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Weekly Internet Poll # 444

Q. What do you think of the Maoists stopping the extension of tenure of eight generals?

Total votes: 3,601

Smart move: 27.7%

No big deal: 17.7%

Stupid move: 54.6%

Weekly Internet Poll # 445. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com

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RUNNING ON EMPTY: The Kulekhani reservoir on Wednesday is nearly empty despite this week's rains which were not enough to raise water levels. The six-month drought has exacerbated government mismanagement, leading to a serious energy crisis.



KIRAN PANDAY

High and dry

The prime minister's main priority should be to restore investor confidence

KUNDA DIXIT

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has said his primary mission during his Nordic tour next week will be to encourage foreign investment, especially in energy and IT.

However, his hosts will also want to hear from him just how seriously he is committed to protecting democracy during Nepal's transition to peace, and they will link his track record to future development assistance. Dahal will probably be able to convince the Norwegians and Finns that he is serious about democracy, but he will have a

much tougher time with potential investors.

"The investment climate doesn't look good at all," said one European investor, "and what is worrying is that instead of getting better it is getting worse."

In Oslo, Dahal is set to meet executives from Statkraft, the Norwegian state-owned hydropower company that partly owns SN Power that is investing in the 600MW Tama Kosi III. He will be facing some tough questions about security, legal stability, political and bureaucratic delays. The Norwegians are said to be surprised that the minister of

water resources is not included in Dahal's entourage.

SN Power's chief executive Nadia Sood was in Nepal last month, and told us: "We are committed to continuing to develop hydropower in Nepal, but a pre-condition to doing so is that we can rely on speedy, reliable and transparent decision-making. Our expansion plans hinge very much on these things being in place." (See full interview: p4).

Indian companies like GMR and Sutej, which had signed agreements for Arun III and Upper Karnali are said to be wavering because of security at the site. West Seti's offices were

vandalised recently in Doti and Sanima's Likhu III was also attacked by locals.

"If labour and security is not addressed, no new foreign investment is coming into this country and even the joint ventures which are here will quit," said one transnational representative in Nepal. Colgate Palmolive, which wound up in Nepal earlier this year has issued a damning annual report in which it cites 'extortion and security' as the main reason.

Besides security, hydropower investors are also worried about corruption in NEA, uncertainties in the Electricity Act and arbitrary taxation. Local expectations have grown with districts with power plants and even households below transmission lines demanding 24-hour power.

For the short-term India's Power Trading Corporation has offered to sell up to 500MW of power to Nepal for INR 3 per unit, but businesses say that unless investor woes are urgently addressed, Nepal's economic future looks bleak. ●

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MESSENGERS BEWARE

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) has compared the relative dangers that journalists face around the world and has ranked Nepal seventh from the bottom for the killings of journalists and the lack of prosecution of their murderers.

Rankings of this kind make snappy headlines but mask the qualitatively higher level of intimidation, violence and impunity in various countries, and indeed within countries. These lists, however, do name and shame governments that show a consistent contempt for the values of press freedom and the safety of journalists.

The only positive aspect of the CPJ list from Nepal's point of view is that there are countries worse than us: Iraq, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Columbia, the Philippines and Afghanistan. But the great shame about Nepal being in the 'Bottom Ten' is that it needn't be.

It all started out so promisingly three years ago with the ceasefire. And last year's elections was a moral victory of the non-violent struggle for democracy and press freedom. Nepal was the touted as an international role model for conflict transformation.

Yet, more journalists have been killed in the past three years than during the war. Not a single murderer of a Nepali journalist has so far been caught and tried. The side-effect of all this impunity is that self-censorship is now endemic. There is almost no investigative journalism, muckraking has become rare, corruption is almost never covered. Journalists have learnt the hard way not to write about cross-border crime, or about the way the YCL and other militants control village and district-level bidding process for development work.

Self-censorship is much more insidious than overt control. It gives citizens the impression that the media is free when it's not. Ultimately, this undermines democracy and favours those who want total control.

That said, we in the media have to do our own introspection. Media can only protect its freedom by its maximum application. Our obsession with disarray and disorder is turning out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Shallow, sensational and lazy journalism spreads cynicism and perpetuates discord.

