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#439

20 - 26 February 2009

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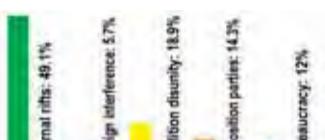
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IMPREGNATING TILE & GROUT SEALER



IN MUFTI

The Nepal Army's 'recommendations' to the CA Committee on Protection of the National Interest has raised hackles. While it is the fundamental right of every citizen to respond to the CA's call for suggestions, an instrument of state is expected to abide by operational norms of proper procedure. The NA brass has clearly overstepped its limits by bypassing the executive to present its case directly before the legislature. Under normal circumstances, an organ of state has to access parliament through the concerned ministry.

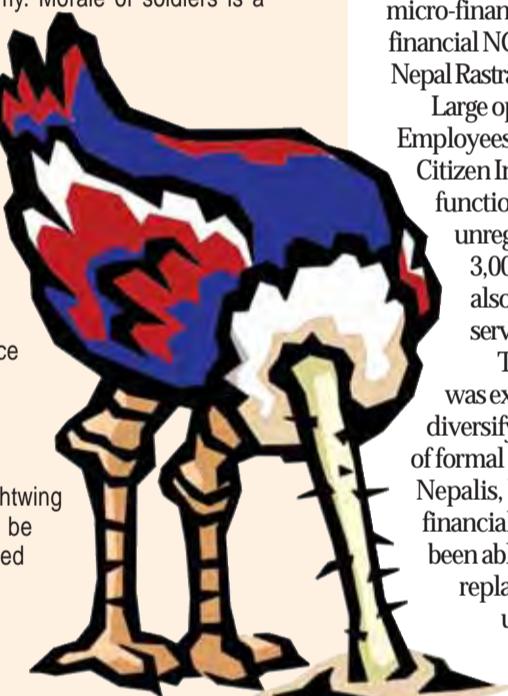
But even more alarming is the tone of the content. A civilian chain of command means the army shouldn't have a political position of its own other than that of the government of the day. Whether the legislature deems it necessary to hold a referendum on issues of national importance or decides it by simple majority should be of little concern to the bureaucracy, police or the army. They should leave that to the public sphere: academia, thinktanks, the media and even neighbourhood teashops. That is where the political parties pick up the threads for debate in the legislature.

The suggestion for the formation of National Defence Council, chaired by the Chief of Army Staff (CoAS) to advise the government and head of state on issues pertaining to national security is mischievous. It would undermine the importance of the National Security Council headed by the prime minister and the Central Security Committee chaired by the home minister. The Ministry of Defence would lose even the minimal role it has at present of functioning as a link between Bhadrakali and Singha Darbar.

In 1990, five bemuddled generals cornered Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai and asked him to quietly accept a statute promulgated by the king. The confrontation that ensued in the following years destroyed all the three institutions—democracy, constitutional monarchy and the army. Morale of soldiers is a concern, but the protection of the people's democratic aspirations are even more important in formulating the supreme law of the land.

Instead of overstepping its brief, the army should have come clean on its war-time excesses on its own, especially regarding disappearances and extra-judicial killings. That would be a much better way to restore its image, force the Maoists to also own up to their atrocities and help the peace and reconciliation process.

The alternative to Maoist totalitarianism is not a return to rightwing military dictatorship. What couldn't be resolved militarily has to be resolved through the supremacy of civilian representatives accountable to the people who elected them.



Head in the sand

The government has no alternative but to explore alternatives in the financial sector

We have tried to reassure ourselves that Nepal is somehow insulated from the international financial crisis. Nepal's economy may not be globalised, but we depend on the global economy through our reliance on remittances, tourism and exports.



GUEST COLUMN
Achyut Wagle

Sooner or later, this is sure to have an impact on Nepal's financial sector. But even if we come out relatively unscathed from the contagion of global meltdown, banking will soon face a domestic implosion from its own home-spun crisis. As it is, Nepal's financial sector is an enigma wrapped inside paradoxes.

The free-market policy of the past two decades led to the establishment of 25 commercial banks, 58 development banks, 78 finance companies, several micro-finance institutions and financial NGOs supervised by Nepal Rastra Bank.

Large operators like the Employees' Provident Fund and Citizen Investment Trust function as fairly unregulated entities. Some 3,000 plus cooperatives also provide financial services.

This dramatic growth was expected to deepen, diversify and reduce the cost of formal financial services to Nepalis, but in reality the financial architecture has not been able to effectively replace loan sharks even in urban areas who charge interest rates as high as

36 percent.

Interestingly, repayments of these loans are seldom deferred or defaulted, proving that there is strong demand of funds and there are honest borrowers out there.

Yet our banking system suffers from bad loan portfolio with NPAs standing at 14 per cent of total banking assets. The prevalence of excess liquidity in the system and the central bank's mop-up drama through open market operations are often reported. But this simply indicates a mismatch between demand and supply, a lack of business acumen, creativity and imagination in the banking sector.

Despite the share-rush in every initial public offering for new banks and a disproportionate growth in the banking and financial sector, its cumulative capacity can barely finance a 20MW hydropower project. Last week, Citizens Bank and Bank of Asia simultaneously issued IPOs, soaking up about Rs 12 billion. This created a liquidity crisis in the banks and also pushed the inter-bank rate above 11 per cent, the highest in the last 10 years. Nepal's financial sector is therefore fragile, unsustainable and runs on a trust deficit.

To make things worse, the 120-hour-a-week power cuts have brought economic activity throughout the country to a halt. Large manufacturers have seen a huge increase in operating costs, even photocopy shop owners, furniture makers, cybercafe and call centres, fruit-juice vendors, farmers using lift-irrigation, cold-storage renters and milk chillers have shut shop.

Big and small, these

businesses are beginning to default on bank repayments for loans. Most banks and financial institutions that have invested more than 80 per cent of their liquid assets are also likely to face a reduced deposit inflow and increased withdrawals.

The crisis will start manifesting itself by the third-quarter bank balance sheets of this fiscal year. There can't be a quick fix solution to a crisis that was building up for years and has been exacerbated by more recent downturns. But what is even more alarming is the gross indifference of policy-making and regulatory authorities to the impending crisis.

Coming soon: bank runs, inflation caused by government augmenting money supply, social and political anarchy. The government and the Rastra Bank have but no alternative but to consider other alternatives: keep the economic activity floating during these difficult periods. In absence of investment opportunities in productive sectors, people are either investing in real estate or in banking sector equity. A credible and commercially viable plan could pool these scattered resources into a consolidated fund, perhaps administered by a transparent autonomous body, and invested into the areas less affected by the energy shortfall. Large infrastructure investments could crank up the economy by creating jobs and spurring growth.

But, first and foremost, the government must have the willingness and sense of urgency to foresee and forestall the danger. You can't solve a problem if you don't acknowledge a problem exists. ●

LETTERS

TWO ARMIES

It does not take a genius to figure out that as long as we have two armies in this country and they view each other as enemies, this country will remain in the doldrums and our real enemies will be benefit ('One country two armies', #438). Most of the men and women serving in these armies enlisted thinking that they would be serving the country in their own way. The two armies do have skills that could complement each other to tackle the kind of grave security problems that the country is facing now. Diplomacy alone has never been enough (even in the most democratic country) to maintain security and discipline in the society. Therefore, force will have to be used to solve many of our current problems and we need men and women in uniform for that. It would be best for the leaders to rise above partisan politics and dogmatism, to resolve the stalemate regarding the two armies for the secure future of the country.

