Weekly Internet Poll #440. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. After Butwal, will UML emerge:

Total votes: 2,546

Weekly Internet Poll #439

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

Total votes: 2,546

BABY BOOM: Ex-guerrilla Sabitri Shah, 27, has two children at Shaktikhor in Chitwan. Since the ceasefire nearly three years ago, 1,000 female fighters have given birth in camps.
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 turmoil of global meltdown, banking will soon face domestic implication from international crisis. As it is, Nepal's financial sector is an enigma wrapped inside a paradox. The free-market policy of the past two decades led to the establishment of 25 commercial banks, 80 finance companies, several micro-finance institutions and financial NGOs supervised by Nepal Rastra Bank. Largely operated like the Employees Provident Fund and Citizen Investment Trust, functionally unrelated entities, some 3,000 plus cooperatives alongside village financial services.

This dramatic growth was expected to deepen, furthering the cost of financial services to Nepalis, in reality the financial architecture has not functioned. Replacing loan sharks even in urban areas where charged interest rates rachet up 36 percent. Interestingly, repayments of these loans are seldom deferred or written off. The average financial crisis Nepal's economy may not be globalised, but we depend on the global market through our remittances, tourism and exports.

Soon after, 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 domestic implication from international crisis.

It will be a mistake to consider other alternatives: keep the economic activity floating during most difficult periods. In absence of investment opportunities in productive sectors, people are venturing into illegal betting in bank security equity. A credible and commercially viable plan could pool these scattered resources into a single, structured 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 will and ability to accommodate the bridegroom's urgent need for peace and forestall the danger. You can't solve a problem by acknowledging a problem.
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 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, they get to 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 (NCHA), democrats—euphemism for NC-supporters—find it hard to field competent candidates and rely on former-kangrejis to face the challenge of assertive leftwingers. The joke at the recently concluded annual convention of 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 hadn’t been able to complete its building in BP Nagar is because it’s not rightwing enough to motivate diaspora kangeris.

Overseas UML sympathisers have successfully made their parent party take a right turn. A prominent visaged PML-N loyalist from the Motherland Extravaganza this week, the UML has long forgotten the man’s teachings.

Girija Prasad Koirala alienated many NC loyalists abroad by cozying 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-kangreji to the ambassadorship in Washington.

If Sah is installed in his tracks during parliamentary hearings, 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 a precedent for politically ambitious NRNs advocating dual citizenship and angling for public posts.

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

KIRAN PANDAY
Lost opportunity

The UML leadership race misses a deeper malaise

A midstream 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, has 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 crowds booted 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 ideals as well.

There may have been a constellation 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.

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 personal vendettas. The Maoists had to finally come back to the system, and for us. So I thought let us give the Maoists a chance."

Maoists this time. "I am still with UML, but they didn't do anything about how the Maoists had to finally come back to the system, and for us. So I thought let us give the Maoists a chance."

Man Bahadur Tamang is a mild-mannered farmer from Baglung before moving to Kathmandu and becoming the central secretary of the student front.

Ace aces it

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

Some see a crisis as a time to change tack or even 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 banking sector has proved to be remarkably resilient.

One of the new Nepali banks and one to integrate the fastest diversification and growth is the Axe Development Bank, which in the first year after upgrading from an affiliation company has become the highest earner per share among development banks in Nepal. It's net profit grew 150 percent in the first year.

Axe has shown aggressive growth in merchant banking and has become the largest manager of issuance through the market with 233 PNs worth Rs 2.7 billion. The bank has also become the first to introduce the Exchange Traded Fund in Nepal of Gold ETFs and will soon be introducing Visa Electron debit cards. It is focusing on infrastructure financing and rural micro financing.

The architect of all this is CEO Sidhant Pandey, who himself returned to Nepal from an international banking job with Merrill Lynch in London in 2004. "I'm glad I came when the choices were mine, now I may have been forced to come back," Pandey joked, citing the apathy in investment banks internationally due to the global financial crisis.

Pandey wanted to return to Nepal and run a financial institution, and says he has felt "enormous satisfaction" with the results he has helped achieve at Ace. He attributes the bank's success to teamwork and his own deep involvement in every aspect of its activities on a rotational basis.

Yet, Pandey has no illusions about the challenges ahead. He told the Nepal Times after being selected the paper's Company of the Month for February 2009: "We, as ancillary, 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 bank we have to be strongly capitalised."

As world goes through "de-globalisation" there is an attempt on 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 aloft.

Yet, Pandey finds the government 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 an excellent 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 has also helped revive the Bums 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.