The CPJ report puts the spotlight on the Maoist-led government for allowing the media environment to deteriorate so drastically, and will put pressure on it to prove its commitment to press freedom with actions. It also forces us in the media to correct the dampening effect of the high threat level against the media with even more fearless, meaningful and responsible coverage.



LAXMI PRASAD NGAKHUSHI/KANTIPUR

Enough tit-for-tat

Stop wasting time and get on with integration

The Supreme Court's decision on Tuesday to "temporarily shelve" the controversial decision by the Defence Ministry to not extend the tenure of eight generals will quell the tension between Singha Darbar and Bhadrakali for now.



GUEST COLUMN
Shiva Gaunle

But a lot will depend on how the Maoist leadership, and especially Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, react to the decision of the apex court. From Thursday's protests outside the Supreme Court, it looks like they are not taking it well (*pictured*).

The Maoists were voted in even though they still have nearly 20,000 guerrillas in UN-monitored camps. For a group that suddenly went from war to power it may be difficult to swallow the decision, but being a constitutionally elected government it can't ignore the court either.

Justice Kalyan Shrestha in his ruling said the 2006 decision by

the apex court to similarly reject the non-renewal of the tenure of Gen Pradip Pratap Bam Malla had created a precedent. He also said the government's decision to overturn the army's request without giving a reason went against the principles of the 'terms' and 'balance' of military service.

The bone of contention is who should have the right to renew the tenure of retiring officers. The court decision will now make it difficult for the Maoists, who still regard the army as an 'enemy' force, to take unilateral decisions and will set a long-term precedent. The Maoist administration, which has been interfering in the army, police and civil service without any debate will now have to be much more careful about adhering to the rule of law.

The court will perhaps explain in more detail what it means by 'terms' and 'balance', but we can speculate that the justices are worried about unacceptable interference in the army's internal rules and traditions that have a bearing on morale and discipline. It also shows that the Defence Ministry can't do what it likes with the national army because in the present state of the country it would mean an unacceptable politicisation of the military. A civilian chain of command is desirable when things are stable. This fragile transition is the

wrong time to tamper with the one institution that has so far been saved from politicisation. It would be extremely dangerous for a general at the Nepal Army HQ to have to go to the Maoist HQ in Buddhanagar to lobby for a promotion.

The other positive aspect of the Supreme Court order is that it has rejected the irrational politics of revenge. It was clear that the defence minister was itching to get back at the army for having stalled his attempt to stop the recruitment into the national army, which itself was stopped by an earlier court order. It was clear that the blocking of the tenure extension of the generals was not a decision of the defence minister as a member of the coalition government but was taken by the Maoist party at a conclave of its own army.

If the Maoists are smart, they will not let this controversy drag on and use the opportunity afforded by the Supreme Court decision to activate the Army Integration Special Committee on which it has been dragging its feet. UNMIN, which has a midterm report due at the UN Security Council, is losing patience with the lack of progress on integration, and the special committee which meets only to decide to meet again. It is almost certain UNMIN's tenure won't be extended beyond June and it also sure that integration can't be completed before then.

So the sooner the Maoist-led government and the army start working together on integration and not waste time on tit-for-tat, the better it will be for the peace process. ●

LETTERS

SHAREHOLDERS VS STAKEHOLDERS

While I can agree with your call for a visible corporate responsibility in order to have sustainable and profitable enterprises in Nepal ('Shareholders vs stakeholders,' # 443), I would still like to emphasise the need for a business friendly environment. Some may think responsible corporate behaviour can help create a smooth business atmosphere. But I believe it happens the other way round: we need to have a sound business environment first.

This argument may sound excessively driven by corporate interest but let's face reality here. What are our areas of competitive advantages? Dirt cheap workforce (semi and low skilled), poor fiscal and auditing systems and more importantly, insufficient property right laws to name but a few. These are also the ills of our system.

Let's not blame a businessman in New Road who employs 10 workers but sticks to a little help from the above to generate profit. His ability to create 10 jobs and employ people is more important than preaching to them about what they ought to do. But as a nation,

we need law enforcement and regulation and the creation of a qualified workforce. That is not what the private sector should be concerned with. Moreover, why do we believe that a nation is capable of getting rid of all of its ills in a snap of finger? To foster a sustainable business environment that is competitive, we need to cure those ills. We have to root for change, we need concrete, bold action.