Rajendra Khadga, Lazimpat

- Why is the Prime Minister holding

an anniversary party to celebrate the start of the 'people's war'? The conflict is over, a peace agreement was signed, time to move on and start concentrating on healing the country. That the PM felt that this kind of celebration was acceptable is a bad sign, shows arrogance and poor judgment. He clearly considers violence as something to celebrate. This in no way brings the country forward on the path towards real peace and democracy, it is yet another sign that the leaders of Nepal care little for ordinary Nepalis and more about safeguarding and showcasing their power.

Jenny Anderson, email

- Were the PLA soldiers carrying fake guns? We thought the real guns were supposed to be locked up in containers in the cantonments. Unless they were the guns that were 'swept away by the river'? They do look very scary, and very real.

Praswas Shakya, email

- Re: Editorial, 'Citizen Dahal', #437. The only ones who are satisfied with the performance of the government are the opportunists. This is not the kind of country we sacrificed so much for. It looks like the

Maoists, like previous governments, were so desperate to get into Singha Darbar and Baluwatar that they forgot about everything else. This government is led by the Maoists, and to blame others for all the problems is childish and unfair. For ordinary people it doesn't matter if it is Puspha Kamal Dahal, GP Koirala or Surya Bahadur Thapa who is the prime minister. If the PM cannot understand the basic problems of the country, he is incompetent. If Dahal was an ordinary citizen at this point, how would he evaluate the performance of his government?

Akesh Jaiswal, Birganj

FRYING PAN

Only now do the people realise the dangers that come with the Maoist demands ('From the frying pan.' #438). It will be a mistake to think that the party and its top leadership are unaware of what is going on or are willing to change their previous attitude. You can't expect much from a party whose top leaders like Baburam Bhattarai believe confusing people and sweeping power within that confused state. Everything they do is propaganda.

Anjan Panday, email

LOST IN TRANSITION

CK Lal has rightly written that Janakpur has lost its glory as the kingdom of King Janak ('A town lost in transition,' #438). The capital of Mithila should have been a vibrant one with Hindu tourists from the world over flocking to the town for mass marriages and touring the historic Janaki Temple and the bibah mandap where Ram and Sita tied the knot. The place should have been the centre for Hindu-style marriages for the rich and the poor with five star hotels teeming to accommodate the brides, grooms and their companions from India, Nepal and other places. Instead, Janakpur is a ghost town where residents are fleeing ethnic strife. The residents of the town should unite to reverse this trend, set aside the ethnic differences, and focus more on economic growth.

Dinesh Malla, email

- Much as I admire CK Lal's State of the State columns, enough of Mithila already.

Dubby Bhagat, email

The rise of the diaspora

Rulers back home are rewarding long-distance patriots

The enrolment of Nepali students in US universities increased by 28 per cent last year. With 8,936 legitimate students admitted in 2007, Nepal surpassed Pakistan to become the 11th biggest source of foreign students in the United States.

Recent data suggest that even more Nepali youngsters are heading west for 'further studies'. Counseling centres that

 STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

assist students with admissions and visas say most clients go abroad with no intention of coming back and choose subjects with the highest probability of acquiring Permanent Resident (PR) permits.

Unlike Nepali Workers Abroad (NWAs) toiling in the deserts of Arabia and swamps of Southeast Asia, migrating students aren't potential foreign currency heroes. In fact, they drain away a chunk of the country's remittance income. Increasingly, the elite pay their own way. Reports are impossible to verify but insiders say Maoist threats of takeover have exacerbated capital flight, as assets are transferred into the names of their children studying in Australia or the United States.

The exodus has political implications: it has depleted the support-base of the NC and UML in urban areas. During elections of professional organizations such as Management Association of Nepal (MAN), Nepal Engineers Association (NEA) and Nepal Council of World Affairs (NCWA), 'democrats'-a euphemism for NC-supporters find it hard to field competent candidates and rely on former royalists to face the challenge of assertive leftwingers.

The joke at the recently concluded annual convention of



KIRAN PANDAY

MAN was that for the democrats to win their elections on their own, polling stations would have to be set up in Massachusetts and Melbourne and not in Kathmandu.

The members of the diaspora are traditionally much more vocal and extreme than the parties they profess to support. The blogosphere is teeming with agitated comments of non-territorial nationalists speaking about the plight of the motherland from the relative safety of their adopted homelands. Uprooted as they are from their natural habitat, the diaspora tends to back the politics of identity with unrestrained enthusiasm. It was the same with Khalistanis in Vancouver, Tamils in Toronto and Hindus in the US. Perhaps the reason the NC hasn't been able to complete its building in BP Nagar is because it's not rightwing enough to motivate diaspora kangresis.

Overseas UML sympathisers have successfully made their

parent party take a right turn. A prominent visage of Karl Marx had a pride of place at the Butwal extravaganza this week but the UML has long forgotten the man's teachings.

Girija Prasad Koirala alienated many NC loyalists abroad by cosying up with the Maoists against the monarchy. Former IMF official and teacher of economics at the University of

South Pacific in Fiji, Sukhdev Sah falls into this category. He probably embraced the MJF because Upendra Yadav was the only politician who didn't concede an inch to the Maoists in the run-up to the CA elections. The MJF has rewarded him by nominating a former-kangressi to the ambassadorship in Washington.

If Sah is stalled in his tracks during parliamentary hearing, UML and MJF-as representative parties of Pahari and Madhesi ethnicities respectively-stand to lose a substantial section of their overseas supporters. When deciding about the nomination of Sah, the parliamentary committee would be setting precedence for politically ambitious NRNs advocating dual citizenship and angling for public posts.

UML had already accepted the logic of long-distance patriotism by appointing Muraraj Sharma during its rule at the foreign ministry. Now it's the MJF's turn to push the envelope by patronising a green card holder as envoy-designate. ●

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Lost opportunity

The UML leadership race misses a deeper malaise

Amidst the fanfare, the UML may be missing a significant element in its convention.

The competition over the posts has assumed all the attention. That is important because it will determine the direction and longevity of this government, have an impact on the nature of the constitution, influence the democratic and left movement in the country and will shape the future of the party.

But the key question UML should have been pondering this week was: why has this been a lost decade for them?

The party has been in power multiple times, but always as a junior partner. It has an image of swinging from one extreme to another rather than that of a responsible force that protects the middle ground. It has been insensitive to rising ethnic aspirations,

so visible when the UML crowd booed Rajendra Mahato's Hindi speech. It has been reacting to events rather than setting the agenda. But the biggest

weakness of the UML is that it is seen to have betrayed not only the communist movement, but broader left ideals as well.

There may have been a complex set of factors that gave rise to the Maoist movement, but the UML's failure to channelise the aspirations of its original constituency of workers, peasants, Dalits, left activists and students from remote regions ranks as a primary cause.

Krishna KC is now a Maoist central committee member. But he began his political career as a student activist for the UML in Baglung before moving to Kathmandu and becoming the central secretary of the student front.



KIRAN PANDAY

But during the mid 1990s, he increasingly felt that the party would not be able to effect a "fundamental transformation". He got disillusioned with the leadership's corrupt ways, and the constant number game in the house. The breaking point was the Mahakali treaty which he saw as a sell-out.

