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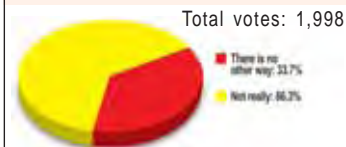


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Times nepalnews.com Weekly Internet Poll # 438

Q. Do you agree with the coalition's governance by ordinance?



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Q. The main reason the Maoist-led government hasn't been able to fulfill its promises is:

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KIRAN PANDAY

One country two armies

Maoist anniversary coincide with splits in party

PRASHANT JHA
in NAWALPARASI

The Maoists staged a show of military strength to commemorate the 14th anniversary of their revolution on Thursday in a camp in Nawalparasi at a time when splinter groups are threatening the already-rocky peace process.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal told his former guerrillas: "I am not here today as your supreme commander, but as the prime minister."

He said the PLA would now

"in principle" be directed by the Special Committee on integration, and he asked the former fighters to "accept this unconditionally...with honesty and responsibility".

Dahal underlined the need to keep the peace process on track by setting up a "new national army" and a "new people's constitution". Significantly, a banner on the stage read 'Federal Republic of Nepal'—the word 'Democratic' was missing.

Dahal appeared to be preparing his fighters to the

prospect that not everyone would be inducted into the Nepal Army. The Maoist anniversary coincided with new splits within the party. Dahal still controls his army through loyal commanders, but some ex-guerrillas attacking police stations appear to be taking orders from a parallel hierarchy. On Wednesday, Madhesi Maoist leader Matrika Yadav set up his own party and vowed to "restore the revolutionary Maoist path".

Past and present splits within the Maoist movement are along regional or communal

lines, and by elements within autonomous councils promised ethnic self-determination. Recent attacks on police stations in Khotang, Makwanpur, Nuwakot and Piuthan have been carried out by ex-Maoist groups. ●

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editors@nepalitimes.com
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Mission statement

Press freedom in Nepal threatened

THE ETHNIC EDGE

What is it about our political leadership that they can't give a speech without verbally eviscerating each other, predicting Armageddon, threatening to resign at least three times a week and making apocalyptic self-fulfilling prophecies about unleashing another war on the people.

The Maoists dictate the agenda in the CA, direct the government and rule the streets through the YCL, student and labour wings. And yet its leadership exhibits extreme paranoia. The reason could be that they don't control the Tarai armed groups, ethnic activists in the mountains are doing their own thing and the media is irrepressible.

After trying to face the threats head-on, Prachandapath strategists have devised a way to co-opt them. In order to wrest back control of the Madhes, they seem to have re-deployed the mercurial Matrika Yadav to form his own militant party to reinject the class struggle into that communal cauldron. The Mohan Baidya protégé hopes to consolidate the Maoist support-base among Dalits, Janajatis and the poor without antagonising Madhesi traders and farmers aspiring for a bigger role in national politics.

In the midhills, however, the class war is going ethnic. The Maoists are past masters in this game, and have concluded that ethnic activists aren't happy with the crumbs they have thrown their way. From the Tharu armies in Dang, Kailali and Udaypur to the Tamang force in Kathmandu or the Kirat battalion in the east and the Magarat militants in Rolpa, the militants bear the hallmark of Maoist mobilisation. Could the Maoist strategy be to contain ethnic activism before it spins out of control? If so, it is risky business: the whole thing could easily degenerate into warlordism.

It remains to be seen if the Maoist leadership will be successful in appeasing hardcore ethnic militants within their party and put the communal genie they unleashed back into the bottle.

That leaves the media. Here, a two-pronged strategy seems to be at work. A section of the media is being persuaded to believe that 'freedom' of the press is guaranteed if they agree to cooperate, or else. Another section is being lured by being shown the economic benefits of being on the right side of the government.

The Maoists received the benefit of doubt from all of us without even once attempting to show they really deserved such an advantage in the first place. Now, they are playing with fire by trying to set the ethnic agenda. Civil society and the international community must press the Maoists harder to complete their transformation into a fully-democratic political force that eschews violence.

Over the past nine years we have warned in this space that Nepal's class war shouldn't turn into a caste war. It's now much worse than that: there is a danger of multiple-ethnic conflict down the road.



The International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission visited Nepal from 5-8 February to undertake a rapid response assessment of the press freedom situation in the country. The mission was represented by ARTICLE 19, International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), International Media Support (IMS), International Press Institute (IPI), Reporters Without Borders (RSF), UNESCO and the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC). This is the statement the mission issued on 8 February:

Press freedoms in Nepal continue to face serious threat despite the hope that restoration of democratic rules would improve the situation.

The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) recorded a staggering 342 press freedom violations in 2008 alone, including a significant escalation in the number of physical attacks on journalists and media houses. Four journalists—Uma Singh, JP Joshi, Birendra Sah and Pushkar Bahadur Shrestha—have been killed since 2006. The International Mission calls on the authorities to undertake prompt, independent and impartial investigation of these and all other cases of murder and disappearances of journalists.

Another journalist, Prakash Singh Thakuri, has been missing since July 2007. Late last year the government withdrew charges against the accused, who was earlier released on bail. The International Mission also calls

for an investigation into the killing of Dekendra Thapa, after his remains were found last year.

The International Mission is deeply worried about the attacks on media houses, including Kantipur, Himalmedia, *Ankush*, Ramaroshan FM and the APCA Group. Such attacks on media workers, publications and property are unacceptable. Those responsible must be held accountable for their actions. Any substantive grievances over work conditions must be addressed through dialogue and negotiation.

The International Mission is concerned that due process is not being observed in the cases against Rishi Dhamala, Ram Subhak Mahato, Birendra KM, Manoj Mahato.

The ongoing attacks, threats and harassment of media personnel and organisations are having a chilling effect on press freedom. Free and open debate is being undermined with journalists and media being forced into self-censorship, seriously jeopardising the peace and democratisation process currently underway in the country.

A pattern in the attacks and harassment is discernible. Critical reporting is being met with violence and perpetrators go unpunished. The authorities are failing in their duty to prevent, punish and redress the harm caused by such attacks. The violation of journalists' rights is a direct infringement of the public right to information. Furthermore, the links between political parties and some of the perpetrators of these violent acts are a matter of serious concern and would indicate the acceptance, and possible complicity, of those political parties in the violence.

Conditions for women journalists, already seriously underrepresented in the



profession, are of particular concern as they are more vulnerable to attack and harassment, and are being forced to leave their work and sometimes to move away from home due to such pressures.

As of now, not one person has been convicted for a criminal act against journalists and media houses, and the International Mission calls on the prime minister and the government to follow up their commitment to end impunity.

The International Mission draws attention to the following six points:

- Guarantees of freedom of expression for all and press freedom must be enshrined in the new constitution
- The Right to Information Act should be properly enforced so as to give practical effect to the presumption in favour of disclosure
- The government should end control of media and introduce Public Service Broadcasting
- An independent regulator for broadcasting should be created in place of direct government control
- Criminal defamation should be abolished and defamation should be addressed only through civil law
- The Working Journalists' Act should be implemented and accompanied by regular dialogue between media workers and owners

The International Mission is convinced that all media stakeholders must rally around the common goal of safeguarding freedom of expression and urges the international community to support the national media community in its efforts to defend press freedom.

LETTERS

CHANGE

After a long war we had hoped that there would finally be positive change, but it looks like the government is pushing us back to the dark ages in more ways than one (Editorial, 'Citizen Dahal', #437). The energy crisis is just one example. What if we just stopped paying our electricity bills? Then there is the sinister attempt to muzzle the media to stifle any criticism. The Nepali people are now too alert to allow the media to be gagged. It is a pity that after a people's movement, sacrifice by thousands of Nepalis and optimism after the elections those hopes are being dashed.

S Ranjit, email

- Some Nepalis may have really believed the 10-year war and the people's movement was to improve the lives of the poor. You just look around today and you can see it was all hogwash. Your editorial calling on the

Maoists to publicly renounce violence is powerful (#437). The ruling party's mafia-style unions are crippling the last bit of economy that still survived. There is no doubt about it, the Maoists want a totalitarian regime. Anyone who harbours any doubt on that score (especially the Europeans) are looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses. The end justifies the means: threats, intimidation, extortion, murders. Any talk about a democratic process is just a way to buy more time. Nepal's democracy is under attack, don't trust a word they say.

Luba Svrčina, email

WAIT AND WATCH

When you assume that India is the key player in the Madhes, there is nothing left for national parties to do ('Wait and watch,' #436). This is exactly the wrong base the Panchayatis played their politics on and blackmailed the NC. Are you encouraging parties to line up outside the Indian embassy or take a plane to Delhi every

time the Tarai is discussed? Is that what you want the political parties to do? Or are you trying to scare off Pahadis so that the region ultimately becomes a part of Bihar or UP?

Kamal Kishor, email

DNA PIONEERS

It was good to read about the establishment of a molecular-based lab in Nepal ('New firm pioneers DNA testing,' #436). However, the swab samples of the dead chicken from poultry farms in Jhapa was tested in Nepal at the Central Veterinary Laboratory first and found positive. The samples were then sent to the UK-based OIE to reconfirm the tests. RT-PCR is the fastest way to test for avian flu virus among many others like HA/HI. These tests are available in Nepal's Central Veterinary Laboratory.

