondents, which included key countries in western Europe, East Asia, Latin America, west Africa, the Islamic world, as well as Russia, India, and the US itself, said the global financial crisis should be Obama's 'top priority'.

Half of the respondents put 'withdrawing US troops from



Iraq' in that category, while 46 per cent named 'addressing climate change' and 43 per cent cited brokering peace between Israel and the Palestinians, a significantly higher proportion than the 29 per cent who thought supporting the Afghan government against the Taliban should be at the top of the new president's agenda.

The survey largely mirrors the steady growth in optimism about an Obama presidency within the United States since his election even as the financial crisis that broke out has become increasingly serious.

In a *New York Times/CBS News* poll released Sunday,

nearly four out of five respondents including nearly three out of five Republicans said they were optimistic about the next four years under Obama, the highest level of optimism about a new president since the question was first asked in 1977 about Jimmy Carter.

No doubt the US polls, as well as BBC's 17-nation survey, reflect the unpopularity of the incumbent, George W Bush, whose eight-year tenure – especially the Iraq War, the abandonment of the Geneva Conventions for the treatment of prisoners and other global treaties and the aggressive

unilateralism of his first term, in particular – brought Washington's global standing to an all-time low.

Much of the goodwill reflected in the BBC poll may be attributable to the contrast between Bush's unilateralism and Obama's repeated emphasis on diplomacy, multilateralism and international law, most recently signaled by his pledge to close down the Guantanamo detention facility and ban the use of torture.

The latest BBC survey, which was carried out in most countries in December, included 1,000 or more respondents in each of the 17 countries: Chile, Mexico, Ghana, Nigeria, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Egypt, Turkey, Japan, Indonesia, and China.

The most optimistic views were found in Ghana, where 87 per cent of respondents said US relations with the world would improve under Obama, continental Western Europe (78 per cent), Mexico and Nigeria (74 per cent), Britain (70 per cent), Chile and China (68 per cent).

Particularly notable, according to Kull, was the sharp rise in optimism in the predominantly Islamic countries compared to last August, from 29 to 58 per cent in Egypt, 46 to 64 per cent in Indonesia, and 11 to 51 per cent in Turkey, whose

traditionally pro-US public turned sharply antagonistic with the Iraq invasion.

The only two countries where pluralities, rather than majorities, expressed optimism about Obama's presidency were Japan (48 per cent) and Russia (at 47 per cent, a major rise from 11 per cent in August where U.S.-Russian tensions reached their zenith during the Georgia crisis).

In terms of Obama's priorities, Western Europeans (about two-thirds), with the exception of Germany (49 per cent), rated climate change a top priority. Chileans (68 per cent), Chinese (65 per cent), and Japanese (57 per cent) agreed. By contrast, only 41 per cent of US respondents and a mere 18 per cent of Russians were of the same mind.

In what could bode ill for Obama's pledge to gain more support from NATO for efforts to thwart the Taliban in Afghanistan, US respondents were the most enthusiastic, with 46 per cent calling it a "top priority." While British respondents were close behind at 42 per cent, the notion was somewhat less popular among other NATO allies, ranging from a low of 13 per cent of German respondents to a high of 35 per cent among Spanish respondents.

On dealing with the financial crisis, Chinese respondents showed the greatest concern: 93 per cent called it a "top priority". Germans were next at 83 per cent, while only pluralities in India (47 per cent) and Nigeria (49 per cent) rated placed it in the "top" category. ● (IPS)

A breakthrough against hunger

The lives of the world's one billion hungry will depend on an international conference in Madrid next week

Today's world hunger crisis is unprecedentedly severe and requires urgent measures. Nearly one billion people are trapped in chronic hunger—perhaps 100 million more than two years ago.

World leaders will gather in Madrid next week to move beyond words to action. With Spain's leadership and United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's



WORLDLY WISE
Jeffrey D Sachs

partnership, several donor governments are proposing to pool their financial resources so that the world's poorest farmers can grow more food and escape the poverty trap.

The benefits of some donor help can be remarkable. Peasant farmers in Africa, Haiti, and other impoverished regions currently plant their crops without the benefit of high-yield seed varieties and fertilisers. The result is a grain yield (for example, maize) that is roughly one-third less than what could be achieved with better farm inputs. African farmers produce roughly one ton of grain per hectare, compared with more than four tons per hectare in China, where farmers use fertilisers heavily.

African farmers know that they need fertiliser, they just can't afford it. With donor

help, they can. Not only do these farmers then feed their families, but they also can begin to earn market income and to save for the future. By building up savings over a few years, the farmers eventually become creditworthy, or have enough cash to purchase vitally necessary inputs on their own.

There is now widespread agreement on the need for increased donor financing for small farmers (those with two hectares or less of land, or impoverished pastoralists), which is especially urgent in Africa. The UN Secretary General led a steering group last year that determined that African agriculture needs around US\$8 billion per year in donor financing—roughly four times the current total—with a heavy emphasis on improved seeds, fertiliser, irrigation systems and extension training.