Youth = future. Our leading politicians today do not represent Nepal’s future. They 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. Meanwhile, 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 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 that allows politicians who’ve suffered losses in elections to return as ministers and party leaders. This loser-takes-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 a matter of time that the trust in the political process breaks down completely. Once trust is thus destroyed, there will be lot more damage to 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 rule is 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 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 busy. 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.
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 aren’t using violence, even though they promised to enter 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.

Isn’t an ordinance the government’s right 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 to government, they agreed on a multi-party republic but they’re talking about a Nepalese republic now. We will take part in the constitution-drafting process but we won’t let the Maoists bring a one-party republic.

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 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.

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 a 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?

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Kanchanpur’s dhan

Ananda Rai in Nepal, 1 February 2009

Whether 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 Jahan Prakritik 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 benefited 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 own own interest-free loans, flood control embankments have been built, VDC roads have been gravelled and a new child welfare centre built.

The chairmen 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 and ever before and even tigers and leopards have returned.”
In an interview with Himal Khambhatpatra, 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 Khambhatpatra: 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?
Himal Khambhatpatra: That's a great question. The secretariat might 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 collect 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?
Subhas Nembang: 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 focusing 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?
Subhas Nembang: The CA is a government of national unity. 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?
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 time-frame is the CA’s duty. But to achieve this, the assembly will have to start focusing on certain issues right away by:

1. Build consensus within and between parties
2. Manage disagreements
3. Manage itself within the deadline
4. Have a responsible 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 approval for a new constitution was passed by a majority of 95 per cent. It outlined that sovereign right lies with the people of Nepal, which is inclusive, 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. At most 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 political parties should be studied so that the issues of agreements 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 easy 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 ideal of a unified Nepal. Only then can we move towards a federal state which is 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 the political forces. It is not unnatural to expect the players to play by the rules of the game. If a unanimous decision cannot be reached, acceptance should be given to the one with a majority.

Kiran Paudyal

Commentary

Radheshyam Adhikari

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2. Manage disagreements
3. Manage itself within the deadline
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Kiran Paudyal
The Right Foundation

The team behind Central Park

The Developers

Clean Energy Development Bank Limited, a company promoted by Clean Energy Development Bank Limited, comprises professionals from different walks of life and business houses, who aim to make this park the next great real estate development of Nepal. With the highest level of corporate governance and transparency in operations, the business philosophy is not limited to creating just concrete and brick structures but to work towards sustainable development. Central Park, will redefine the benchmark in group housing in Nepal and be an exemplary showcase of energy efficient development.

THE PROJECT MANAGER

Clean Energy Development Bank Limited (CEDBL) is the Project Manager of Central Park Project. CEDBL, a national level development bank of Nepal, has one of the most diverse equity participation among Nepalese Banks with the participation of the Employees Provident Fund of Nepal, FMO Netherlands, General Public among a lot of others.

In technical collaboration with Winesack International, an international organization working in Nepal in the energy sector, and with support from USAD, CEDBL has been promoted on only specialised bank with a primary focus on the development of infrastructure, clean energy and the hydro-power sector in Nepal.

BUILT BY THE BEST

The World famous ARCP Group is the architectural force behind Central Park. Headquartered in Montreal, Canada, ARCP is a firm of architects with presence across Asia, United States and the Middle East. With projects of hotels, resorts, commercial complexes, private residences, cultural and institutional projects, museums, ARCP Associates, New Delhi, now bring their design and architectural expertise to Central Park. Their award winning renowned projects include Waldon Almen, the World Trade Center at Montreal, OC Mughal Sheraton Agra for which they won the prestigious Aga Khan award for architectural excellence and the highly acclaimed Laburnum Apartments in Gurgaon, India.

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THE FUTURE HAS ARRIVED

THE TEAM:

Project Manager: Clean Energy Development Bank Limited
Architects: ARCP Associates, New Delhi www.arcp.com
(in association with LE GROUPE ARCP, CANADA)
Landscape: M Paul Friedberg & Partners, New York www.mpfp.com
Energy Solutions: Triodos Bank, Netherlands www.triodos.com

Finance Partners:

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With offices in New Delhi and the world, M Paul Friedberg has completed projects in the USA, Brazil, Greece, India, Hong Kong and the Middle East.

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Triodos will provide sustainable real estate and project development for the park.

Triodos will provide sustainable real estate and project development for the park.
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THE FUTURE HAS ARRIVED

in living, at the heart of Kathmandu.
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 Godawari, 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 in 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 for lovers. Even Pashupatinath was teeming with couples holding hands and cuddling. At Nag Pokhari there were at least six couples holding hands and cuddling in 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.