Sital Kaji Shrestha, Research Scholar, GADVASU, India

GOING UP

I am disappointed in *Nepali Times* for publishing what appears to be a sponsored

six-page promotion on housing complexes. As a neighbour of one of these upcoming 'iconic creations' I can assure you there is no attempt to develop them as responsible, integral parts of the local communities. There is not even a proper access road, the designs are not environmentally friendly, no attempt is made to develop the local economy. The colonies introduce their own supermarket, grocery stores, food delivery, clubs, and other facilities so these new neighbourhoods lead an isolated, parasitic lifestyle behind mighty walls, while the communities suffer increased water shortage, noise and waste pollution, blocked roads and loss of view. Condominium owners might have bought 'complete peace of mind', 'an enchanting lifestyle' and 'lush green ambience', but that is exactly what they took away from us neighbours.

Lucia de Vries, Dobighat

A town lost in transition

The capital of Mithila still searches for a purpose

JANAKPUR—In a town associated with the process of personal growth, childhood memories ride on waves of nostalgia. Until the late-fifties, this sleepy hamlet woke up only during Bibahpanchami—a festival to commemorate the marriage ceremony of Janaki with Ram.

All through rest of the year, priests, ascetics, and devotees took dips in its innumerable ponds several times a day and chanted sonorous prayers at neighboring temples even more often. The town was clean and garbage-free.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

The construction of the Janakpur Cigarette Factory

transformed the basic character of the pilgrimage town as chimneys replaced chimes of temple bells. Migrant workers began to wash their uniforms in the holy waters of religious tanks and the fish disappeared.

By the late-sixties, the once docile crows were as aggressive as the Russian technicians at the Soviet-built cigarette factory. The ubiquitous pigeons were driven away from the temple cornices. Janakpur was

quality of RR students anymore.

The eighties belonged to titans of vote-bank politics. Hem Bahadur Malla ferried truckloads of poor devotees to Pashupatinath, Bhola Nath Jha campaigned for building more Hindu temples and Yadavs began to coalesce to influence the election outcome. Crony capitalism created 'import-export millionaires' who continue to dominate social life in the town.

Winds of hope swept the town during the People's Movement of 1990, only to be blown away with the hard realities of nepotism and favouritism in the distant capital. A new class of fixers emerged who made a comfortable living through their connections with the centres of power in Kathmandu. Many have since emerged as NGO-entrepreneurs flying in and out of town. They were nowhere to be seen when one of the first and biggest anti-Gyanendra rally was organised here prior to the Rhododendron Revolution.

When supremacy of the people was restored and mainstreaming process of Maoists was initiated, hopes were high that the long-neglected Mithila would finally get its due in national life. But once again, the new ruling class refused to address long-standing grievances of Madhesis. Janakpur became the epicenter of the Madhes Uprising. Its success has since ensconced the NC nominee in Shital Nibas, MJF leaders in Singh Darbar and the TMLP stalwarts in the CA. But did the city and its residents get anything for their tireless efforts? Yes, vague promises from politicians and many more NGOs that seem to be doing little else other than perpetually 'raising awareness' of the masses.

Unplanned sprawl and urban decay coexist cheek by jowl. The Ramanand Gate may or may not be the biggest in Asia, but it certainly is a monumental waste of scarce resources when not a single public toilet has been built for the convenience of millions of pilgrims that throng to the town every year. Palaces of Raja Man Bahadur Singh and Ram Shamsher or sprawling mansions of Giris and Mishras wear a desolate look even as new houses are being built in all directions by remittance-beneficiaries.

When the Janakpur-Jayanagar Railway is extended northwards and the BP Lokmarg finally joins the East-West Highway with Kathmandu, regional commerce too will probably shift to Bardibas. Janakpur will then once again be a backwater and have to look for a new role and identity.

In myths mixed with history, the capital of King Janak was known for its devotion to the search of knowledge and that's a role this town is best suited for. Janakpur needs to revisit its origin and develop a Yagyawalk centre of excellence for higher learning in a tribute to the sage who propounded the theory that wisdom comes from mixing materialism with spiritualism. ●



now a budding industrial town with diesel-powered electricity, piped water, an airstrip and a highway—all of it built with Indian assistance. No arrangements were made for the safe disposal of household waste. Almost four decades have passed, but the town still doesn't have a sewer system or any form of solid waste management.

By the seventies, students from neighbouring districts had begun to flock to Ramswaroop Ramsagar (RR) Degree College as standards across the border deteriorated with the introduction of Karpoori Division—a category that signified 'passed in all subjects except English'. Right up to the referendum-induced euphoria of early eighties, RR was considered one of the finest centres for science education in the country. And then came the era of student politics directed, controlled and run personally by Anchaladhis. No one speaks for the

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Back to square one

Expect another Madhes movement by April

If the Integrated Services Centre fiasco has taught us anything, it is that the Madhes is back to the period post-January 2007 that was characterised by a clash between the state and Madhes, between the Maoists and Madhesi parties and between Pahadis and Madhesis.

The last four weeks have been a repeat. The government decided to set up the service centres as a supplement, not replacement, of the district administrative office for people living far away from district capitals.



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

In the Tarai, the decision had another motivation. The Maoists followed a 'highway strategy' during the polls and got votes from Pahadis in the northern belt. They wanted to

deliver a tangible benefit to this constituency, which is increasingly fearful of going to the southern border towns to get paperwork done.

The TMDP started the agitation. The NC was looking for an excuse to discredit the government. And Madhesi civil society, which has bitter memories of how the state has systematically favoured hill migrants, got suspicious.

After three weeks of protests, the state had to put the decision on hold. This in turn triggered a mirror agitation, largely but not exclusively by Pahadis, up in the north, demanding the implementation of the decision. The government was in a Catch 22.

What is significant here is the unstated admission by the state that it is difficult for Pahadis of the northern belt to go down to the district headquarters. This was an almost formal recognition of the communal divide. Instead of working towards bridging that gap, the state announced separate service centres which would only reinforce and legitimise that gap.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

This was not just an ethnic issue. There are hill-origin people in district headquarters and there are Madhesis in bajaran like Bardibas and Nijgad. In fact, even a TMDP member was leading the struggle committee near the highway asking for its implementation. Bardibas activist Nagdev Yadav says: "I am a Madhesi from the highway and I want this centre. The problem was the state did not explain the decision. And Madhesi leaders were opportunistic."

But few have time for these nuances, and the message that has gone out is that this is a Pahadi-Madhesi issue, where the Maoists and UML are on one side and Madhesi parties on the other.

Despite efforts by ministers and officials to clarify that this decision was not a precursor to shifting the headquarters, Madhesis did not believe them. They went by the inflated propaganda of the protesting parties and supported street protests in Jaleshwar and Kalaiya against the decision. This should tell Kathmandu as well as district administrations how low their credibility is, and how easy it is to incite anti-government unrest.

Instead of worrying about secessionist conspiracies where there are none, this is what the establishment should worry about: the state is so discredited that it can't follow through a decision. Having Madhesis as president and vice president and 200 Madhesis in the constituent assembly has done little to bridge that trust deficit.

That does not mean Madhesi parties are seen as angels. MJF is boxing itself in by getting too cosy with the Maoists while doing little for the Madhes. The impression is that power has gone to Upendra Yadav's head and he has become intolerably arrogant. While TMDP is appreciated for staying out of government, it is seen as a Brahmin club. And Rajendra Mahato doesn't have the stature or credibility, even though for the first time in years, Sadhabana is building its organisation. And there is only contempt for the armed groups.

Matrika Yadav wants to fill this gap. He has the blessings of the Kiran faction of the Maoists, with the Chinese giving a nod. Matrika's radicalism will make life difficult for Madhesi parties. He will dent the core Maoist base in Dhanusha and Siraha. But he doesn't have the ability to build an organisation—most of the present Maoist splinters in the Madhes are proof of Matrika's failure to hold it together.

That leaves us with a political vacuum yet again in the Tarai. To fill this all parties will compete with each other to be more radical. Their calculation is by the end of April, national politics will be clearer when the CA committees have their drafts ready. They need to plan for a movement around that time. ●



COSTLY BUSINESS: Lokhit Dental Hospital, which opened nine months ago, spent Rs 150,000 on a generator. "But it is too expensive to run the generators all day, so we run it only for four hours," says dentist Drabesh Jha as he gives nine-year-old Rahul Rauniyar a checkup.

PICS: KONG YEN LIN

A country's cardiac arrest

How medical staff cope in the power crisis

KONG YEN LIN

Despite a slight easing of power cuts, NEA is warning us to brace ourselves for more to come. The worst hit have been hospitals, which do not have independent power feeds and inadequate generator capacity.

The government has promised around-the-clock power supply for major government hospitals, but smaller private hospitals and their patients have been struck hard. Treatment has to be delayed, or worse, rejected.



BETTER OFF: Bir Hospital, the oldest and largest hospital in Nepal with a 119-year-history, has sufficient generators and UP Lights which starts automatically when darkness falls. Only the emergency wards, haemodialysis, operating theatre, ICU and post operative wards have 24 hours of electricity, says nurse Kalpalata Subba (second from left) as she inspects back-up batteries in the ward.



RUNNING AGAINST TIME: Nursing interns from the Himalaya Nursing Campus filling medicine at Teku hospital in the evening while light is still available. "The emergency lights can last five hours but there's not enough electricity to charge them," says staff nurse Madhu Ghimire (right).