KC moved to the short-lived Bamdeb Gautam-led CPN (ML). But when Gautam got back to UML, KC along with many others from the party switched to the Maoists. He subsequently became the vice president of the student front and Kathmandu-in-charge. He was also picked and tortured by the army.

The Maoist nominated MP and analyst Hari Roka's political career followed a similar trajectory. He was in the UML and shuffled between being Khotang district in-charge and looking after the central office. But Roka was dissatisfied with Madan Bhandari's political line, which he saw as a compromise with the Westminster system. For a party activist with no income, who went to jail for seven years during Panchayat, the party's easy co-option into the system came as a shock. Mahakali was the breaking point for him too. He moved to the ML before becoming a Maoist-leaning analyst. In Roka's home district Khotang, UML won all seats in the 1991 and 1994 elections. This time, the Maoists took both seats.

Man Bahadur Tamang is a mild-mannered farmer from Kabhre's Mangaltar. An old UML supporter who was harassed by the Maoists during the war, Tamang ended up voting for the Maoists this time. "I am still with UML, but they didn't do anything for us. So I thought let us give the Maoists a chance."

What ties these stories together is the obvious disillusionment with UML. The party's leaders spend most of their time being smug about how the Maoists had to finally come back to the system, and how that is a victory of their political line of accepting multiparty democracy. They should listen to the rankling disappointment that led so many of their supporters away.

The party's choice in Butwal is to elect a person more conservative than NC hawks (Oli), or a master reconciler who has already got his chance and blown it (Nepal), or a person with weak inter-personal skills who seems willing to be a junior partner of the Maoists (Khanal). None of the three will create the new hope and energy the party needs. It will not fundamentally alter the 1990s culture of middleman politics that has seeped into the party. It will not win them new members or wean back old comrades.

And that is why the eighth convention, too, may go down as a missed opportunity. •



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

Ace aces it

Nepal's fastest-growing bank braces itself for effects of global downturn



Some see a crisis as a time to opt out, others see it as an opportunity.

Nepal's banking sector has been the most-professionally run where government regulators have taken the least obstructive role. Despite the pall of gloom caused by the after-effects of the international financial crisis and domestic uncertainties about the Maoist-led government's commitment to the private sector, Nepal's financial sector has proved to be remarkably resilient.

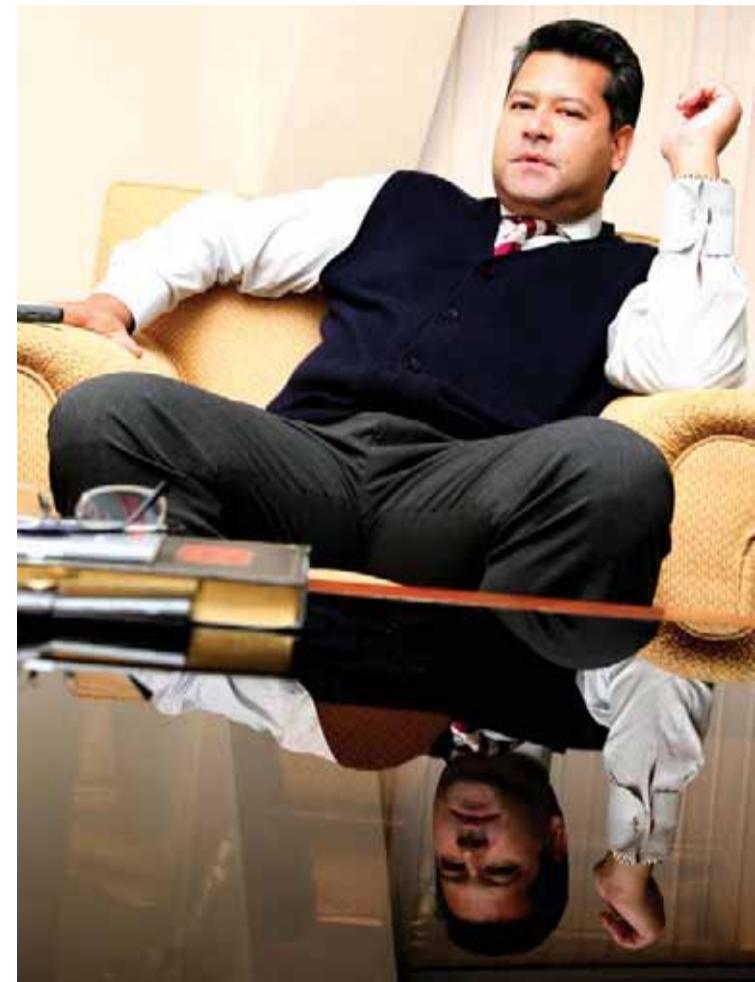
One of the newest Nepali banks and one to register the fastest diversification and growth is the Ace Development Bank, which in the first year after upgrading from a finance company has become the highest earner per share among development banks in Nepal. Its net profit grew 150 per cent in the first year.

Ace has shown aggressive growth in merchant banking and has become the largest manager of issues brought into the market with 23 IPOs worth Rs 2.7 billion. The bank has also become the first to introduce the Exchange Traded Fund in Nepal in the form of Gold ETFs and will soon be introducing Visa Electron debit cards. It is focussing on infrastructure financing and rural micro financing.

The architect of all this is CEO Sidhanta Pandey, who himself returned to Nepal from an international banking job with Merrill Lynch in London in 2004.

"In hindsight, I'm glad I came back to Nepal when the choice was mine, now I may have been forced to come back," Pandey joked, citing the layoffs in investment banks internationally due to the global financial crisis.

Pandey wanted to return to Nepal to head and run a financial institution, and says he has felt "enormous satisfaction" with the results he has helped achieved at Ace. He attributes the bank's success to teamwork and his own



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

deep involvement in every aspect of its activities on a rotational basis.

Yet, Pandey has no illusions about the challenges ahead. He told *Nepali Times* after being selected the paper's Company of the Month for February 2009: "We, as a country, have to brace ourselves for a downturn, we have to have the systems in place to face the effects of the global crisis. And as a bank we have to be strongly capitalised."

As world goes through "de-globalisation" there is a tendency for nation states to address economic contraction with protectionism and insulate themselves. The immediate effect will be felt on remittances, which has kept the Nepali economy afloat.

Yet, Pandey feels the government's recent decisions on VDIS, inability to curb militant unionism and ensure security have not served to bolster confidence, investors are wary and there is capital flight. "The voluntary tax disclosure scheme is a wonderful instrument, but there is a time and place to do it, the timing has been all wrong," he

says, counting out in his fingers a checklist of what the government's priority should be: power, security, labour and investment policies.

Ace itself has joined hands with Butwal Power Company in the 42 MW Marsyangdi III to undertake the entire financial requirements to build the scheme and has been involved with the Swiss-based le Rosey to invest in microfinance projects.

Ace has been cited for its corporate governance, and Pandey says that is a result of his company's emphasis on accountability and responsibility.

"We want managers who take responsibility and not pass the buck," he says.

The bank has opened three new branches this year, including one in Kirtipur. Why Kirtipur, we asked. "Because I was there by chance and didn't see any banks," Pandey replies matter-of-factly.