Anjan Panday,
Washington, DC

RESERVATIONS

JB Pun Magar is too quick to reject reservations ('Reservations about reservation,' #442) and his argument could equally be spun to advocate that there is not enough positive discrimination in India. Reservations are highly important regarding access to universities and widening youth ambitions. Sure, there are plenty of strong examples of

minorities within the CA, but how many Dalits are there in leadership positions? Not enough is the answer. Reservations are over-simplistic and have large

repercussions, but they do change society, and more importantly, they provide a vent for minority tensions that stabilises society (something that Nepal could really use right now).

Oliver Spencer-Shrestha, London

GENERAL UNDERSTANDING

It is a well-known fact that the generals

of the Nepal Army have often misused their high positions. ('General understanding' #443) The civilian government under Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal has the courage to say no to these excesses and demand professionalism from army generals. In a

democratic country like Nepal the elected government representatives make decisions, not army officers.

Pashupati Neupane, email

DISUNION

I completely agree with Mallika Aryal ('Disunion,' # 443) that the main agenda of these student unions is unfortunately not education but politics. In fact, the politics they practise is raw and is driven by parent parties that are looking to expand their reach. It is pathetic that colleges, that should be the place for learning, have turned into the place for politics. It is our generation's misfortune to see students closing down colleges, engaging in vandalism and hampering the studies and exams. The government is clearly not interested in curbing politics in education or closing the gap between the quality of education in private vs government colleges. The irony of this nation is that these young people may gradually make their way to mainstream politics.

Samyam Waglé, Canberra, Australia.



Mass producing mediocrity

423,000 students will sit for their school exams this week

Once again, Nepal's young are knocking at the Iron Gate of their future careers. This year 423,000 students are appearing for SLC Examinations.

Some of them will be declared 'failed', others will pass, a few with flying colours. Once more, the results will illustrate the gross inequality in Nepal's education system. And what will these young people do once they are out of school?

In these uncertain times, the general attitude ('we'll cross that bridge when we come to it') has



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

its advantages. But the decision becomes a little

complicated when rivers are deep and the choice involves building a bridge, waiting at the edge while you wait for someone to throw the rope, or just jumping off the cliff and hoping for the best. No wonder students appear so stressed.



MIN RATNA BAURACHARYA

The last choice is the only one available to students stigmatised by society as failures, usually for no fault of their own. In a majority of public schools in rural areas, untrained and unmotivated teachers struggle with syllabuses that have no relationship with the ground reality.

Other than the 3Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic, school education in rural Nepal teach no life skills. Students don't learn about farming, how to make a plough, produce manure, keep goats, build huts, grow trees, look after the elderly, attend to the sick, clean streets, dig wells, play dhime baja or organise village communes. The best that they can wish is a chance to take up the gun for others, like the British or Indian Army, if they are lucky. Or to migrate for work.

There are private schools in urban areas that teach to build bridges, but most churn out youths with exaggerated sense of self-importance. For them, this country is beyond redemption. Their talent needs a more conducive environment, so they troop off to educational consultancies for student visas to Australia, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark. Anywhere, as long as they can escape the country that they think has no future.

But even for an education system designed by default for the mass production of mediocrity, it's possible to save seeds for the future of the country. Unfortunately, the post-school facilities of training the willing are in equally bad shape, if not worse. For those who are fortunate enough to be declared 'passed', technical schools are few, mostly of a standard that leaves a lot to be desired.

The intermediate level education of Tribhuvan University and majority of +2 teaching shops are merely places for the ambitious where they playact while they wait to be served with appropriate opportunity: an admission into professional colleges, a scholarship abroad, a job through connections or a career in politics. Very few have the confidence left to begin a trade or join an occupation by the time they finish secondary education.