NOT SMILING: Dentists at Smile Dental Clinic in Kupondole have nothing to do during power cuts. "Patients have to be turned away or treatment delayed while the power is out," says dentist Anita Sharma (right).

Service (not) included

We still don't understand the link between good service and revenue

Last week, when the Beed was taking a few friends out late one evening, it was shocking to see a city that should be gearing up to receive hoards of visitors in the next few years so customer-unfriendly. Restaurants were behaving as if



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

they were doing us a favour by even letting us step into their eateries. A five star hotel refused to serve us even when we told them it was still half an hour till their official closing time. The deterioration in quality of service in the hospitality sector in Nepal is of serious concern.

Everyone revisiting Nepal for the first time in a decade can tell the difference between the world class service people used to get and the crass service we get now. It's not just the fault of the workers in hotels and restaurants. In the bid to share out the service charge, the establishments have created a monster that they cannot tame. In the myopia of splitting that 10 per cent, both the establishment and the workers have lost the focus on the person who actually pays them that 10 per cent. Nepali orientation towards service is traditionally very poor. Look at our tax offices. The people who pay taxes honestly are penalised. Why would someone be willing to pay the highest tax

rates when one can find a way of investing the taxes to be paid over many years and get away with paying just 10 per cent? What is the additional service one gets from the state for diligently paying taxes? Similarly, when you go to the offices of the Employee Provident Fund, you are not treated as a customer. Like the restaurant owner, the state seems to think it is doing you a favour by keeping your money. It takes ages to get your own money back, and one has to bribe the official with tea money just to withdraw one's own hard-earned savings. The dis-service issue is everywhere. You take a cab and pay a horrendous amount that has no correlation with the price of

petrol. You pay a high mobile phone tariff to use your gadget as an antiquated pager. You pay for cable television and never get to watch anything because the cable operator does not have backup power. In fact, the state electricity utility, which provides power only eight hours a day, is just a backup power supplier. You pay the highest airport tax in the region and never get a trolley to cart your luggage. You pay for food products and the weight on the packets never matches the weight of the contents. You barely question why yoghurt prices shoot from Rs 40 to Rs 68 per litre in a span of a couple of months. When you run out of mains water because there is no electricity to pump it at the allocated time, you

patiently wait four days for a tank to be delivered, but it doesn't turn up. If the Nepali economy is to grow then businesses must seek to understand the wants and needs of the customer. If businesses and the government are to start generating revenues, they need to take care of the customer who holds the purse strings. Nepal Tourism Board as well as the numerous tourism bodies and hospitality entrepreneurs could start by taking a long hard look at themselves before springing into action. In this new republic, customer may not be king, but customer should be president. ● www.arthabeed.com

Reaching west

Laxmi Bank's has opened its 17th national branch in Bhairawa. The local branch offers a full range of services from personal banking to small business and large corporate loans.

Edu loans

Nabil Bank has been chosen as one of the acceptable financial institutions to provide education loans for Nepali students pursuing further studies in Australia. The list of institutions was revised by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship's National Office in the Australian capital, Canberra.

NEW PRODUCTS

SLIM THING: Chaudhary group, the authorised dealer of LG electronics in Nepal, has introduced the 14 inch ultra-slim flat screen television to Nepal. It is currently priced at Rs 11, 990 and includes a 48-month warranty. Customers can purchase the television at zero per cent financing.

GEAR UP: Home appliances company Whirlpool has launched a range of new products especially targeted for power cuts in India and Nepal. Their refrigerator retains cooling for up to 17 hours without electricity. Other products include microwave and oven inverters. Whirlpool is planning an aggressive marketing campaign in Nepal.

PUMP UP THE POWER: Him Electronics has launched a range of batteries called Himstar Maxx Power Extra Heavy Duty Batteries, which are available in three standard sizes- AA, AAA and D.

SAVE ENERGY: Eco Visionary is distributing Samsung Pelomax energy saving bulbs which consume just 20 per cent of the power of a normal light bulb and come with an 18-month warranty.



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Piuthan attack

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 10 February

भयाँ पत्रिका

The Maoist-style attack on the police station in Piuthan and the shooting of the prime minister's personal secretary in Kathmandu indicate that the state's anarchy is taking a new shape. Nepali society is just coming out of the brutality of the 10-year war, and violence has not yet abated in the Tarai. Those responsible for atrocities during the war are still free. There has been strong political polarization after the Maoists came to power. Now, there seems to be an effort to push the country towards civil war by the anti-federalists and those who define federalism only through ethnic chauvinism, anti-republicans and criminals, religious fundamentalists and revisionists. The government must act strongly against these elements and end impunity, otherwise this country will slide into chaos.

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 10 February

क्रान्तिपुर

If the attack on the police station in Piuthan had happened in the tense Tarai, not too many eyebrows would have been raised. But Piuthan is in the cradle of the Maoist revolution and the attack bears uncanny similarity to Maoist attacks on security bases during the war. There have been armed clashes in the Gam area of bordering Rolpa in the past year in which two Maoists have been killed. And there have been rebellious tendencies in this Magar-dominated area even before the Maoist insurgency. There are many militant groups and elements that want a shortcut to political power by adopting the same armed tactics that the Maoists taught them, especially in the Tarai. Most are former Maoists themselves, like Goit, Jwala Singh. Even Matrika Yadav now wants to quit his party and set up his own rebel group. And the Tharus are setting up their own 'army'. The Piuthan attack is not the first in the hills after the peace process: there have been similar attacks in Nuwakot and in eastern Nepal by Kirati organisations and by Maoist splinter groups all over the country who say the 'people's war' is not over. Such extremism, if it is allowed to continue, will threaten the peace process itself.

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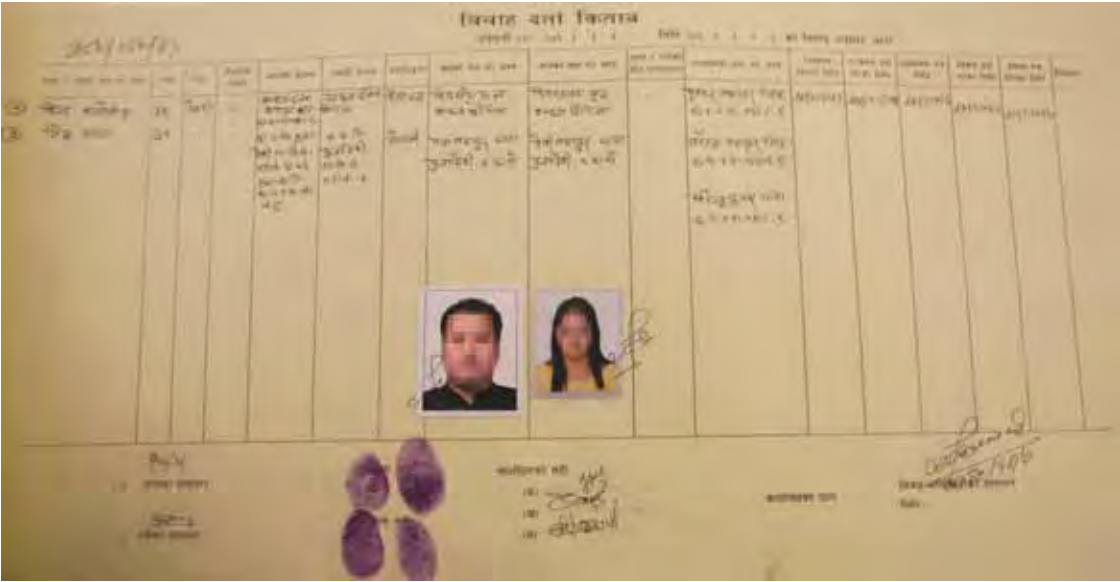
Annapurna Artha, 9 February

The private business sector, which had hoped to work hand-in-hand with the Maoist government, feels gravely let down. Business leaders now feel that even documents they submit to the government will be used against them. Although the voluntary disclosure of income source (VDIS) scheme has been welcomed, businessmen fear that if the Maoists lose the next election and enter opposition they will again have to battle the terror of extortion. The business community is incensed enough to get together to launch a joint campaign. They are asking: why should we pay taxes to the government when we already bear the burden of extortion, and the government doesn't use the tax revenue to improve services and provide security. Industrialists still hope that an investor-friendly environment will be created and the chaos will end. But day in and day out we hear news of abductions of businessmen, extortions and even murder.



Prachanda to International Media Mission: Don't worry, we will protect the press.

क्रान्तिपुर Batsayan in *Kantipur*, 8 February



Modern day slavery

Nepali women are paying brokers to be sold to Korean 'husbands'

Sunil Neupane in *Himal Khabar*, 29 Jan - 11 Feb 2009

हिमाल खबर

A *Himal Khabar* investigation shows that 'marriage bureaus' that advertise in the papers are selling Nepali girls to Korean men to be re-married to elderly farmers in rural Korea.

Two undercover women reporters posing as prospective brides were asked last month for Rs 500,000 as a facilitation fee to be paired off with Korean men who would take them to Korea. Some women have paid up to Rs 1 million to brokers to be 'married' so they can go to Korea to work. But once they get there they are sold to older men to work like slaves.

Dawa Sherpa, 22, from Nuwakot paid to be 'married' to a 32-year-old Korean man so she could go to Korea. When she got there, he sold her to a mentally handicapped elderly farmer. After she nearly ran away, she was 'given' to another Korean man.