Research centers such as the

International Rice Research Institute and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre provided the high-yield seeds and innovative farming strategies that together triggered the Asian Green Revolution. These centres are not household names, but they deserve to be. Their scientific breakthroughs have helped to feed the world, and we'll need more of them.

Dozens of low-income, food-deficit countries, perhaps as many as 40-50, have elaborated urgent programs for increased food production by small farms, but are currently held back by the lack of donor funding. These countries have appealed to the World Bank for financing, and the Bank made a valiant effort in 2008 to help them through its new Global Food Crisis



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Response Program (GFCRP). But the Bank does not yet have sufficient funds to meet these countries' urgent needs, and has had to ration assistance to a small fraction of the flows that could be effectively and reliably used. Hundreds of millions of people, in the meantime, remain trapped in hunger.

Despite the dedicated efforts of many professionals, the response to the hunger crisis remains utterly inadequate. The 2008 planting seasons came and went with much too little additional help for impoverished small farmers. African countries search endlessly, and mostly fruitlessly, for the small amounts of funding needed for their purchases of fertiliser and improved seeds.

Donors should pool their funds into a single international account, which we can call the Financial Coordination Mechanism (FCM). These pooled funds would enable farmers in poor countries to obtain the fertiliser, improved seed varieties and small-scale irrigation equipment that they urgently need.

The time for business as usual is over. The donors promised to double aid to Africa by 2010, but are still far off track. Indeed, during the past 20 years, they actually cut aid for agriculture programs and only now are reversing course.

History can be made next week in Madrid when the world's richest and poorest countries converge to seek solutions to the global hunger crisis. The lives of the billion poorest people depend on it. ●

Project Syndicate

Jeffrey D. Sachs is Professor of Economics and Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Serving it right

Ashlesha Lissanevitch, Mina Ghartimagar, Achal Sumsher Thapa (pictured), Milan Rokaya and Sandesh Singh Rathor and took part in the Under-14 (second group) category of Asian Tennis Championship that ended on Wednesday in Kuching, Malaysia. The championship saw over 80 young players from 38 countries compete for the cups. The five were selected from 116 players who participated in the Seventh Jaykar Memorial Junior Open.

Although Nepal didn't make it to the semi-finals the performance is quite commendable. Among the boys Sandesh ranked 14th. Milan and Achal stood 26th and 29th respectively. Ashlesha, whose strong forehand shots, height and skills in the court had made Nepal's foremost hopeful, made it to the 15th position among the girls. Mina stood 21st.

The Nepali coach and team manager Surya Bhushan Bajracharya feels the players are as competent as those from any other country. In the 2004 championship Ramesh Karki had made it to the semi-finals, his success was an inspiration to the newcomers.

Nepal played against Bhutan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kazakhstan and Malaysia. If Nepal had reached the semi-finals, the game would have been against contenders from Group I which include India, China and Thailand. India's Sania Mirza was also once a winner of the U-14 category of this Championship.

The performance of the players has boosted the confidence about the future of tennis in Nepal. "We plan on organising junior championships under International Tennis Federation (ITF). This will allow the players to achieve points required to meet international standards and will also help increase the popularity of the sport," says Manoj Sumsher Rana, president of All Nepal Lawn Tennis Association.

Five tournaments are organised annually in Nepal, which include one national championship, two junior, one open and one veteran. A national tournament is being organised this February.

Although tennis as a sport is yet to develop in Nepal, we do have a history to be proud of. In

FROM THE BASELINE: Ashlesha Lissanevitch, Mina Ghartimagar and Achal Sumsher Rana practice at the Satdobato tennis court before leaving for Malaysia to participate in the Asian Tennis Championship.

1982, Sarad Lama and SK Singh received rave reviews on their performance in the Asian Games held at New Delhi. In the 1984/85 Wimbledon, Sujay Lama was selected in the junior games. He wrote a regular tennis column for *Nepali Times* from 2004-2006, and is now coaching players in a US university. His doubles partner and also the Nepali co-ordinator at the ITF, Krishna Raj Ghale laments, "We were not able to build on the successes of the past."

However tennis does have plenty of potential because tournaments are held regularly for those aged 5-50 and over. In the ITF Veteran Championship (over 45) held in India last June, the team of ex-ministers Kamal Thapa and Madhukar Rana reached the doubles semifinals. Rana even made it to the finals in the over 65 category. ●

Suresh Raj Neupane

World's stage

The stage was alive with shimmering costumes and a powerful ensemble of music playing to a traditional form of song of the Sami people of Norway. Performed at Gurukul, where almost no one in the audience could understand a word of the dialogues, the play *The Frost Haired and the Dream Seer*, seemed to appear from another world.

The Sami are the only indigenous minority in Norway. For five centuries, the government assimilated them into the larger Norwegian-speaking lump to a point that their culture almost reached extinction. However, owing mostly to the strikes against a dam that the government planned to build in the late 1970s that would destroy Sami settlements, they regained a voice and an ethnic pride.

"Norway has one indigenous minority, Nepal has 60," said Haukur J Gunnarsson, director of the play. However, their approach to carving out an identity is vastly different from ours—and non-violent. Even though there are only 50,000 speakers of the Sami language, the Sami National Theatre always performs in Sami (with accompanying subtitles), no matter where they are.