Ace has also helped revive the Burns Unit at Bir Hospital which was about to close down because of lack of funds, it is involved in cleaning up the Hanuman Dhoka area and works with Bal Mandir on scholarships for children. ●

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How is one to simplify the complexity surrounding what pushes Nepal ahead? Four thoughts come to mind.

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Our leading politicians today do not represent Nepal's future. They



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Ashutosh Tiwari

remind us of our past. Though we are thankful for their sacrifices, the future is so uncertain that past achievements on anyone's part are no guarantee for prosperity ahead. Meantime, with 13 million out of 26 million Nepalis under the age of 17, it's the young who are our future. Unless our geriatric politicians grasp this straightforward fact well enough to either step aside to let young people in their party to come to the fore or start deeply engaging with the youth in education, health services and career-related skills, there is no new Nepal.

Accountable politics.
There's something fundamentally wrong with our political process



SAM KANG LI

that allows politicians who've suffered losses in elections to return as ministers and party leaders. This losers-take-all process signals that individual competence and the public's (lack of) confidence in the individual do not matter for governance.

Besides, if losers stay on the top of the bottle as bottlenecks, how can any political party grow its next set of leaders? Moreover, our unchallenged practice that as long as one politician gets an election ticket, he need not be a stakeholder in any constituency in which he is to run for public office makes him put his party's

interests above anyone else's. Is it any wonder that our representatives, once elected, could care less about the voters' concerns?

Predictable legal regime.
There's a reason why journalists want the ongoing culture of impunity to end. It's not only because of the attacks against the media and the killings of journalists. When crimes are committed by party cadres, and politicians are there to cover the alleged criminals, it's only matter of time that the trust in the political process breaks down completely.

Once trust is thus destroyed, there will be no loktantra of any kind, no matter how lofty the rhetoric is. Additionally, there will be negative spillover effects. Investors will see laws not being followed in one domain. They will conclude that laws will likely not be followed in Nepal in any domain, and they'll stay away.

And which hardworking Nepali will want to live and work in a supposedly democratic country in which rules are unclear, laws are easily bent, and those in power are not interested in empowering the courts to mete out justice? The only way to restore trust in the system is to strengthen the legal institutions by making them independent and strong.

Private sector for jobs.
In a lecture recently, a presenter said that though our politicians fought for democracy, none have ever fought to improve our economic lives. The result is that we are stuck in a doom loop of endless party-political conversations that do not touch upon ways to create jobs for thousands of young Nepalis,

who we see milling about on the streets.

Unless those in power take the issue of job creation seriously by reframing how they view the private sector as a platform on which jobs are created, the difficulties of running a business together with rising unemployment levels will only foment social upheavals in a few years.

True, for some, it's in their interest to keep Nepal's problems complicated and hazy. But for a majority of Nepalis, the simplicity of focus on youth as our future, accountable politics, independent judiciary and skill-based and competition-driven job creation programs help imagine the new Nepal that's still being over-promised and under-delivered. ●

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"The Maoists can't take over"

Interview with Ram Sharan Mahat in Deshantar, 15 February

देशनारायणमहात

Deshantar: Is the NC planning to topple the current government?

No. The Maoists are intentionally creating false rumours to assert autocracy. We aren't thinking about an alternative right now. If we are able to bring the Maoists on the right track, we won't need an alternative.

What do you mean by bringing them on the right track?

The Maoists have to behave like a constitutional party. They are still using violence, even though they promised to enter a multi-party democracy underpinned by the rule of law, with a respect for human rights and press freedom. Even though the prime minister announced that all seized property would be returned, nothing has been done. We will make the Maoists carry out what we've agreed on.

Isn't an ordinance the government's constitutional right?

Yes, it is. We've introduced ordinances in the past too. But not introducing any bills while the parliament was in session, and bombarding the cabinet with more than a dozen new ordinances a week later is against parliamentary tradition. The words in a bill are very important, each clause needs to be debated and endorsed in agreement. Delicate issues like disappearances are not something that a single party should decide on.



KIRAN PANDAY

Are you against the bill itself or the way it was introduced?

We are not against a commission being formed to investigate disappearances, but there should be discussion on how it is formed and what its activities will be. Since the Maoists themselves are suspects, they are being self protecting about this issue.

There are claims that by raising property issues, the NC is trying to hinder the constitution making process. Is it that you don't want to draft a constitution under the Maoists?

It's the Maoists that don't seem to want to draft the constitution. They don't seem serious. When they came into government, they agreed on a multi-party republic but they're talking about a people's republic now. We will take part in the constitution-drafting process but we won't let the Maoists bring a one-party autocracy.

Should we start thinking about an alternative government?

You can't change a government every three months. Even though there is debate on how true the support is, constitutionally, they are in power. They have the numbers, and the constitutional right. We don't. If the situation gets worse, the government will fall apart by itself.

The Maoists are threatening to take over. It's impossible to take over power. They won't do it through violence, because if that was the plan, they would have done it a long time back. If they try to, however, there will be protests all over Nepal, and we will take the lead.

Thorn in the side

Himal Khabarpatrika, 12-26 February

हिमाल

According to a source at army headquarters, the Maoists had always viewed COAS Rookmangud Katawal as an obstacle. In fact, PM Dahal had been pressuring him to resign and had even tried to lure him to do so with various rewards. When that didn't work, the threats began. His wife started receiving menacing calls at their home and Katawal told his core team of generals that his life was in danger.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Now the defence minister too has been quoted several times as saying Katawal will be dismissed. But sacking him would be difficult for the Maoists because it would involve lengthy legal procedures and because they lack support from partner parties. A retired army official adds that if the Maoists were perchance successful in dismissing Katawal, the whole army structure would collapse.

It would also have a severely detrimental psychological effect on army personnel.

In a scenario in which the Maoists seem to be trying to weaken the state structures, the army has emerged as a strong body. Maybe the Maoists think that if the army is weakened, they can rule without any opposition. But meddling in issues that shouldn't be their prime concern has only weakened the Maoists. Whether Dahal is unable to explain to his party leaders that they can't do as they please or he doesn't want to, he should understand he is harming his own party.

Kanchanpur's dhan

Ananda Rai in Nepal, 1 February

लेपाल

Whenever a speech is made about deforestation, officials never miss pointing out that refugee camps and kamaiya settlements on government property have contributed to the mess. But at a community forest in Kanchanpur, it is the refugees and Kamaiya that are protecting the forests.

Sixty families of freed Kamaiya Tharus and internally displaced have turned the Janahit Mahakali Community Forest into a model for grassroots forest management. In a forest north of the East West Highway, where trees were depleting due to massive deforestation by wood mafia and erosion, the community has planted over 8,000 bamboo, timber and hardwood trees since 2004. Locals have also benefitted by producing more than a hundred

tonnes of ginger. This unique system of agroforestry has raised living standards, while conserving forests. The community has donated Rs 100,000 to the nearby Udaya Higher Secondary School to provide free education for students from the ninth to twelfth grade, and Rs 40,000 to Kanchanpur Campus—all from the sale of forest products. Members of the community can buy oxen on interest-free loans, flood control embankments have been built, VDC roads have been gravelled and a new child welfare centre built.

The chairman of the group adds that one of the biggest achievements has been the protection of the forest and wildlife. "We haven't just protected trees," he says, "we have seen more deer than ever before and even tigers and leopards have returned."