Twenty-one year old Shanti Magar from Baglung paid Rs 1 million to a marriage broker in Kathmandu to be married to a 35-year-old Korean man two years ago, but when they got to Korea he sold her to a 56-year-old man who made her work in the fields.

Dawa and Shanti are among many young Nepali women who are so desperate to migrate to work in Korea that they are willing to get married to Korean men, little knowing that they will be sold to older, handicapped farmers who are willing to pay to buy young women to do household and farm work and provide sex.

This modern form of slavery has been seen with other 'Asian brides' in the 1980s in Japan and Korea with women from the Philippines and Vietnam, but as rules were tightened the trafficking has moved to Nepal.

The girls are trafficked in three principle ways. The most common is for a young Korean male to come to Nepal, marry a girl take her back to Korea and sell her to someone else for \$4,000. The second way is for an elderly Koreans to come to Kathmandu themselves, buy a girl from a Nepali broker, marry her and take her back. The third method is for Nepali women to pay a recruiter up to Rs 1.2 million to get a Korean work permit, go to Korea where she is blackmailed and sold.

Nepali newspapers are full of advertisements from marriage bureaus inviting Nepali women to get married to Koreans. Although the ads all say the women don't have to pay any fee, they end up paying between Rs 500,000 to Rs 1 million. The brokers then also get paid by the Korean intermediary.

The ads also make exaggerated promises: that the women can get Korean citizenship within two years after which they can earn lots of money and take their family members to Korea. The girls are then sold, resold, and sold again when they get to Korea.

The 'bride grooms' arrive on the bi-weekly Korean airlines flight in Kathmandu, get married in a church or a temple, get a 'no objection letter' from the Korean embassy and go back with a marriage certificate. They then go back to Korea and within a few months send back necessary

documents for the girls to get their visas.

"A Nepali woman, who has spent up to Rs 1.2 million to get married to a Korean, is re-married to a handicapped old man when she gets here. There are many cases like this," says Manju Thapa, a Nepali student in Korea. "There are even cases of Nepali husbands who have paid brokers to get their wives married to Korean men."

Ganga paid a broker to work in a restaurant in Korea, but the man she was handed over to started beating her up when she refused to be sold in marriage to a Korean man. Her visa has now expired and she is being blackmailed. "She and another Nepali women fled the village of Chung Sung Namdo to Seoul, but there are 22 other women like them," a Nepali in Korea, Bambahadur Lawati, told *Himal*.

The government in Kathmandu is either ignorant or doesn't care about the plight of Nepali women. A young woman from Khotang who was cheated by her 'marriage' broker filed a case with the police in Maharganj, but the investigation has never been pursued.

There are now over 300 Nepali 'brides' in Korea, but the Nepali embassy in Seoul says that since the Nepali women become Korean citizens after marriage, it is a problem that the Korean government should resolve.

A Korean social worker who was in Kathmandu recently, Cecilia Lee, said: "If something is not done, there will be widespread exploitation of Nepali women, they will suffer like their sisters from Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia have suffered."



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From the frying pan...

PURNA BASNET

When the comprehensive peace agreement was signed, Pushpa Kamal Dahal analysed the achievements of the 10-year armed insurrections by saying: "Because of our party's policy supporting self-determination and autonomy, for the first time in Nepal's history there is solidarity between the downtrodden, the Janajatis, the Madhesi and other marginalised communities."

Now that Dahal is prime minister and his party is leading the government, those words have come back to haunt him. And the Maoists have come to the conclusion that the demands for self-determination and autonomy by myriad groups need to be kept under control.

In a white paper he presented to the national convention in Kharipati in December, Dahal said: "The Maoist party has been weakened by Madhesi groups midwifed by the Indians." In January, the Maoist central committee meeting concluded that the party was being torn by conflicting ethnic and territorial demands, and it needed to come up with a new strategy to keep things under the lid. A Maoist secretariat meeting in 30 January in fact was held to identify the roots of the Madhes crisis and ways to settle them.

Dahal has himself been active in trying to resolve ethnic and territorial turf wars within his party, mediate between his Tharu and Seti-Mahakali cadre between supporters pushing for Kochila and Limbuwan and other potential flashpoints.

"We tried raise the issue of ethnic and territorial autonomy from the standpoint of class struggle, but if you take class out of the equation it can become very dangerous and that is what is happening now," admits Maoist central committee member Ram Karki.

The Maoist class war could turn ethno-separatist if the comrades aren't careful



SHRAWAN KUMAR DEB

One glaring example of just how ethnically polarised the Maoist party itself has become is the dispute within the proposed Limbuwan, Khambuwan and Kochila provinces in the east. The Limbuwan want all nine districts east of the Arun a part of their province, while the Maoists have set aside only Dhankuta, Terathum, Ilam, Panchthar and Taplejung. The supporters of the Kochila want a chunk of what the proposed Limbuwan province in their area, including the historic hills in Bijaypur.

A Limbuwan meeting in Dharan in 2 January accused the mother party of trying to politicise the issue and threatened to set up a 'Radical Young League of Limbuwan' (RYL) to counter the already existing 'Limbuwan Volunteers'.

In the west, there is a dispute within the Maoists between supporters of ethnic self-determination by the Tharu community and those who want territorial

autonomy in the Seti-Mahakali. The federal unit demanded by the Tharus includes Kailali, Kanchanpur, Banke, Bardiya and Dang, but Kailali and Kanchanpur is also claimed by Seti-Mahakali supporters. The dispute has already cost the life of journalist JP Joshi who wrote an article for the Maoist *Janadisha* newspaper arguing against an ethnic Tharuwan enclave. Joshi was disappeared in November and is believed to have been killed.

Seti-Mahakali supporters are led by central committee member and Maoist Labour Minister Lekh Raj Bhatt. He accuses Tharu rebel Laxman Chaudhary ('Roshan') of trying to incite ethnic hatred. Roshan has left the Maoists and now wants a 'Tharuhat' province that includes not just the western districts but all Tarai districts between Jhapa to Kanchanpur. For this, his 'Tharu Army' has started staging march pasts with youth dressed in combat fatigues.

The Tharuhat demand is in direct

collision course with the Madhesi demand for One Madhes. In fact, the various Madhesi militant groups were all once Maoists and it was they who first raised the One Madhes demand. They represent the first ethno-regional based split of the Maoist party two years ago. But when the MJF and others championed that slogan, the Maoists at election time countered with a proposal for three linguistic-based sub-provinces in the eastern Tarai: Kochila, Mithila and Bhojpur. The Maoist leadership is now worried about former minister Matrika Yadav, who announced his own Madhesi party this week.

In fact, all 13 ethnic federal units proposed by the Maoists are already mired in dispute. There is a tussle between Maoists who want a Newar province in Kathmandu Valley and Tamang supporters over who should get Dolakha and Sindhupalchok. The Tamangs want Dhulikhel as their capital. Even though the Magarat and Tamuwan are relatively quite, there is a brewing controversy over where Tanahu should belong.

It now looks like the Maoists are having second thoughts about their strategy of promoting ethnic self-determination and autonomy. Admits Ram Karki, "Originally, we had used guarantees of self-determination and autonomy to bring the oppressed ethnicities into the revolution." The Maoists are now trying to forge inter-party caucuses of various ethnic groups to defuse the crisis.

Within the Maoists there is disagreement between those who warn that the class war is in danger of turning into a multi-ethnic conflict, while others seem determined to fan the flames. ●

With reporting by Somnath Bastola in Sunsari, Dirgharaj Upadhyay in Kailali, and Shrawan Deb in Saptari

Federalism isn't a zero sum game

The solution is to go for a compromise mixed-model of federalism

Federalism is the most hotly debated, and most misunderstood, issue of the current constitution-making process. Political parties, pressure groups and individuals are coming up with their own competing federalist models. What complicates things is that the politics of identity is difficult to

In a country like ours where there are many castes, religions, cultures and geographic regions, there has to be more than one criteria to create federal units. Demarcating federal units based on geography or ethnicity alone would be neither workable nor acceptable.

Those who proposed provinces on the basis of ethnicity argue that the size of the population is not important. But such a proposal would be difficult to implement because of overlapping ethnic composition of proposed provinces.

Alternatively, those who propose a geographical demarcation have proposed mountain, hill and Tarai provinces. The problem with this is that there is ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and geographical diversity within these regions.

The solution is a mixed model. For example it would be workable to base Limbuwan, Khambuwan, Tamsaling,

Nepa:Mandal, Tamuwan, Magarat and Tharuhat on ethnicity while Mithila-Tharu and Bhojpuri-Abadhi could be based on language and Khasan and West Khasan on geography.

What's more, there are regions without any specific geographical distinction, with scattered castes and communities for whom we can adopt non-

geographical provinces to ensure their representation in the federal government. This should be done to ensure representatives from Dalit communities.

But these decisions should be based on a scientific study and survey of castes, sub-castes and an updated status of indigenous nationalities. The decision should consider their settlements, historical background, geographic situation, linguistic, social, cultural and religious status as well as availability of natural resources. Besides, the final decision should be made only

after consulting with the stakeholders so they can make informed choice and agree on a solution.

Kathmandu is not only the country's capital but also it also represents the unitary central system. In a federal structure it should be purely an administrative unit which should be neutral and non-political.

The right to self-determination of federal units should be understood as regional ethnic autonomy to develop political, economic, social and cultural rights while keeping national unity, sovereignty and regional integrity intact.