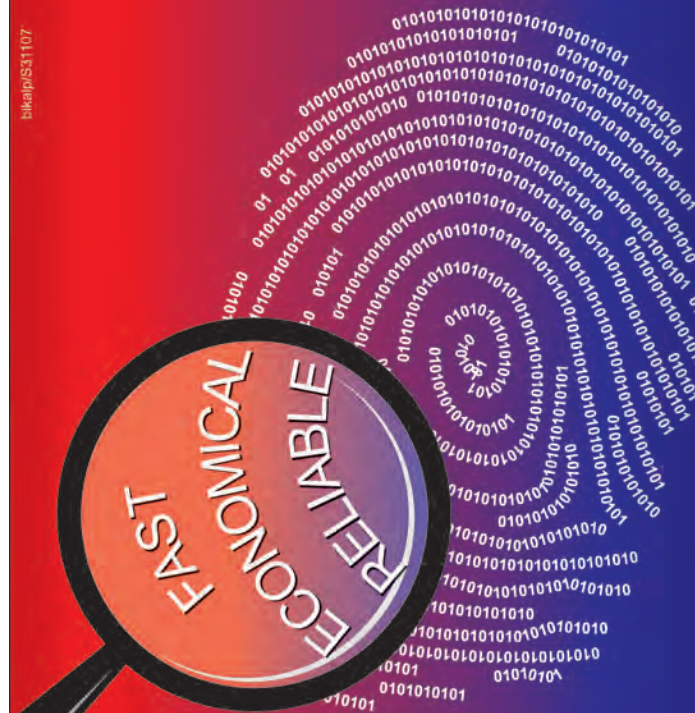
The main problem with Nepal's school system is that it churns out individuals who wish to consume but have little ability to produce. Even among the relatively privileged, some become cheerful robots of the NGO-industry. Many end up as no-collar automatons at projects and aid agencies. Nepali economy is in doldrums. The tragedy is that our youthful workforce lacks the will—and tools—to pull it out of this rut.

In the Birth Centenary year of social thinker Ram Manohar Lohia, it may be appropriate to learn from the model he envisioned for his own country. Like India of Lohia's time, Nepal is a capital-scarce but labour-abundant country. Our problems are compounded by the fact that generations of Nepalis have availed of the easy option of withdrawing from the national economy by becoming Lahures. Had remittances been the best way to build a country, Nepal would already be Switzerland of Asia and the Philippines would be Japan. The hard reality is that there is no alternative to building a prosperous economy but pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. ●

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Success and failure

For the Maoists it really about staying in power

A young banker says: "The Maoists cannot make things better. They are just too entrenched in corruption across sectors. All they have is rhetoric. The country is being run by a mafia."

You can take that with a pinch of salt since bankers are obviously not the Maoist core constituency. But the same evening, a civil society activist, with sympathy for the Maoist agenda, commented, "I have just got back from villages in Kabhre and Sindhuli where even Maoist voters are disillusioned. What was the point of the war if JP Gupta and Krishna Bahadur Mahara are doing the same thing in government?"

Talk to an urban resident and he will crib about the power and price crisis. A poor rural family will talk about the food shortage. In any of the ethnically charged regions (eastern hills, eastern Tarai, and western Tarai) there is insecurity, alienation and deteriorating inter-community ties. And the



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

educated unemployed will ask that perennial question: where are the jobs? The Maoists will get the flak because they are in charge.

But this doesn't mean the Maoists are completely discredited. A young migrant worker visiting his home in Chitwan said: "Everyone is out to ensure they do not succeed. Give the Maoists a chance and freedom to work. There is peace in the districts."

The Maoist leadership point at the finance ministry's track record: revenues are up, minimum wages have increased and labour is relieved. Old people are being given pensions. VDC grants have increased. Self employment schemes have drawn crowds of young people and Baburam Bhattarai's integrity is hard to question.



KIRAN PANDAY

As for things they have not been able to do, the Maoists point out they inherited a mess. And then they blame the bureaucracy, coalition partners, NC, army and internationals, especially India.

So the judgement is mixed. But any discussion on Maoist 'failure' has to first confront the question: what does failure mean in this context. Is it the failure, as a government, to give direction to the country? Is it failure to meet standards of the middle class and do what Kathmandu elite expected them to? Is it failure to live up to their own promises and deliver to their own base? Is it failure, as a party, to enhance power?

The paradox is that the Maoists have become immensely stronger in eight months of being in power even as their public credibility has dented, even if partially.

So they have succeeded in keeping the party intact, creating opportunities for their cadre, infiltrating the state, co-opting even erstwhile adversaries, delivering benefits to their core working class base and making money. But they have not changed the patronage culture of politics or focussed on providing public goods to a wider constituency. They have not politically engaged with groups in the districts whose resentment against Kathmandu is turning into militancy, letting a general sense of drift fester. And instead of being reconcilers, they have tried to maximise advantages for the party.