UML Convention, Leadership selection

अन्जपूर्ण पोष्ट Basu Kshitij in Annapurna Post, 15 February

QUOTE OF THE WEEK



I'll fix Prachanda, just watch me. //

CA member Baban Singh in Ghatana ra Bichar

Concerns, consensus and the constitution

In an interview with *Himal Khabarpatrika*, CA chair Subhas Nembang calls for consensus and compromise among political parties to see the peace process to its conclusion with the writing of the new constitution.

Himal Khabarpatrika: How is the constitution writing process going?

Subhas Nembang: It is going smoothly as per schedule. A team of CA members has set off to gather public opinion from all 75 districts. We will have the draft concept paper for the new constitution by the end of April.

Are the suggestions collected by these CA members and those received by the secretariat of equal significance?
The secretariat might still be receiving ideas while the CA members are out collecting opinions from the public. These suggestions are equally important for the constitution writing process. The secretariat deemed it necessary to physically go to the public to collate views as it was impossible to collect a complete range of ideas through notices placed in the media. The CA members will meet people directly and canvass their opinions.

Can anyone complain of not having his/her suggestions included in the new constitution?

It is not practical to include all suggestions in an annex of the constitution. But they are important documents for the secretariat. Based on these suggestions, the subject committees will develop concept papers and prepare a preliminary constitution.

The CA members are going back to villages to gather views from those same people who elected them? How meaningful is this?

We are focussing our efforts on making the writing process democratic and progressive. The more people we can reach, the better the constitution will be. When people are involved in writing the constitution they feel ownership of it. This is the first time the CA has drawn up the constitution. Sending CA members back to villages guarantees the people ownership it.

How do the CA and its committees make their decisions? Are they made by a majority vote?

This has been spelled out in the CA Regulations. The issues will be discussed within the committees and they will make their decisions based on consensus, even when it comes to endorsing the preliminary constitution draft. This decision making by consensus is the essence of the constitution writing process. There are always

other legal ways and rules to resolve the issues if a consensus cannot be reached.

If a small party tries to disrupt the process by demanding its issue be addressed first, what would you do?

I do not think this will happen. The CA procedure envisages a consensus mechanism for decision-making. They have all taken an oath to accept the outcome through this method. I don't think anyone would have any objection to the outcome of a procedure they have signed up to themselves. It applies to the full assembly of the CA.

Have you found any political parties to be in agreement or disagreement regarding certain constitution-writing issues yet?

If we look at past decisions taken by parliament and historical documents like the Comprehensive Peace Accord, political parties have successfully shared a vision on major issues like the multiparty system, periodical elections, human rights, freedom of press, an independent judiciary, the rule of law etc. We can find solutions to other issues based on the fact they have already agreed on many.

But when political parties have not reached an agreement on the structure of provinces, how can the State Restructure Committee proceed?

For so long the country has been ruled under a unitary system that it appeared an extremely difficult task to break up the unitary state and create a federal system. But the country will be a federal republic and there are only a few issues to be resolved. Discussions and debates are continuing regarding the basis on which provinces should be created. It is through discussion that we will find common ground. In the same way we should seek consensus on other issues while protecting the common agreements of the past.

Should the political parties go along with the provinces prepared by the State Restructure Committee or should they decide on this issue first?



KIRAN PANDAY

The subject committees go to the public with a set of questionnaires for the draft constitution. These are open-ended questions to collect public views, aspirations and expectations. These suggestions will be sent to the relevant committees, where they will be discussed. The political parties will then be clear about people's opinions regarding provinces. The political parties should decide on the structure of provinces by studying these suggestions. The final draft passed by the assembly will be again taken to the public before its formal endorsement.

What is the most important aspect in the process of constitution making?

There is a need for a high level of political understanding among the political parties until the constitution writing process is complete. We have to come together to give the peace process a logical end and write a new constitution. I appeal to all to be vigilant in this process.

The hunt for common grounds

Let's focus on the points of agreement and move ahead

Finalising the constitution within the stipulated timeframe is the CA's duty. But to achieve this, the assembly will have to start focussing on certain issues right away by:

COMMENT
Radheshyam Adhikari

1. Build consensus within and between parties
2. Manage disagreements
3. Manage it all within the deadline
4. Have a stable government

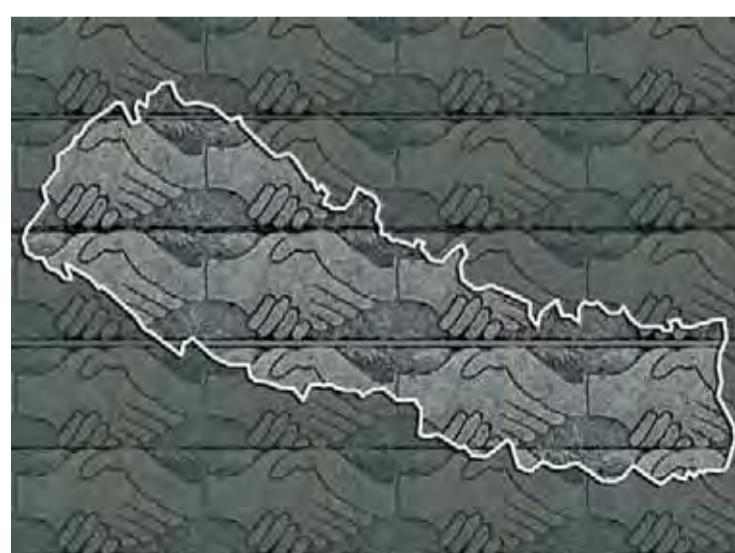
If we can achieve these points, we will be in an ideal situation. But this doesn't mean that the constitution building process should stop if we are unable to attain them. For this a consensus between the political

forces is vital.

A sound basis of cooperation between the political forces was formed in the first meeting of the CA when a proposal for a new constitution was passed by a majority of 95 per cent. It outlined that sovereignty lies with the people of Nepal, which is a free, united, sovereign, secular and inclusive federal democratic republic state.

The second point of common ground was to be found in the political parties' manifestos that were put forward before the election. Almost all 25 parties agreed on human rights, rule of law, independent legislative, free press and a multi-party system.

Before starting the constitution writing process, the manifestos of all the parties should be studied so that the issues of agreement and



disagreement can be defined and areas of contention discussed and debated.

The agreements made between the political parties and other groups represent the third point of cooperation. The CA has its

work cut out implementing these agreements as some issues are hazy and need clarifying and directing. Until the new constitution is signed and sealed a government of national cooperation is needed.

It has already been decided that Nepal will be a federal state. But state reconstruction is a difficult and challenging task. If we are to uphold the agreements passed by the first meeting of the CA, reconstruction should take place within the ideals of a unified Nepal. Only then can we move towards federalism on a political, economic, geographic, linguistic, social and cultural basis.

The constitution writing is indeed a challenging process, but it has to be done. To complete it within the given time frame, it is necessary to build understanding and cooperation. It is not enough to simply complete the constitution, its meaningful implementation also requires harmony between all political forces. It is not unnatural to expect the players to play by the rules of the game. If a unanimous decision can't be reached, acceptance should be given to the one with a majority. ●

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KIRAN PANDAY

Two V-days

Last week Nepalis celebrated love, not war

It was a glorious sunny day in Kathmandu last Saturday and the roads were deserted. Where was everyone?