The main purpose of the new constitution is to transform Nepal from a centralised unitary state to a federal republic. The challenge is to reconcile competing demands in a spirit of compromise. This is not a zero-sum game, everyone should win and learn to accept alternatives. Today's real issue is to make the state structures pro-people so that Nepalis can take command of their own destiny and improve their living standards. ●



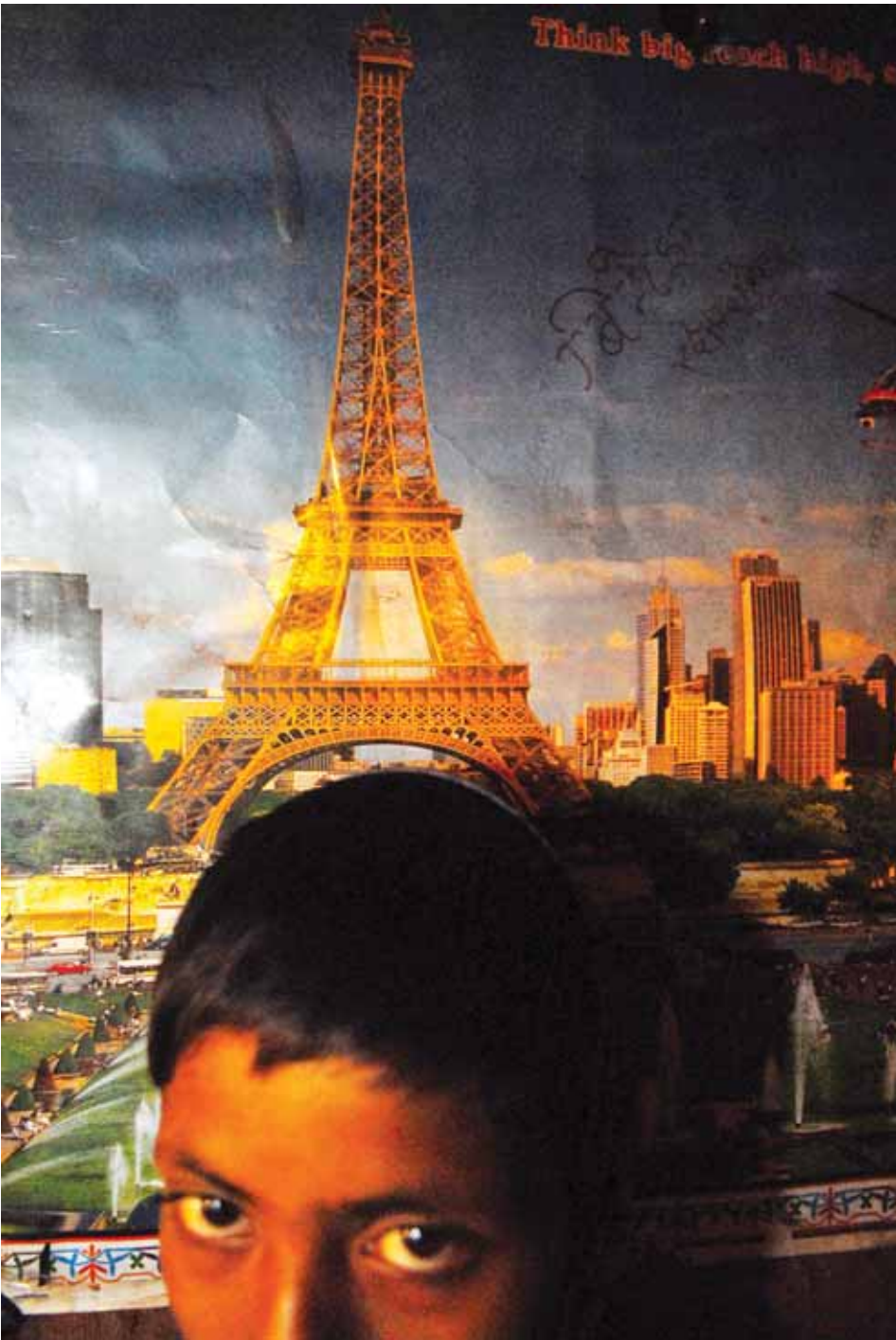
COMMENT
Pari Thapa

reconcile with Nepal's multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural and topographically diverse country.

Everyone knows that indigenous groups, women, Dalits and the Tarai communities have been historically marginalised by the state. Since April, voices calling for inclusion, participation and proportional representation in state policy have been raised. Most of the proposals for a federal structure are based on ethnicity, while there are counter-proposals for including not just ethnicity, but languages, territory and natural resources.



Source: The new structure of the country presented at the Seventh Convention of the Unified Maoists in Janakpur, 2009.



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HOPE FOR SALE: (l-r) Some of the boys harbour ambitions of earning enough money to leave the trade and seek better opportunities overseas.

Gobinda sells cotton candy daily in front of the Jawalakhel Zoo.

With their tall candy racks, these boys are hard to miss around town.



Sweet dreams

TEXT and PICTURES by KONG YEN LIN

It's 1AM and Kathmandu is asleep. But inside a small room in Nardebi, six boys are hard at work manufacturing cotton candy.

The pink candy floss looks fluorescent in the dim light as one boy tosses dyed sugar powder into the machine while another twirls wisps of candy with two sticks like an expert knitter. Some boys pack the candy into plastic bags while others fasten the end products on a clothesline hanging across to a connected bedroom.

The boys are aged 9-13 and are from Rautahat. They were sent to Kathmandu by their parents to look for work to supplement the family income. Due to load shedding, they have no choice but to wake up at irregular hours to prepare the candy floss.

Kids selling candy floss work 18 hours a day for their future

A fellow villager, Dinesh Yadav, owns the 'factory' and takes charge of food, lodging and allowances for the boys. When he finished college, he bought a cotton candy machine in India and launched a small business venture to support his family here.

At dawn, the boys prepare and eat their meals before leaving for work with about 60 candy floss packets dangling from a stick. Priced at Rs 10 each, the packets sell fast, especially during festivals. Regardless of the sales, the boys receive fixed monthly wages: the younger ones earn Rs 1, 500 and older ones up to Rs 2, 500.

Some of the boys have spent almost three years away from their families and are homesick. But their optimism for the future helps chase the blues away. Some are ambitions to work in a clothes factory to fund their education.

Says 13-year-old Gopal Sah from Kesaraiya: "I hope to earn enough money to work in India some day." ●

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Rebel rebellion

Danger not just to the peace process, but of a brewing ethnic conflict

ANALYSIS by J B PUN

The attack on the police post at Syaulibang in Piuthan on the night of 7 February was reminiscent of the war years. The raid was timed for the 14th anniversary of the start of the insurgency, and was a reminder of how close this country is to an ethnic conflict.

Dissent within the Maoists has been brewing in Rolpa ever since the ceasefire. Two Maoist politicians were killed in Gam during elections last year. Even today, nothing much happens in this eastern region of Rolpa without the permission of local Maoists.

The Piuthan attack is also the latest in a series of raids on police posts in Nuwakot, Makwanpur and Khotang in which weapons were captured and local ethnic splinter groups of the Maoists have been involved. In Piuthan, M16s were used and a policeman on sentry duty was killed.

The danger here is not just of a breakdown of the ceasefire, but of igniting an ethnic conflict.

The Maoists encouraged the

Magars of the neglected mid-western hills to lay down their lives for liberation and self-determination. It was with crucial support of marginalised ethnic groups that the Maoists waged war, won the election and are now in government in Kathmandu. Now, these ethnicities feel they were used as cannon fodder and that their own party in government hasn't shown much interest in redressing past neglect of the midwestern hills where the revolution was born.

At one level, these dissident former guerrillas are inspired by hardline leaders in the Maoist central committee, who have their own ideological disagreements with the party leadership. But at another level, they are working within the ethnic state councils that the Maoists set up during the war and used as effective vote-gathering mechanisms during the election by promising autonomy. Other dissatisfied combatants have taken to organised crime and are involved in extortion, murder and kidnappings.

Ethnic-based splits within the Maoist movement aren't new.



KIRAN PANDAY

Nearly all the Madhesi militant groups in the Tarai are former Maoists. The Limbuwan and Khambuwan unrest in the east is also steered by former Maoists. The Tharu groups in the west have set up their own army after splitting off from the Maoists. All of them are using the same slogans and military tactics that the Maoists taught them during the war.

The Maoist-led government at the centre doesn't seem to know how to deal with the many brewing mutinies. There are now more than two dozen armed groups in the Tarai alone that are putting pressure on the government with competing demands for autonomy and representation.

The Maoists, weakened in the Tarai by the Madhes movement and the continued militancy, don't know how to react. And

their own Madhesi leader, Matrika Yadav, has split to set up his own Maoist party championing the cause of the downtrodden in the Tarai. There are some who say this is an "artificial" split and that the Maoists want to wrest back control over the eastern Tarai by getting Yadav to set up an even more radical militant force. But a new revolutionary Madhesi party has already been set up by a former YCL from Lumbini, Rahul.

Ex-Maoist minister, Roshan Tharu is mobilising Tharu youth to protest against the proposal for a united Madhes and for a separate Tharu state. Roshan has not returned the weapons that he had when he separated from the Maoists. The Tharu community is the largest ethnic minority in the Tarai and the fourth largest ethnic group in the country.