This is because after winning the elections, the Maoists changed track. If earlier they reached out to all those disaffected and angry at the state in a bid to assume power, the Maoists now began focussing on using the state in a bid to consolidate.

Critics will say it shows all the Maoists wanted was power for power's sake, not to bring about change. But there is a deeper theoretical underpinning. Classical Marxism in principle talks about state control as necessary to advance a particular class interest. For Maoists who make no distinction between the party and the class it claims to represent, this means using the state to advance party's influence and interests.

But what the Maoists miss here is that most people who voted for them in the last elections were not party members. The party faithful may stick on even though fissures are now emerging inside. But the supporters outside that framework are getting frustrated. Their challenge is to tackle growing disillusionment among this broader coalition that propelled them to power. ●



Concern about uncertain investment climate

Nadia Sood is the chief executive of the Norwegian state-owned energy giant, SN Power. She was in Nepal recently to meet government officials and inspect the site of SN Power's new project in the Tama Kosi basin. She spoke to *Nepali Times* about the investment climate for hydro developers in Nepal and gave suggestions to make the country more investor friendly.

Nepali Times: As the new head of SN Power what are the areas you'd like the company to concentrate on?

Nadia Sood: SN Power has a long-term vision about its participation in the Nepali hydropower sector. As the new head of SN Power's South Asia business, I intend to keep SN Power focussed on participating in the development of Nepal's hydropower potential in a responsible and sustainable manner. As such, this will involve seeking out projects that are economically viable, which can help alleviate Nepal's load shedding problems by allowing for export/import to and from India. The projects can be developed in line with international standards for social and environmental sustainability.

What were your impressions from your recent visit to Nepal?

I was struck by how much unrealised potential exists in the country. Nepal seems to be poised on the cusp of a great future, but significant work needs to be done to ensure that the foundations for a healthy economy, that is, political will, acceptable infrastructure, prudent legal and regulatory framework, good governance, and an efficient bureaucracy are firmly established.

Have some of your plans for future expansion in Nepal changed after what you saw or heard from policy-makers in government?

While I was in Nepal, I had the opportunity to meet with all the ministries and departments, which have responsibility for or interface with hydropower development. During those meetings, I emphasised that SN Power is committed to continuing to develop hydropower in Nepal. But a pre-condition to doing so is that we can rely on speedy, reliable and transparent decision-making when it comes to the licensing and permitting process. Our expansion plans hinge

very much on these things being in place.

How are preparations coming along for Tamakoshi II & III?

Tamakoshi II & III is now in the feasibility study and environmental and social impact assessment stage. We are excited about the potential of this project, and look forward to working closely with the government and the local population to see the project through to completion.

What strategic direction would you like the Nepal government take for the development of its water resources?

Nepal needs to harness the potential of its water resources to help build the foundations for healthy and robust economic growth in the future. In practice, the easiest way for it to do so will be for it to stimulate the development of hydropower and over time establish a open-access electricity trading market both within Nepal and on a regional basis, similarly to what has been done in the Scandinavian countries. The first steps required to make this happen are strong focus on the establishment of a strong political and bureaucratic will, good legal and regulatory framework, reduction of red-tape and speedy decision-making. This will help attract foreign investors and open constructive interactions with India.

How would you characterise the present investment climate in Nepal, and what would you like changed?

Although Nepal is striving towards political stability, the current investment climate in Nepal is still quite uncertain. Nepal is on its way to formalising a number of regulations and policies that will be critical to ensure that it can continue to attract foreign investors. We look forward to following this development and will certainly be keeping a close eye on it as we continue to consider our investment strategy.

NRNs as tourists

A group of young people have started a tourism campaign, targeting Nepalis living abroad for tourism year 2011. Titled 'Jau hai Nepal' the campaign will include cultural shows with performances by Sabin Rai, Komal Oli and Mantra Band in Australia, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan and Korea. In Sydney alone, there are over 150,000 Nepalis.

Targeting the citizen

Citizens Bank International has launched a savings account that offers customers an eight to ten per cent interest for savings that are more than a year old. Senior citizens can get a yearly interest of 7.5 per cent on their current account.

New prez

Shasin Joshi, CEO of NIC Bank has succeeded Bank of Kathmandu managing director Radhesh Pant as president of Nepal Bankers' Association. Anil Shah, CEO of Nabil Bank, was voted vice-president at the annual general meeting of the association last week.