INTERESTING TIMES

Malikya Aryal

But it was clear that Nepal is now wanting to make love, not war. St Valentine was even honoured in the cantonments where former guerrillas gave each other plastic roses. FM radio stations were busy relaying love messages, newspapers were 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, not present. If everyone you knew was planning ‘something special’ on Valentine’s Day, 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 them. While Bollywood may be making parents and their kids oblivious to these two countries have switched to market reforms and have forgotten the injustices of capitalism, and the communist victories in China and Vietnam. Heavens 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 accompanying a commander and another 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,
Rolpa fights neglect

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 Syanttan 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 Siwal and Kiran Panday

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.

"Our party is in power, but they don’t care for us."
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 of the Axe and the Axes, 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 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 new 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, Nayabajar, Pokhara
Undar 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.”

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.”

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 go, 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.

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P A C I F I C I T I E S
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NATIONAL
EVENTS

- Second Documentary Open School Workshop, till 28 February at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoika. 9511083338
- Call for entries for Film South Asia, documentaries made in and after January 2007. For deadlines, visit timesculture.org. 5552314
- Salsa dance workshop, 20 February at Salsa Dance Academy, Dhaibhateni.
- Non-profit communication workshop with lunch, 22 February, 9.30 AM-5PM. Rs 800, Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal, Thamel. 4410042
- Encountering the legend, Madhab Prasad Ghimire, socialising session starts 5.30 PM, Rs 565, nepa-la y’s sala, Kalikashtan
- Bhuta Kosi rafting, Nepal River Conservation Trust, rafting date from 1 March, Rs 1,500 registration fee. 4301995

MUSIC

- Pose and the Fags, live, 20 February, Moksh. 5526212
- Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, scholarship fund concert with Kailash Thapa and Vasant Tamang, 28 February, 7.15 PM onwards, Hyatt Regency.
- Blues American folk and classic country live by Desmond Lattary and Anthony Correll, 5.30 PM, 22 February, Lazimpat Gallery Cafè. 4428549
- Sunday jazz brunch barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491234
- Jazz evening at Dece's France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM, Rs 600.
- Strings Band live every Tuesday at G's Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.
- Wednesday Melody at Jazbaat Café, Happy hour 6-8PM and TGIF party with live band Epic every Friday at BPM. 2114075
- Some hot every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel. 4494348
- 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 Loozza Band every Friday night, Bhu Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412197
- Fusion and Classical Music by Anil Shahi every Wednesday night, Rs 600, Hotel Siddhartha. 4428549
- Saturday night barbecue at Olive Garden, 6PM onwards at Rs 850+,
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal. Revisited. 4262070
- Fresh Himalayan rainbow trout at Roso Restaurant all February 7PM onwards, Hyatt Regency. 4493632
- 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
- Nhunghce goes Thai at Nhunghce's Thai Kitchen, Baluwatar. 4492863
- Fusion of Marcela Ragan's new menu and Mannie's new bar at Oscar's Cafe. 5522113
- Plate D'jour at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4429929
- Pasta pesto passion at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- Home made pasta at Alfresco, Sallitee Cinema Plaza. 4273999
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Cafe, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4235341
- Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs at the Aash lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Ja, Thamel.
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Cee Gurning, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4491999.
- High tea with scones and sandwiches everyday at the Lounge from 4:30-6:30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4494244

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepaltimes.com

WEEKEND WEATHER

Drought After going straight from winter into summer, it is now clear that this drought is here to stay. With no wet western front on the horizon and a very 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 to see more chances for heavy local downpours and thunderstorms, says Met Office forecaster Dhiren Keule. "The only blessing is that the heat is starting to melt the snows, so temperature to climb to 26 with minimum staying down at 6. This daily 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. 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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.

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.

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

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.
When the comrades first assumed power six months ago and started stacking afno manchhe in all govt corporations and ministries, we said so what’s new, the kangrejis 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 AEPCC 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, could not save his skin. Then you had this guy in the moolla that could bese mere miffed 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 shoplifting and was only set free after claiming diplomatic immunity. We had a hijacker as ambassador to the Delhi Durbar, and 20 years later we were getting ready to send away from apathy which New Delhi declared a terrorist outfit even before we got around to doing it. In the we-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-haa 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 ordinance 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 Gangur 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 COMPOSAS, with one faction of international and South Asian comrades backing Dahal and another toeing the Gajurel-Baidya line.