The attack in Piuthan came at

a time when the Maoists in government seem unable to deal with the rising discontent within its own ranks. Initial evidence shows the involvement of ex-Maoist commander Tekbir Gharti Magar in the attack at Syaulibang. The tactics used and the captured assault rifles point the finger at Rolpa's rebel remnants.

Last month, there were two armed attacks at police stations in Hetauda within a week. In Khotang, a police station was attacked in November and arms looted. Reports say the attackers included combatants from UNMIN-supervised cantonments which have become hotbeds of resentment against the government. Some combatants have escaped from cantonments, taking weapons along with them.

The Maoist leadership realises this, and there is a sense of urgency about resolving the integration issue so that the cantonments can be emptied and dismantled. But till that happens, dangerous tension will be brewing inside the camps.

The ten-year insurgency was fairly straight forward it was waged by one group to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. The coming crisis, of which Piuthan was just the latest reminder, points to a much more complicated multi-pronged conflict waged by revolutionary groups whose identity and struggle are based on ethnicity, region and language. They are all inspired by Maoist ideology and are backed by senior figures within the party hierarchy.

Groups that have 'split' from the Maoists are organising their own national convention in Kathmandu in March, and it will include armed groups. The Maoists and the government urgently need to formulate a contingency plan for the day when these forces unite to wage what is sure to be a much more virulent multi-ethnic war. ●

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Anarchy in the east

All the disparate groups of young men share is making threats of violence

DEEPAK RAUNIYAR in PANCHTHAR

At an interaction in Panchthar last week, local journalists were asked how the struggle for Limbuwan autonomy was affecting their community. One woman participant burst into tears, another became very emotional and couldn't reply. There was silence in the room.

In private they said friends had stopped speaking to each other, journalists were self-censoring because they were afraid of the militants. The journalistic community is itself getting polarised between Limbu and non-Limbu.

We got an inkling of the lawlessness of the east as we crossed the Kosi in a ferry. Six hundred vehicles were queued up to cross the river where it breaks out into the plains. A man claiming to be from the Khambuwan Rastriya Morcha approached us after he found out we were journalists. "Don't forget to write my name in your report," he ordered, "it is because of me that you got across today."

Further east, we meet Sanjuhang Palunwa, leader of the Federal Limbuwan State Council in his home at Birtamod. He is supposed to control the Limbuwan Volunteers (LV), who were enforcing a new tax on businesses and media, which had to register with his 'government', even though there seemed to be no mechanism to use this tax. Palunwa is fed up with the ruling party not listening to his group and the government not taking it seriously and has launched a series of protests in the east.

Even before the demarcation of the federal units are discussed, eastern Nepal is already carved up by the overlapping claims of various ethnic groups. There are more than 17 Limbu groups with different

agendas. And then there are the Kirat and Khambuwan, Madhesi and the Rajbanshi of the Kochila. Even the Lepcha want their own Rong province. It's hard to see how these conflicting demands will be reconciled when the slogans are so uncompromising and are being enforced by threats of violence.

There are moderate voices, like that of Satendra Jabegu, the Ilam district president of the FNJ, who used to be with one of the Limbuwan groups. He feels that dividing up the country along ethnic lines is wrong and that we should be careful about federal boundaries and the names of the new

units. There are many here who agree with him, but their voices are getting drowned out in the clamour of the radicals.

The highways in the east are always blocked by one group or another protesting one thing or other. In the event that the roads are open, vehicles have to pay taxes to myriad militant groups. Every car that goes from Phidim to Jhapa has to pay taxes in at least three places to the Federal Limbuwan State Council (Palunwa), the Federal Limbuwan State Council (Lingden) and their respective sister organisation Limbuwan Volunteers, and Upallo Kirant.

On top of all this, there are taxes collected by the DDC. The main cash crop of the region is cardamom and the DDC collects Rs 75 per sack, while merchants have to pay Rs 100 to various Limbuwan groups. Some truckers said even the police got a cut.

"The Limbus are also not happy," said the group's leader Manraj Jabegu in Ilam, "we are helpless that the police are not helping us control this extortion." We put this to Panchthar CDO Dullu Singh Basnet, but his reply was: "We have no order to apprehend them. We can chase them, but we are not allowed to catch them."

The next morning while returning from Phidim, we encountered a group of Limbuwan Volunteers in Ranke. There were five young boys carrying long khukuris and were asking for money from every vehicle and motorcycle (see picture).

As we reached Sunsari we ran smack into another highway blockade, this time by the Tharu Kalyankari Sabha. After being stuck for days, we hit another obstacle in Nijgad organised by Chure Bhabar. The only thing these disparate groups of young men carrying rocks, sticks and knives had in common was that they threatened us to publicise their agitation in the media, or else...



DEEPAK RAUNIYAR

Embassy
of the Federal Republic of Germany
Kathmandu

Bekanntmachung für Deutsche zur Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag

Am 27. September 2009 findet die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag statt.

Deutsche, die außerhalb der Bundesrepublik Deutschland leben und im Bundesgebiet keine Wohnung mehr innehaben, können bei Vorliegen der sonstigen wahlrechtlichen Voraussetzungen an der Wahl teilnehmen.

Für ihre Wahlteilnahme ist u. a. Voraussetzung, dass sie

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2. in ein Wählerverzeichnis in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland eingetragen sind. Diese Eintragung erfolgt nur auf Antrag. Der Antrag ist auf einem Formblatt zu stellen; er soll bald nach dieser Bekanntmachung abgesandt werden. Einem Antrag, der erst am 07. September 2009 oder später bei der zuständigen Gemeindebehörde eingeht, kann nicht mehr entsprochen werden (§ 18 Abs. 1 der Bundeswahlordnung).

Antragsvordrucke (Formblätter) sowie informierende Merkblätter können bei

- den diplomatischen und berufskonsularischen Vertretungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [Die Botschaft Kathmandu wird Antragsvordrucke ab April vorrätig haben.],
- dem Bundeswahlleiter, Statistisches Bundesamt, Zweigstelle Bonn, Postfach 17 03 77, 53029 Bonn, Germany (www.bundeswahlleiter.de, Antragsformular online verfügbar)
- den Kreiswahlleitern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

angefordert werden.
Weitere Auskünfte erteilen die Botschaften und berufskonsularischen Vertretungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

Kathmandu, 04. Februar 2009

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Bekanntmachung für Deutsche zur Wahl zum Europäischen Parlament

Am 7. Juni 2009 findet die Wahl der Abgeordneten des Europäischen Parlaments aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland statt.

Deutsche, die außerhalb der Bundesrepublik Deutschland leben und im Bundesgebiet keine Wohnung mehr innehaben, können bei Vorliegen der sonstigen wahlrechtlichen Voraussetzungen an der Wahl teilnehmen.

Für ihre Wahlteilnahme ist u. a. Voraussetzung, dass sie

- 1.1 seit mindestens drei Monaten in den übrigen Mitgliedstaaten der Europäischen Union eine Wohnung innehaben oder sich mindestens seit dieser Zeit dort gewöhnlich aufhalten (auf die Dreimonatsfrist wird ein unmittelbar vorausgehender Aufenthalt in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland angerechnet) oder
- 1.2 in anderen Gebieten leben und vor ihrem Fortzug nach dem 23. Mai 1949 aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [Zu berücksichtigen ist auch eine frühere Wohnung oder ein früherer Aufenthalt in dem in Artikel 3 des Einigungsvertrages genannten Gebiet (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt und Thüringen zuzüglich des Gebiets des früheren Berlin (Ost))] mindestens drei Monate ununterbrochen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [Zu berücksichtigen ist auch eine frühere Wohnung oder ein früherer Aufenthalt in dem in Artikel 3 des Einigungsvertrages genannten Gebiet (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt und Thüringen zuzüglich des Gebiets des früheren Berlin (Ost))] gewohnt oder sich dort sonst gewöhnlich aufgehalten haben;
2. in ein Wählerverzeichnis in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland eingetragen sind. Diese Eintragung erfolgt nur auf Antrag. Der Antrag ist auf einem Formblatt zu stellen; er soll bald nach dieser Bekanntmachung abgesandt werden. Einem Antrag, der erst am 18. Mai 2009 oder später bei der zuständigen Gemeindebehörde eingeht, kann nicht mehr entsprochen werden (§ 17 Abs. 1 der Europawahlordnung).

Antragsvordrucke (Formblätter) sowie informierende Merkblätter können bei

- den diplomatischen und berufskonsularischen Vertretungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [Die Botschaft Kathmandu wird Antragsvordrucke ab März vorrätig haben.],
- dem Bundeswahlleiter, Statistisches Bundesamt, Zweigstelle Bonn, Postfach 170377, 53029 Bonn, Germany (www.bundeswahlleiter.de, Antragsformular online verfügbar)
- den Kreis- und Stadtwahlleitern in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland

angefordert werden.
Weitere Auskünfte erteilen die Botschaften und berufskonsularischen Vertretungen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

Kathmandu, 04. Februar 2009

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Obama and Af-Pak

American policy needs to take into account Chinese, Saudi and Iranian interests



INCREASED ASSAULTS: Deadly militant attacks hit government buildings in Kabul on 11 February, leaving at least 27 dead and many injured.

PARAG KHANNA

Despite the flurry of American activity in the region, it's by no means clear that Washington is any closer to understanding the dynamics in South-Central Asia. To fix Afghanistan-Pakistan (Af-Pak), the Obama administration will have to go regional—and, crucially, look beyond the usual suspects for help, even if they are not naturally inclined allies.