Twenty twenty

KIST Merchant Banking and Finances and Himalayan Bank have both opened their 20th branches in Koteswor, Kathmandu and Chuchepati and Chabahil respectively.



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Revisiting student politics

Young people need to engage in politics but not on campus

MUMBAI: I was asking a young college student about college elections in Mumbai and he responded as if I was talking about something alien to him, saying they only happen in some government colleges or in Bengal. Perception is more important than reality.



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

The recent fanfare about student elections reminded me of my years in Kolkata in the mid-eighties where many students seemed to go to college to change the world rather than concentrate on studies. While students stuck to politics in Kolkata, students in Karnataka decided to further their studies in IT and leave politics alone. Twenty years on Karnataka produces the finest IT graduates that have converted Bangalore into a Silicon Valley while Bengal still produces student leaders who never make it to national leadership.

The growth of India is fuelled by the youth like those in Mumbai and elsewhere that are observing how change can take place and keeping up with its pace. Suddenly new airports are built in couple of years, flyovers commissioned in less than a year,

mass rapid transit systems like metro rail built in a few years. Youngsters in Mumbai talk of how India and China will dominate the world economic scene in the coming decades and how they will lead the new world economic order. They are taking the general election seriously, demanding more representations from the youth and supporting initiatives like the new party formed by professionals to fight the forthcoming federal elections.

For Nepal, there is a lot to learn. Sloganeering for three or five years in campuses lead nowhere till the youth finds its voice in the larger political debate. Rather than fighting tooth and nail with different politically affiliated student unions, they should fight for their rights within their own parties so that youth leaders take responsible positions within their parties and further the political reform process in the country.

What does student union politics mean? How many of these student leaders will actually find greater roles in the

national politics in a democratic republic? What is the point of such student union elections and how are they still relevant in the larger political landscape? What do the political leaders think of the role of the student unions? Are the students just a tool to fulfill their political ambitions or do they still take note of the students shaping the future of their own political parties? The questions are endless.

The Nepali youth and student politics need real reform to prevent Nepal from being relegated to another West Bengal. We need to learn from the youth leadership in places where it is making its mark and changing the economic and political landscape. Mumbai minus the sporadic extremism of some political parties could be a benchmark to explore. ●

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Multicultural federalism

Shree Krishna Anirudda Gautam in *Nepal*, 13 March

नेपाल

Nepal's political system and its prevailing politics of ethnicity, regionalism and language are inspired by Marxist ideology. It is the Maoists who have been raising these issues in a violent fashion. It comes as no surprise to have Maoist ideology dominating political deliberations and ethnic-lingual issues coming to the fore when deciding the country's federal structure.

Some believe that basing provinces on ethnicity could lead to the country's disintegration. Alternatives should be discussed. Often by ensuring the rights of one

extensive survey is required to delineate these ethnic and non-ethnic settlements.

Unfortunately, the Maoist proposal to base provinces on ethnicity has lumped all ethnic and non-ethnic groups together. Neither the Maoists nor the groups struggling for identity have ever thought about how to address the identity of different groups within a particular region.

While ethnic autonomy seemed to work under communism in the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, it ceased to work when communism collapsed and the countries disintegrated. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavia have now split into different independent states. While the breakup of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia was relatively peaceful, the slaughter and ethnic cleansing in the Balkans will haunt us for centuries to come.

There is still time for federalism experts to make a comparative analysis of differing federal structures and to carve out a suitable one for us. The political parties should not delay in agreeing on a stable federal structure taking cultural diversity into consideration. The delay might unleash a series of demands like Tharuhat in Madhes and Greater Kirat in Limbuwan. The current climate of identity politics will open the floodgates to more and more demands from different communities.

Federalism based on single ethnic identity and the concept of sub-nation could result in a prolonged period of instability and anarchy in the country. The Maoists must understand that it will be difficult to meet the conflicting demands of sub-national ethnicities.

The communists must turn democratic no matter how difficult it is. By doing so, they can set an example to the world. They can assure that Nepali people, who are still terrified by the prospect of becoming a 21st century Yugoslavia, feel they are safe. For that, they should correct their past mistakes, dump the single ethnicity based federal units and draw up a map of multi-ethnic federalism.