They were in Godavari, Tau Daha and Sundarijal and other picnic spots around the capital—all young couples holding hands or embracing. At Nag Pokhari there were at least six couples holding hands and cuddling on narrow benches around the pond. Even Pashupatinath was teeming with lovers.

Never has Valentine's Day been observed as passionately by young Nepali urbanites as this year. Card shops, department stores and restaurants displayed tacky hearts made of ribbon and fur outside their doors, heart-shaped balloons floating around.

V-Day coincided with the Maoists' own V-Day, the 14th anniversary of the war.

But it was clear that Nepalis now want to make love, not war. St Valentine was even honoured in the cantonments where former guerrillas gave each other plastic roses.

FM radio RJs were busy relaying love messages, newspapers were either full of stories about 'super couples' or ads for Valentine's Day parties. Even Nepali language papers featured stories on what Valentine's Day meant for young Nepalis. V-day messages were blatant, and omnipresent. If everyone you know is planning 'something special' on prem dibas, it is difficult not to be curious or succumb to the mad frenzy of this consumer-driven event. For 15-year olds, peer pressure alone is enough.

There was a time not so long ago when eyebrows were raised if a girl and a boy were seen walking together. Satellite tv, Hindi soaps, Bollywood/Hollywood and music videos changed that. This change was not just for the younger generation but also for their parents, who spend considerable amounts of free time watching tv than the generation before did.

While Bollywood may be making parents and their kids more liberal, it is the sappy Korean love stories such as *Six Years in Love* and *Do Re Me Fa So La Ti Do* that have become the shows that the new generation watch and emulate. Kathmandu's youth don't just dress like the Koreans they see on screen, but even behave like them.

Mobile phones are so cheap that every college-going kid has one. With SMS and MMS it is much easier to come together, communicate, meet new people and relay love messages.

Kathmandu is now much more densely packed than before. People in Kathmandu have less time to talk about (or to) each other. Today's teenagers have broken out of the mould of obsessing about upsetting family and neighbours and care less about what society thinks.

For someone who was raised in Kathmandu and left during adolescence, one thing that struck me on my return after living away was how comfortable young Nepali men and women were with each other.

It doesn't matter if Valentine's Day is western, or anti-revolutionary. Nepalis are creative and celebrate prem dibas their own way. Personally, I would rather see people displaying affection publicly than the moral police roaming around the city. This past weekend urban Nepalis were more enthusiastic about celebrating the anniversary of love than the anniversary of war. ●

INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

CHONG ZILIANG
in CHITWAN

While the war was going on in the jungles of Nawalparasi four years ago, Sabitri Shah was fighting a battle of her own. The 24-year-old was pregnant and despite the lack of medical facilities, gave birth to a daughter just as the war ended.

In the Shaktikhor camp last year, Shah gave birth to a second child, a son. She named him Jang. "I gave him that name hoping he will grow up to be a brave warrior," she says.

It was difficult raising her first child in the battlefield and she was malnourished, but she says that things are much better in the cantonment.

Marriages between PLA combatants after permission from the party is becoming increasingly common.

Section commander Phulmaya Syangtan, 27, is another ex-guerrilla with a young

Children

PLA babies in the camps face an uncertain future

son. Young James Pun (named after the British scientist James Watt and not the fictional British spy, we are told) was born last year in the camp. PLA parents like 22-year-old Sushma Devkota say they have no problems with bringing up children in the environment of a military camp.

However, the camp commanders are getting worried that a military base is getting to look like a feeding centre and have decided to give a five-month maternity leave to the estimated 1,000 young mothers in the seven main cantonments and 21 sub-cantonments all over the country.

Where possible, the young mothers live in a village near the camp renting a room with the Rs 3,000 maternity allowance they receive from the cantonment.

Growing up within the Maoist army is not new for many

of the ex-guerrillas. Ram Kumar Moktan was only 15 when he dropped out of school and joined the revolution. Now 22, he is part of the public relations team for the PLA third division.

Moktan speaks in Maoist jargon and his sentences are a series of slogans against the injustices of capitalism, and the communist victories in China and Vietnam. He seems oblivious that these two countries have switched to market reforms and have experienced rapid economic growth.

Nirmala Nepal joined the Maoists when she was 17. She is now a company vice commander and a mother of one-year-old Ishan.

Nirmala married fellow soldier Arjun Karki after a fierce week-long battle in which three of their comrades were killed.

After the war,



PAINTED OVER: A house in Thabang bajar that had silhouettes of Marx, Stalin and Mao (above) has now been painted over (top). A neighbourhood of the town destroyed in the war has been re-vamped with new cobble stones and electric poles (right).

TEXT and PICTURES by KYOKO OGURA

Back in March 2003 when I first visited Thabang, this cradle of the Maoist revolution embodied Nepal's ethnic diversity in a microcosm. There were not just the local Magars, but Tharus, Bahuns, Chhetris, Dalits.

They were Maoist guerrillas from all over Nepal, and they walked around openly with their weapons. Scenes of collective life were everywhere: a Maoist cultural group would sing revolutionary songs early in the morning, the militia would do morning exercises, in the evening young Maoists played volleyball while the girls cooked food for comrades in huge pots.

It was clear that Thabang was the centre of the

of the revolution

FAMOUS BABYSITTERS: One-year-old James Pun is growing up in the Shaktikhor cantonment under the watchful eyes of communist luminaries. His father and mother are both fighters in the Maoist army and admit their son's future is as uncertain as the country's.

The couple's goal now is to join the national army.

"We fought for the party and now we will fight for the nation," says Nirmala, "our ability is proven and there is no logic in putting us into another profession." She says her son's future will depend on the integration process.

It is clear the children of the Maoist revolution face an uncertain future. Asked about what her hopes for her son James are, Phulmaya Syangtan says, "I can't even say what the future holds for my country. How can I say anything about my son?" ●

With additional reporting by Ekal Silwal and Kiran Panday



CHONG ZI LIANG

Rolpa fights neglect



Maoist revolution, protected by its isolation in a remote part of already-remote Rolpa. Major Maoist military campaigns, such as the attack on Beni, were planned in Thabang. Top leaders like Mohan Baidya and Ram Bahadur Thapa were here regularly for meetings and the locals willingly gave the Maoists shelter.

Today, nearly three years after the ceasefire, parts of the town demolished in helicopter raids have been rebuilt, many villagers have electricity and there is no load shedding. In Phuntibang where 95 members of Maoist central committee including Pushpa Kamal Dahal assembled in August 2004, electricity poles have gone up. There are neat stone pavements laid with government support. The bajar has a jewellery shop, which always has throngs of women. But shops opened by members of the Maoists commune are closed.

The most dramatic transformation is in the people. There are outsiders, but this time they aren't guerrillas



"Our party is in power, but they don't care for us."

but government health workers, school teachers, NGO activists and even police officers. Access to Thabang is much easier with the half-finished motorable road from Sulichaur. Thabang can now be reached from the nearest road-head within a day of fast walking.

Although locals in Thabang are experiencing peace and development after years of conflict, most still carry physical and psychological scars of the war. A 53-year-old woman in Phuntibang whose only son is a Maoist recalls the night in January 2006 when she heard about an army patrol approaching. She took her daughter-in-law and a newly-born baby into the jungle in deep snow. "We spent days in the forest, often I felt we would die," she recalls.