We all know that Pakistan is a vital piece of the puzzle, but consider for a moment the consequences of a strategy that lacks a regional element. If the additional 30,000 US troops being deployed in southern and

eastern Afghanistan succeed in pushing Taliban fighters into retreat over the border into Pakistan, they could destabilise the country's already volatile North West Frontier Province, which is almost as populous as Iraq. US troops would be squeezing a balloon on one end only to inflate it on the other.

Meanwhile, fewer carrots from a pro-democracy Obama administration have diminished the Pakistani military's willingness to support American priorities, evidenced by a sudden increase in attacks on NATO convoys in Peshawar and the Khyber Pass. Centcom is scrambling for new routes through Russia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. As was the case under the Musharraf regime, the Pakistan Army is more interested in American planes than policies.

But China, Saudi Arabia and Iran are also becoming increasingly important—not as neighbours of the chaos but meddlers in it. China has become the largest investor in Afghanistan, developing highways to connect Iran and the giant Aynak copper mine south of Kabul and financing the deep-water port at Gwadar on Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast.

Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, is widely thought to be funneling unquantified sums to Wahabbi mosques and the Taliban, and the country's leadership is brokering the latter's negotiations with the Karzai regime. Iran is building electricity plants to meet Pakistan's growing shortfall. More importantly, the country is renewing efforts to construct an Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline, which both Pakistan and India badly need.

Cooperation will have its price, the Obama administration may face greater pressure from both Pakistan and India to lift US opposition to the IPI pipeline. The US may also need to appeal to Iran to allow access to Afghanistan through the Iranian port of Chabahar and the Indian-built Zaranj-Delaram highway in western Afghanistan that connects the country's ring road to Kandahar and Kabul.

One way to align Afghanistan's and Pakistan's regional partners would be to follow a regional security model. It must begin with a joint Afghan-Pak force empowered to conduct operations on both sides of the border. At the same time, the US will have to accept Afghan and Pakistani negotiations with Taliban commanders.

These are just some of the trade-offs necessary to encourage a thaw with Iran, monitor China, stabilise Afghanistan, encourage political reform in Pakistan, and placate insecure India. If the US cannot negotiate a modus vivendi among the nations and rivals of South-Central Asia, then perhaps China will. ●

*Parag Khanna is senior research fellow in the American Strategy Program at the New America Foundation and author of *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order* (New York: Random House, 2008).*

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KEEPING IT ALIVE: Eighty-five year old Lure Gandarba performs on the second day of *Music of the Gods*, held at the Patan Meuseum on Thursday.

KIRAN PANDAY

Musical revival

Eighty-six year old Lure Gandarba (pictured) still recalls days when he carried his sarangi and travelled with his music. “We used to go from house to house and play our songs. We even carried messages from one village to another,” reminisces Lure.

Lure was the oldest sarangi player in *Music of the Gods: The Intangible Cultural Heritage of Nepal’s Musical Caste*, a concert organised last week by the UNESCO in collaboration with the Gandarba Culture and Arts Organisation, the Music Museum of Nepal and Creative Statements.

The three-day festival brought together over 35 artists from Gandarba, Badi and Damai communities from all over Nepal. The festival featured an exhibition of musical instruments, film screenings and the heart touching sounds of sarangis and madals.

“When it comes to music and dance, no collective group in Nepal can claim ascendancy over the Gandarba, Badi and Damai. This is a fact that must be acknowledged and celebrated,” said Colin

Kaiser, UNESCO representative in Nepal.

The artists were overwhelmed by the response and the respect they received. “The audience was very happy,” says performer Nanda Ram Badi, “people even got up and danced.”

The tradition is passed on from generation to generation in Gandarba communities. “We all have a sarangi in our homes,” says Budhi Man Gandarba from Lamjung, “this instrument has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember.”

But Gandarba, Badi and Damai communities are among the poorest in Nepal.

Lack of money, and lack of respect, means many younger people now opt for alternative professions.

Kisan Gandarva, a 24-year old from Tanahu, plays in the streets of Thamel. “There are days when I earn Rs 2,000 and then there are days when I might earn nothing at all.” There are about 50 others like him who have left home and now play for foreigners who seem to appreciate them more. ●

Paavan Mathema

See also: Modernising minstrels #378

Action is needed to keep Nepal’s unique forms of cultural expression alive

Eastern Western

There's always been something essentially Bollywood to Baz Luhrmann's work, most notably in *Moulin Rouge!* with its plainly acknowledged inspiration from Indian cinema. But it isn't simply the song-and-dance routine and the accompanying extravaganza. It's something that permeated the entire aesthetic of his films, a misty sheen of romance, an embrace of melodrama and the logic of the narrative. It's a kind of aesthetic that critics love to hate, the moan-inducing corniness, the requisite tear-stained emotions, the loud caricatures for characters.

With *Australia*, his latest work, albeit without much singing and dancing, it seems he hasn't left Bollywood yet. If anything, the film will seem comfortably familiar to any viewer of Hindi films. At a sprawling 2 hour 45 minutes, you have that similar format of two (or three) movies in one, post-and pre- intermission—a veritable cocktail of genres with generous shots of comedy, drama, romance and tragedy in the mix.

In fact, with the gratuitous displays of masculine physique on the part of Hugh Jackman reminiscent of Hrithik Roshan's flexing and Nicole Kidman's frequent costume changes, *Australia* truly brings to mind a grand Bollywood epic. What's more, in admirable form, the leads, much like their Indian counterparts, shine in their complete commitment to their characters, regardless of what over-sentimental line the script commands, what bouts of over-acting the director demands. Indeed, it is Baz Luhrmann's full and unabashed dedication to his hyperbolic style with its awesome vistas, jumbo-sized drama and histrionic emotions that literally overwhelms any criteria of taste or standards of moderation. There's a saturation point of sensory and emotional overload that transforms the critic's eye-rolling to eye-watering.

Baz Luhrmann's latest epic *Australia* still pays homage to Bollywood

Set in Australia at the start of the Second World War, the plot moves from Western to romance and is finally a war flick. In a romping Tim Burton style introduction —comic, costumed and brisk—Lady Ashley, a trim, prim Kidman, pluckily travels to Australia to confront her husband and is met by his uncouth cattlehand ‘Drover,’ played by Jackman. There's an immediate mutual antagonism that precedes their inevitable attraction (much like in most Bollywood romances). A murder puts Lord Ashley to rest, and allows Kidman to romance in the outback while she imprudently decides to challenge the delightfully charming villain King Carney and his crony, a seething Fletcher (Wenham in a sympathetic performance).

A Western set in Australia is surprisingly palatable. The genre has always been about the frontier, the contradictory ambivalence and draw towards both civilization and the wild. Set in America, the western becomes a kind of parody of itself. But the Australian landscape still retains that quality of wilderness, at least in the imagination, that long since seems unimaginable in America. Those tensions coalesce around a make-shift family unit of Lady Ashley, Drover and Nullah, a mixed race boy whom the pair adopts.

There's a confused and contradictory political dimension as Luhrmann tacks on and tackles Australia's ugly legacy of racism. On the one hand Lady Ashley appears aghast at the missionary effort to steal children from their aboriginal mothers, yet she hampers her young charge from exploring his own culture. But somehow, the film is all the better for it; awkward and earnest, those historical questions and moral dimensions float unanswered outside the scope of the epic romance. It belies a certain commitment—and I mean this as a compliment—not to let cerebral concerns or good storytelling get in the way of schmaltzy fun or emotional impact. ●

Australia
Dir. Baz Luhrmann
Cast: Nicole Kidman, Hugh Jackman, David Wenham, David Gulpilil, Brandon Walters
PG-13, 2 hr. 45 min.



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Picassos of the jungle**, elephant paintings by Khem Prasad and Sundar Kali at Indigo Gallery, 13-22 February, 8AM to 6PM.
- ❖ **Love in the air**, art by Ragini Upadhayay-Grela at 5.30 PM, till 8 March, Siddhartha Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **A Search for serenity**, artwork by Chirag Bangdel till 15 February, Gallery 32, Kamaladi

EVENTS

- ❖ **Second Documentary Open School Workshop**, 16-28 February at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 9851108338
- ❖ **Call for entries** for Film South Asia, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. For deadlines, visit filmsouthasia.org. 5552141
- ❖ **Rakshya Nepal Mela**, 14 February, 10AM-5PM, the New Era, Trikuti Colony, Battisputali.
- ❖ **Salsa dance workshop**, 20 February at Salsa Dance Academy, Bhatbhateni.
- ❖ **Nonviolent communication** workshop with lunch, 21 February, 9.30 AM-5PM, Rs 800, Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal, Thamel. 4410402

MUSIC

- ❖ **Live Jazz**, every Tuesday and live fusion every Saturday at New Orleans coffee shop, Pulchok. 5522708
- ❖ **TGIF**, Friday night party with live band Reverb, 6PM onwards, Jazabell Café, Chakupat, Patan. 2114074
- ❖ **Yala Maya Classic** featuring Tarabir Singh Tuladhar and Jeevan Rai on 13 February at 5PM at Yalamaya Kendra, Patan Dhoka, Rs 100 entry. 5553767
- ❖ **Rock with Rashmi** every Friday and Sufi and Raga every Saturday 8PM onwards, Absolute Lounge Bar, Pulchok.
- ❖ **Sunday Jazz brunch** barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz evening** at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM. 4260326
- ❖ **Strings Band** live every Tuesday at G's Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.
- ❖ **Some like it hot** every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar.
- ❖ **Fusion and Looza** Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193

DINING

- ❖ **High tea** with scones and sandwiches everyday at the Lounge from 4.30-6.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Chez Caroline** for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited. 4263070
- ❖ **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Nhuchhe goes Thai** at Nhuchhe's Thai Kitchen, Baluwatar. 4429903
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Pasta pesto passion** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **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 liquors** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.