MARTY LOGAN

group, another will be deprived of its own rights. The recent Tharu uprising against Madhesi identity provides the latest example. Except in the far west and Mithila, there are no instances of a single dominant linguistic group.

Nepali diversity does not mirror that of Switzerland where ethnic and lingual groups rarely overlap. There are no distinct units of English and French speaking groups like in Canada. Nepal can be compared with eastern India to some extent but it is considerably more complex here when it comes to ethnicity. An

Mistrust

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 23 March

नयाँ पत्रिका

PM Prachanda has claimed that the restructuring of the government will take place within the next month and that the NC will also be joining the government.

If the PM's promise turns out to be true, then Nepal's political future looks brighter. But it remains to be seen whether the PM will fulfil his promises, judging by his track record. If he doesn't, the consequences will be disastrous.

In Nepal's present context, it does not necessarily matter who leads the government. But it is vital that the main parties within the government work and cooperate with each other to complete the constitution.

It has been clear from the beginning that the UML and Nepali Congress do not see eye to eye with the present government. Even though the UML is a part of the government, they have always been critical of the Maoists. Many of the commissions still haven't been formed, and the ones that have are incomplete. So far, they haven't even been able to utilise the development budget. Without any capital investment there is no hope of

generating employment and boosting economic development. For this, all the parties of the government have to work together.

Commissions

Kantipur, 23 March

कान्तिपुर

Formed

1. Land reform commission
2. Administrative restructuring commission
3. Commission for the landless
4. Inclusiveness commission
5. Commission of the freed Kamaiyas

To be formed:

1. State restructuring commission
2. Commission to investigate forced disappearances
3. Truth and reconciliation commission
4. Labour commission
5. National Muslim commission



Heir apparent

Nepal Samacharpatra, 24 March

समाचारपत्र

Do you recognise the person in the picture? It is Prakash Dahal, son of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'. The location is Dhulikhel Lodge Resort. During their revolution, the Maoists banned alcohol, a move that was appreciated by the people. A year hasn't yet passed since the Maoist chairman Dahal took over as the country's prime minister. But his son, who also holds an important position in the party, was caught last Sunday, drunk.

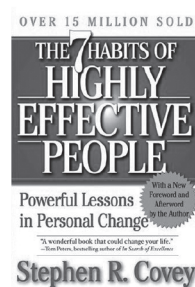
PMDahal and Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai were in Dhulikhel on Sunday to discuss Kathmandu University and Dhulikhel Hospital. While Dahal and Bhattarai were busy in discussions,

Prakash made merry. He coaxed party members, accompanying traffic police and journalists to join him. Prakash was even serving the drinks. At the end of it, Prakash was so knocked out that he did not even attend the dinner party. The journalists there could not ignore this juicy piece of news and let their cameras roll. But Prakash's supporters pressurised them to delete the pictures and snatched away their cameras. A journalist from a Maoist paper even commented that such sights should not be recorded and the press should not focus on "negative issues".



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Tarai-Pahad unity

Teachers, businessmen, general workers, entrepreneurs, social and political activists of Dipayal gathered last week to discuss the new constitution. Extracts:

What do you think of the situation the country is in since the formation of the CA?



Nara Bahadur Dhant (social activist): The Maoists have not lived up to expectations but seem to be trying to reform. Although we are more assured of security and progress, there are examples of countries turning autocratic even after the formation of a constituent assembly.



Sita Pokharel (health worker): The situation is getting complicated. Trust in the government is eroding every day. Things will not get better just by replacing the present government with other parties. The political parties do not seem to have the necessary vision to deal with ethnic issues.



Dipak Shahi (political cadre): The government has failed to deliver. Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai last month announced he would mobilise the YCL to collect tax from private schools, which shows how democratic the government is. The Maoist leaders threaten to revolt. What is important now is

the Maoists' commitment to democracy and peace, which can ensure the new constitution is written on time.



Gopal Suchikar (painter): The political parties are fighting for power instead of giving people hope of progress and writing the constitution. The ruling party and the opposition are constantly trying to undermine each other. This is not

the right time to do so. All political parties should focus on writing the new constitution.

How do you think the federal structure should be created? In which province should Doti be?