Fifty-year-old former teacher Indra Bahadur Buda Magar is one of the oldest party activists in Rolpa since the Panchayat. He helped establish the party in other districts of western Nepal. He was injured during the Beni attack, and still has shrapnel in his body. There are many like him who haven't received proper medical treatment. It's not only the government but also their own party that is failing to take care of them.

The majority of Maoists here do not openly blame the party for forgetting Rolpa, but there is a growing murmur of discontent against the comrades in faraway Kathmandu. A father of a student who studies in Thabang's model school that the Maoists set up four years ago dared to say: "During the war leaders used to stay in Thabang and we used to look after them. But after the war ended, our party is in power in Kathmandu but they don't care for us. They have never come back."

The Maoist model school, where half the students are children of martyrs, has been trying in vain to register as a government school, but has not succeeded. All the seven teachers work voluntarily and the students have no text books.

An elderly Maoist supporter in Mijhing VDC has no place to live since both of his houses had been burnt down by the security forces. He expresses his distrust of the party: "Seeing the behaviour of our leaders in power, I just lose hope. I am afraid that we have to suffer again, just like during the conflict." ●

Jam m in' in the ratri



PAAVAN MATHEMA

When musician Ishwor Gurung, front man of Namaste band, first raised the idea of an international music concert in Nepal back in 1994, many brushed it off as a crazy undertaking.

But having represented Nepal in various music festivals abroad, Gurung was determined to make it possible. An open-air concert had never been organised before and getting the logistics right was a mammoth task. "But somebody had to start," recalls Gurung, "at that time, we built the stage with

our own hands using bamboo." Not only did he organise the first ever Maha Shivaratri World Music Festival, but he got an overwhelming response. The festival took place thereafter every year for 10 years on Shivaratri in various cities in Nepal.

On Maha Shivaratri, worship with world music

ENCORE: Ishwor Gurung and Mahesh KC (l-r) perform along with their band mates of Namaste Band at the 2003 Maha Shivaratri World Music Festival in Kathmandu.

"As we closed the 10th year finale in 2004, I promised the people that we would be back, and here we are," says Gurung. Organised after a gap of five years, this year's festival also marks the 20th anniversary of Namaste Band. The festival will include 20 bands from Nepal, Japan, the US, Canada and Germany. Top Nepali bands like Robin and the New Revolution, Cobweb, Shadows Band and the Axe, among many others, are gearing up for the event. Almost 30 independent artists will also perform which includes veterans of Nepali music like Deep Shrestha and Om Bikram Bista.

The two-day musical festival will take place in Kathmandu and Pokhara. Namaste Band will also release a documentary made on the band and launch their book-Smarika, which is a tribute to musicians who have been a part

of their 20-year journey.

"We call it world music because we're not featuring just one genre or a particular type of music. Folk, rock, jazz, classical, hip hop, fusion—the bands we have come from diverse backgrounds," explains Gurung, "and when artists come together like this, there is so much one can learn." In the past years, the festival has been a wonderful platform for old musicians and new. Gurung says that he remembers some of the top artists and bands of Nepal today starting out at the festival.

Asked why on Maha Shivaratri, Gurung replies: "Well Shiva himself is an artist. Shivaratri is a celebration of Shiva when people come together in love and peace. That's the message we want to spread with our music." ●

Mahashivaratri World Music Festival

Tickets: Rs 100
22 February, Fun Park, Exhibition Road, Kathmandu
28 February, Pradarsani Marg, Naya Bajar, Pokhara

Voting lines now open 24 hours

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STEVE LECLERQ

Pachyderm masterpieces

ROMA ARYAL

Sundar Kali holds a brush to the canvas before her and paints even lines with careful precision while her mahout helps her choose the colours. She is a 35-year-old elephant from Tiger Tops in Chitwan, who is used to carrying tourists on her back through the jungle on safaris.

But this winter, the elephants and their mahouts had something new to do: paint.

It was all the idea of Ariane LeClerq, a student at Lincoln School in Kathmandu. Spending time at Chitwan lodges Machan Wildlife Resort and Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, Ariane was able to go the farthest with two elephants—Sundar Kali and a five-year-old male, Khem Prasad (pictured).

"At first, the mahouts thought we were crazy," recalls Ariane, who has lived in Nepal all her life. She wanted to do

this project after she read about how logging elephants in Thailand were taught how to paint after logging was banned and they and their mahouts were left jobless, begging for money on the streets. Now, Thailand even has an elephant orchestra where elephants play the percussion.

While Ariane and her mentor Richard Lair, an elephant expert in Thailand, struggled to teach reluctant elephants, Sundar Kali showed a hidden talent for art. Khem Prasad took a little longer to learn, but both now have paintings with their own distinctive styles. While Sundar Kali is more careful, approaching the paintings like a task, Khem is assertive and swishes his brush in random lines.

James A Giambrone, curator of the Indigo Gallery who is exhibiting the paintings, sold 17 works of elephant art on the first night. But not all feedback has been positive, some animal rights wallahs have complained that it is inhumane to force

elephants to paint.

Ariane agrees to an extent but adds: "It would be great if they were wild. But the reality is that they are domesticated and will continue to be. It gives them something better to do than be chained all day."

The elephant's interest in painting was apparent, Ariane says. While other elephants were reluctant to learn, Khem Prasad and Sundar Kali, when unchained, approached the easel unprompted. Moreover, while painting, they focused on the canvas. "Other elephants merely move their trunks but their eyes are elsewhere," says Ariane.

All proceeds from the exhibition will go to Wildlife Conservation Nepal. Says Ariane: "I think this will help gain respect for elephants, so kids won't turn into poachers when they grow up." ●

The exhibition continues till 22 February at the Indigo Gallery, Naxal.

Follow the sun

Surendra Thapa was born in Kabhre, came to Kathmandu to work as a domestic.

After SLC he started working at the Kathmandu-based solar energy company, Lotus Energy in Bhatbhateni.

Surendra worked his way up from messenger boy at Lotus to production manager. Five years ago, he got a diversity visa and emigrated to the United States. He went to work at Namaste Solar founded by Blake Jones, who was one of the original investors at Lotus.

Namaste Solar is based in Denver where President Barack Obama this week announced a \$787 billion economic stimulus package on non-oil renewable energy research and development. The Obama plan hopes to create millions of new green jobs in the United States in the next three years.

Obama signed the new bill into law at the Museum of Nature and Science in Denver where Namaste Solar has installed a large solar array on the roof. Blake's company was about to lay off half of its 55 staff due to financial problems, but with the pro-renewable emphasis of the Obama administration, Namaste Solar will not just be keeping its current projects but will also expand.

The entire Namaste Solar staff including Surendra were on hand to witness the historic signing ceremony which was beamed live on television worldwide. Later, Obama and his vice president, Joseph Biden toured the roof to inspect the solar panels that produces the electricity for the museum.

"I am extremely proud of our friends Surendra and Blake for this amazing achievement of promotion of solar energy, which will benefit us all," said Jeevan Goff of Lotus Energy who mentored Surendra while he was in Nepal. ●



ELECTRIC MOMENT: US President Barack Obama shakes the hand of Surendra Thapa from Nepal on Tuesday in Denver after announcing his \$787 billion economic stimulus package that emphasises solar and renewable energy development. Thapa was born in Kabhre and worked his way up from being a domestic to work as an engineer at Namaste Solar in Denver.