VALENTINE'S DAY

- ❖ **Rodi Trio live** and buffet dinner, Rs 3500+, The Fusion bar, Dwarika's Hotel, Kathmandu. 4479488
- ❖ **Dinner for two** and a chance to win a stay for two at Park Hyatt Goa, Rox Restaurant, Hyatt Regency. 4489362
- ❖ **Romantic music zone**, Hotel Ambassador Garden, Lazimpat. 4410432
- ❖ **Valentine's Day Party**, couple's only, with live jazz by Mariano Abello Quartet, Rs 2999 for two, 5.30 PM, Dhokaima Café. 5522113
- ❖ **Live music and discount on wines** at Jatra Café & Bar.
- ❖ **Valentines day dinner**, Delices de France Café Restaurant and Bar, Ganesh Man Building, Thamel. 4260326
- ❖ **Love is in the air**, a glass of Bubbly and a free rose by the fireplace, Kilroy's, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Valentine delights** at the Olive Garden, the Fun Café, Corner Bar and Pastry shop at Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **Cupid calling**, Poesie and the Fags live, with buffet dinner and drinks, Rs 2500, Sunrise Café, Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4248999
- ❖ **Live DJ session** with dinner and cocktail specials, Bourbon Café, Darbar Marg. 4441703
- ❖ **Ciney Gurung** and Tatwa Band live with buffet dinner and complimentary drink, 7PM onwards, Rs 1,999 per couple. 4412999
- ❖ **Wine night** with Italian wine and Baileys, free entry, Lakhey Restaurant and Bar, Darbar Marg. 423212
- ❖ **Music by Epic band**, free entry, Jazabell Café and Restaurant, Chakupat. 2114075
- ❖ **L'amour Toujours L'amour**, with free rose and Irish coffee, at K-too beer and steak house, Thamel. 4700043

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



Quest Entertainment



Dev D is a modern retake of the classic love story Devdas, written by Sarat Chandra. The story follows the original tale with a modern twist, when a turn-of-events destructs the fate of two lovers—Paro is resigned to marry an older man and Dev sinks into depression. The characters portrayed in the movie reflect the sensibilities of a generation that is wedged between traditional roots and western influences. Set in rustic Punjab, Dev D also explores the dark underbelly of Delhi. The movie stars Abhay Deol as Dev, Mahi Gill as Paro and Kalki Koechlin as Chanda, and is written and directed by Anurag Kashyap.

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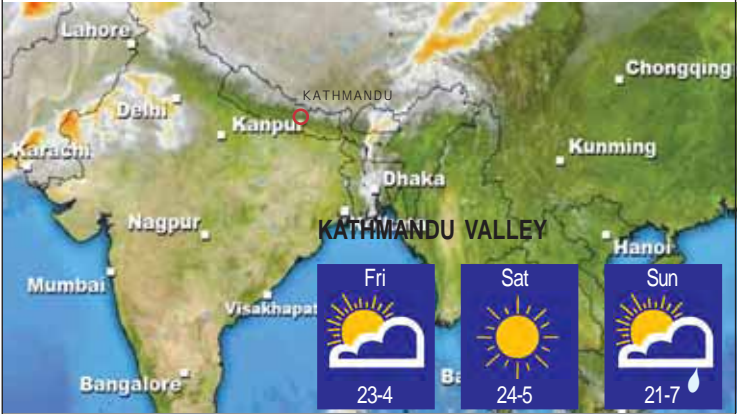
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WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The long dry spell was finally broken, but only in central and western Nepal where 25-35 mm of rain fell. Everything east of Kathmandu is still reeling under drought, all we got on Wednesday was 1mm of rain. This satellite and radar composite taken on Thursday morning shows another westerly system trailing the first one, but this one is curling around to Kashmir. There are still chances of precipitation in the central and western mountains and maybe a drizzle on Sunday on the Valley rim, but other than that no dramatic surprises like the Valentine's Day snowfall in Kathmandu in 2007. Expect the max temperature to climb steadily, with clear and cold nights.



'MANDU MANDALA

by PRERANA PAKHRIN





RAVI MANANDHAR

FLAG BEARERS: Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Foreign Minister Upendra Yadav at the 1st Development Convention of the Honorary Consular Corps, Nepal on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

88 YEARS OF LIFE: Culture scholar Satya Mohan Joshi celebrates Jangphu on Saturday at Patan Darbar Square.



KIRAN PANDAY

MEASURING FREEDOM: Representatives from International Federation of Journalists and ARTICLE 19 inspect burnt copies of *Himal Khabarpatrika* during their visit to Himalmedia on Saturday.

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Let's go back to sleep

Go back to sleep, we'll wake you up when things start getting really exciting around here. As things stand now, nothing is really happening. Politicians are all up to their ears in party affairs, and no one has any time for the country.



The southern plains and the eastern hills have been locked down now for weeks, but PM PKD has all the time in the world to helicopter over to Panchthar to attend his army's anniversary. Defence Minister Cloudy was off in western Nepal attending a Tharu council. This whole week, the Baddie brass has been busy getting organised for the three-day gala war anniversary in Nawalparasi. All the UML members of the cabinet, including the Hydro Minister, will be out of action for another week because of the party convention in Butwal. And next week Nepal's **Other Army** will be celebrating its own Army Day on Shivaratri. So, with all this pomp and ceremony, who is looking at ways to reduce loadshedding, unblocking blocked highways, getting some momentum back into the peace process, and writing a new constitution?



The Rs 40 million Unified Marxist-Leninist Convention in Butwal is boiling down to a tripartite struggle between **Messrs Makunay, Jhallu and Oli**. More than the UML party votes themselves, it looks like it is the influence of other parties that will determine who will get to be general secretary.

The Maobaddie favourite for the post of top job in the UML is Comrade JN, but unfortunately this very fact has become the kiss of death for poor Jhallu because the UML cadre base is seething at continued Maoist excesses in the countryside. No wonder, then, that Oli's consistent and sharp criticism of the Maoists has earned him brownie points within the party, and he is the front-runner. For his part, Comrade MKN has been waiting to see which way the wind blows and is torn between seeking the party leadership or gunning for prime ministership, especially after wily old GPK put the idea into his head this week.



When a lot fewer weapons than anticipated were handed over to be put into UNMIN containers at the start of the peace process, Comrade Terrifico had been asked what happened to the rest of the arsenal. His answer "khola le bagayo" was widely ridiculed. And sure enough, the missing M-16s and SLRs magically resurfaced during the attack by a Rolpa warlord on the police base in Syaulibang last week. With his trusted PA being shot in the leg, senior baddie comrades are getting antsy. Which must be why PKD is soon taking delivery of a brand new \$130,000 bullet-proof Landcruiser equipped with oxygen and defibrillator.



What's with all the to-ing and fro-ing of our comrades to China? It was the very next day after Naxalites Mohan and Matrika went to Naxal to meet their Chinese host that Matrika jetted off on a weeklong visit to the **Mainland**. As soon as he gets back, he splits off from the main party. And then it's Comrade Rainman's turn to fly off to Honkietown on Dragonair. Meanwhile, Awesome is still hasn't confirmed his attendance at the *India Today* do in Delhi in March even though his name is already on the website. It looks like his Delhi dates are going to clash with yet another visit to Beijing.



Many of the invited members of the KTM dip corps did not attend the Nawalaparasi PLA extravaganza, except GTZ. The prez has also declined the PLA invite but will be taking the salute at the Mahendra-era Sainik Munch. The PLA tried to show it is no different than the Nepal Army by carrying out a silly simulated comando raid on a civilian house during their anniversary in Hatikhori on Thursday just like the Nepal Army used to on Army day. Was that a message?

If the COAS really wants to make a public relations coup the way to do it is not to have his troops fire blanks into the air on Shivaratri but to reverse his military's creeping expansionism in Tundikhel and reopen the Maitighar to Bhadrakali short cut which was closed during the war. There is no reason the army should prolong its occupation of a huge chunk of the city centre any longer.

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Luxury & Affordability Combined... Prefab Homes

Tongue and Groove Joining System

Where time is a critical element, conventional building materials don't fit the bill. Simply because brick and mortar construction is, by its very nature and time, requires long lead time for curing. Dry construction concept is therefore ideally suited for speedy construction because they are simple to erect, light-weight, yet strong and durable. The other benefits of a prefab house include ease of mobility and fewer expenses.

Easy to Install, Light Weight, Saves Time, Durable, Water Proof, Termite Proof, Fire Resistant, Sound Insulation, Saves Space

BIRA FURNITURE Patan Industrial Estate, Lalitpur, Nepal. Tel.: 2361113-8, Fax: 977-1-5521172. Kupondol, Lalitpur, Nepal. Tel.: 5555033. Since 1963

E-mail: contact@birafurniture.com.np, amsh@wlink.com.np | Web: www.birafurniture