Today, the Sami not only have constitutional rights but their children learn their mother tongue as a first language. Their national theatre is fully funded by the Norwegian government. ●



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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

REMEMBERING A MARTYR: Madhesi journalists shave their heads to mark the tenth day of the murder of journalist Uma Singh, in front of Singha Darbar on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

SUDDEN LOSS: Family, friends and co-workers offer condolence to talk-show host Indra Lohani at Pashupati on Friday. Lohani, who ran the discussion program *Bahas* on Kantipur Television, died of a heart attack.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

YOUNG BEATS: Nepali tabla players at a concert organised at the Rastriya Nach Ghar on Wednesday to mark the 38th birth anniversary of the late tabla maestro Atul Gautam.



KIRAN PANDAY

POWERLESS: Journalists attend a discussion program on loadshedding organised by the Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists on Sunday.



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Skullduggery in Chait

Just when you thought things couldn't get much worse in this erstwhile kingdom of ours there comes word from Jhapa of the **martyrdom** of thousands of chicken. This government deserves a break, there hasn't been a dull moment since it came to power with one endless crisis after another. Wonder what is in store for us next week: a plague outbreak?

The Ass was determined to write at least one **Backside** column without mentioning loadshedding, but it seems impossible. This week we have to share with you there in the dark some good news that there are places worse than us in terms of power cuts: the Gaza Strip and Goma in the DRC.

And we hear Karachi has 18 hour daily power cuts. At least in Kathmandu we know when the power is going off.



It's a good thing there are only 24 hours in a day. Because it means there can't be more than 24 hours of daily loadshedding. **Whew.**



We have to give credit where it's due. The government's wise (and brave) decision to put the price of diesel and kerosene on

par has stopped **fuel adulteration** for the first time. As a result, NOC reports that the import of kerosene is down by 40 per cent, while diesel import is up 60 per cent - mainly because of the use of generators.



The Panchangan Committee has decreed that next year, 2066, we will only have 11 months and we're going to be skipping the month of Chait in order to make up for the slowing down of the earth's rotation over the past two millennia. The **Gregorians**, who are much more precise about these things because they have caesium atom clocks, added a second at midnight of December 31 on new year's eve to synchronise GMT with the earth's rotation. Here are the advantages of a 11-month year:

- Government saves billions in salaries to civil servants and can plough the cash into populist programs
- There will be no loadshedding because NEA doesn't have to supply power for a whole month, thus allowing the Kulekhani reservoir to fill up
- We'll all be younger by a month

- At least we don't have to pay a day's salary in Chait 2065 for the Finance Minister's Robin Hood tax for the hare-brained Youth Self-Employment Scheme
- The nation saves hundreds of tons of paper because all calendar printers will only have to put out 11 pages
- The pejorative term for political turncoats, **Chaitay**, will no longer be applicable



In other countries, it is the military that captures power through a coup d'etat, or the opposition votes the government out of power. So, it's great to know that Nepal is the only

country in the world in which a ruling party wants to seize power. In other words, we have the only government in the universe that actually wants to overthrow itself. Where else in the world do you have a ruling party which has to keep clarifying at least once a week that it is not the party's policy to hack off people's legs.



Nepal makes it to the world headlines for all kinds of strange goings-on, but the latest is that this great nation of ours is now a major conduit for the smuggling of contraband human skulls. Oh yes, if you didn't know, the trade and transport of human skulls is banned by

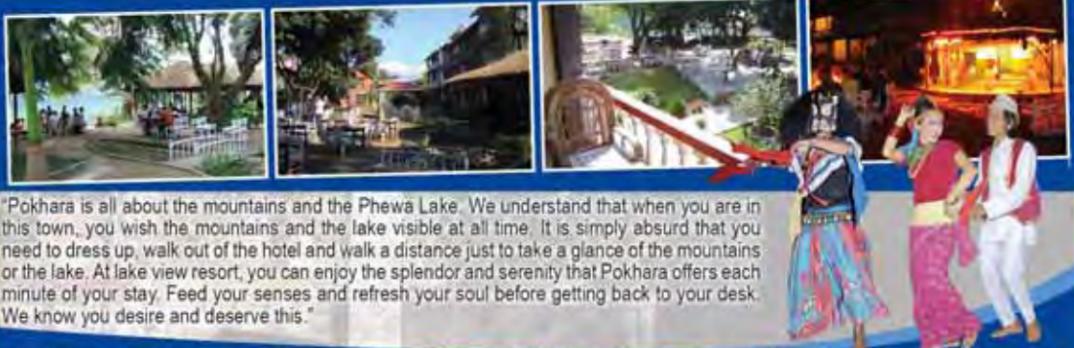
international law. It seems our customary officials were oblivious to this and had been allowing human skulls to enter the country unhindered across our open southern border to be put on cargo flights to the far corners of the earth.

Apparently there is a huge worldwide demand for human skulls as candle stands and India is the biggest supplier. But now that Indian sleuths will be manning the security at Kathmandu airport, looks like all this skullduggery is going to come to an end.



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