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Love in the Air**, art by Ragini Upadhyay-Grela at 5.30 PM till 8 March, Siddartha Gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Picassos of the jungle**, elephant paintings by Khem Prasad and Sundar Kali at Indigo Gallery, till 22 February, 8AM to 6PM.
- ❖ **Faces of Europe**, portraits and landscapes by Fritz Risken, till 1 March 11AM-6PM, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal.

EVENTS

- ❖ **Second Documentary Open School Workshop**, till 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
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Monthly Lecture** by Lisa Choegyal and Gautam SJB Rana, Cultural Studies Group Nepal, 10AM, 27 February, Shankar Hotel, Lazimpat
- ❖ **Encounter the legend**, Madhab Prasad Ghimire, socialising session starts 5.30 PM, Rs 565, nepa~laya 'r' sala, Kalikasthan
- ❖ **Bhote Kosi rafting**, Nepal River Conservation Trust, rafting date from 1 March, Rs 1,500 registration fee. 4361995



MUSIC

- ❖ **Poseie and the Fags** live, 20 February, Moksh. 5526212
- ❖ **Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory** scholarship fund concert with vocalist Sachal Vasandani, 28 February, 7.15 PM onwards, Hyatt Regency
- ❖ **Blues American folk** and classic country live by Desmond Lattery and Anthony Correll, 5.30 PM, 22 February, Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Wednesday Melody** at Jazzabell Café, Happy hour 6-8PM and TGIF party with live band Epic every Friday at 8PM. 2114075
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **Live Sensation**, performance by Yankey every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234.
- ❖ **Fusion and Looza Band** every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- ❖ **Fusion and Classical Music** by Anil Shahi every Wednesday, rock with Rashmi Singh every Friday, sufi & raga with Hemant Rana every Saturday, 8PM onwards, Absolute Bar. 5521408

DINING

- ❖ **Gourmet trout** at Olive Garden, 6PM onwards at Rs 850+, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat. 4411818
- ❖ **Chez Caroline** for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited. 4263070
- ❖ **Fresh Himalayan rainbow trout** at Rox Restaurant all February 7PM onwards, Hyatt Regency. 4489362
- ❖ **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Strawberry Etagere** at The Lounge from 4.30 PM- 6.30 PM. Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Nhuchhe goes Thai** at Nhuchhe's Thai Kitchen, Baluwatar. 4429903
- ❖ **Fusion** of Marcela Ragan's new menu and Mannie's new bar at Dhokaima Café. 5522113
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **High tea** with scones and sandwiches everyday at the Lounge from 4.30-6.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234

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Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com

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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

After going straight from winter into summer, it is now clear that this drought is here to stay. With no westerly front on the horizon and a vast high pressure system sitting over northern India, the prospect for rain in central Nepal is slim. The only thing we can hope for is some moisture injection which can lead to local convection storms over the mountains. But given the dry air sweeping in from the desert, this is also unlikely at least over the weekend. Expect temperature to climb to 26 with minimum staying down at 6. This daily temperature variation of 20 degree is unprecedented. Plan for a severe water shortage. The only blessing is that the heat is starting to melt the snows, so river flows are rising and this mean an easing of the energy crunch.



'MANDU MANDALA

by PRERANA PAKHRIN





MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

CELEBRATING A DREAM: President Ram Baran Yadav, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Vice President Parmananda Jha and Chief Justice Kedar Prasad Giri attend a function at Tundikhel marking the 58th Democracy Day on Wednesday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

STAR ATTRACTION: Home Secretary Gobinda Kusum decorates Ramesh Chand Thakuri of the Nepal Police at the Home Ministry, following his recent promotion from DIG to IG.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

CLEAN CHOICE: An electric REVA car being test-driven at the Alternative Energy Fair at Bhrikuti Mandap on Sunday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

NOT A DROP TO DRINK: Locals crowd around a well that opens only once a day in Purnachandi Tole, Patan. Dry winters have created crippling water shortages in the Valley.

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Afno manchhe

When the comrades first assumed power six months ago and started stacking afno manches in all govt corporations and ministries, we said so what's new, the kangresis and eh-maleys all did the same. But relatively speaking, as it were, the baddies have by now broken all previous records.

We're not even talking about Awesome carrying out another *kram bhanga* by letting his grandson also take the salute from the podium at the PLA bash in Hatikhor last week. Comrade Yummy's sissy was sworn into the Civil Service Commission although this contravenes all kinds of constitutional criteria on eligibility. Instructions came directly from Baluwatar to make her #1 Commissioner.

Then govt spokesman Comrade Dina tried to get his daughter to replace Govinda Raj Pokhrel after he was unceremoniously sacked as the head of the AEPC by the Scientific Minister at a time when the group was coming up with viable alternate energy plans. Even Financial Minister Rambabu, who trusted Pokhrel's qualifications, couldn't save his skin. It looks like everyone had their eyes on the *moola* that could be skimmed off hefty government subsidies for renewables. In the end, the position fell on the UML's plate under some package deal that involved the division of the spoils of government.



When will this country finally get around to appointing ambassadors who don't have skeletons in their closets? We had an excellency in DC once who got caught shop-lifting and was only set free after claiming diplomatic immunity. We had a hijacker as ambassador to the Delhi Durbar, and 20 years later we are getting ready to send a guy from a party which New Delhi declared a terrorist outfit even before we got around to doing it. In the give-and-take, the baddies got ND while the Forum got DC, and it promptly appointed Sukhdev Sah without googling him first. It seems the ambassador-designate had to pay \$40,000 in damages to his Nepali domestic for breach of contract while he was working for the IMF in the 1990s. There was a big hoo-ha about this in the *Washington Post* at the time. All we can say is that at least Sah has a green card, and not a red card.



Looks like COAS Cutwall was offered both carrots and sticks by the baddies to quit. First, they dangled plenipotentiary to the Court of St James and the general refused. Then they tried to entice him to retire early in return for unspecified compensation. When that didn't work they started making threatening calls to him from unlisted numbers. Then Chief publicly ridiculed the ex-royal baddie Sen Oli at a CA hearing and literally brought the house down.

Comrade Storm Cloud then turned internal party screws on Bossman PKD, telling him in so many words: "Either you sack him or I'll resign." Awesome told the Cloudy to cool it because he was under intense pressure from The South on this one. Last we heard, Overcast still hasn't given up trying to oust the Chief, and if can't be through ordnance then it will be through ordinance.



If the UML was a nation state, all hell would have broken loose by now over the gross interference in its internal affairs by outsiders. As the Ass reported last week, in order to defeat his rivals in the internal power struggle, Comrade JN has enlisted the **heavy guns** in the form of the Maoist primordial minister who gave an hour-long speech in Butwal in which he blatantly blackguarded the Oli faction. Awesome took up so much time that when Oli's turn came, the audience was half-depleted. But Jhallubabu's alliance with Bum Dev and his baddie mentors has drawn Makunay, who carries the swing votes, closer to the straight-shooting Oli.



There was a time when splits in the international communist movement would immediately result in the fragmentation of Nepal's own reds. The Sino-Soviet split was mirrored here in the 1960s, and then when the Gang of Four and the Dengists went at each other after Mao's death it happened to our Maoists too. But now it seems to be the other way around. The splits in the Maoists and the open rift between its fast-track and slo-mo factions have split RIM and COMOSA, with one faction of international and South Asian commies backing Dahal and another toeing the Gajurel-Baidya line.



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