Dipak Shahi: We want Doteli province of Seti and Mahakali zones. Dipayal is equidistant from all districts so it should be the provincial capital. It is practicable to divide provinces vertically from the mountains to Tarai throughout the country. So there can be six to seven provinces altogether. The mountain, hill and Tarai regions are rich in different resources. Creating provinces on the basis of geography can strengthen national unity.



Laxmi Roka Magar (entrepreneur): I was born in Rolpa but migrated to Doti. Now, I belong nowhere. Doteli people think I belong in the east and people in Rolpa call me a westerner. This issue of identity should be taken into account while creating provinces. Creating provinces on the basis of ethnicity

and language might create tension and lead to communal violence. I am against it. It would be wise to create provinces based on the present political division of the country.

Sita Pokharel: It is not a bad thing if autonomy with right to self determination is given to ethnic communities, backward regions and the oppressed. The important thing is to manage it well. I am a Brahmin from Kailali. I don't mind Kailali under Tharuhat province but one Madhes, one Pradhes is unacceptable because there are different ethnic groups living in the plains from Jhapa to Kanchanpur and to recognise their identities, there must be many federal units in the Tarai.



What if we give the provinces different names - not based on ethnicity or language?

Ramesh Joshi: In the past, there was a Doteli state. The language is still alive. It is practicable that this region should be Doteli province in all respects.

Gopal Suchikar: If there is real decentralisation, there is no need for federalism. On the basis of language, we would create more than 100 provinces and just as many based on ethnicity. There is no mixed settlement of different castes but no particular caste has a majority in any particular place. So creating provinces on the basis of language and ethnicity is impractical.

Narabahadur Dhant: The provinces should be created on the basis of ethnicity, religion and languages. National interest should be at the centre. Population, geographical situation, economic infrastructure and resources should be taken into account. Each province should encompass the mountains, hills and Tarai, which will make five to six provinces.



Purna Joshi: The existing development regions can become the new provinces. If we opt for provinces based on ethnicity then the minority communities will remain minority forever and be deprived of their rights. Mountains, hills and Tarai should be combined to form

the provinces, thereby ensuring a spread of natural resources. Ethnic division could well lead to communal enmity and disintegration of the country.

What provision should be made in the constitution to improve the lives of underprivileged communities, women and the lower castes?

Purna Joshi: Education has been mentioned as a fundamental right in the interim constitution and should continue to be enshrined in the new constitution. The constitution should guarantee that women are not exploited in the name of religion or caste.

Laxmi Roka Magar: If we put together a Dalit billionaire of Kathmandu and a Brahmin pauper of Bajhang, we find the answer. This is a class issue. Therefore, there should be special provision and programs for those who fall behind.

Reservation- not a magic solution

An interview with Yogendra Yadav, an Indian social and political analyst



In a multi-cultural country like Nepal, what's important when formulating policies regarding reservation? Will policies of positive discrimination be effective to end the existing

discrimination and deprivation?

I feel you are using 'reservation' and 'positive discrimination' as synonyms, like many do. We first need to understand the difference between the two. Positive discrimination entails not just establishing equality legally but also ensuring that the social structure allows that change to occur. Reservation is simply one of the methods to achieve positive discrimination and should in fact be the last. It ensures that some seats are 'reserved' in education and employment for the discriminated communities to guarantee inclusiveness. Here, like in India, caste represents social disparity and can be used as a basis for reservation. But to consider caste as the only basis would be a mistake.

Have the Indian marginalised communities achieved their aim after 50 years of



KIRAN PANDAY

reservation policies? Or did they take an unexpected turn because of this system?

The positive discrimination policy adopted in India has not only allowed the Dalits and Adhivasis to make themselves heard in the society but also given them good leaders. The middle class has been born in India. Caste is slowly ceasing to be an indication of social, economic or political standing. But this does not mean reservation is a magic solution. Inequality still exists in India and discrimination is still a problem. But without the positive discrimination policies, the situation could have been worse.

Some say that reservation has only given birth to new feudalists. Others feel that reservation is a necessary and effective tool to bring the discriminated and the marginalised community into mainstream. Where do you think Nepal stands within these two thoughts?

I cannot answer this without understanding the complications of Nepal's social system. What has worked in some other country may not work here—we cannot use a cookie-cutter approach. The policies here have to reflect Nepal's society and context. Any positive discrimination policy is

caught in a debate because it seeks to change the existing social power structure. Those who previously enjoyed privileges are sure to make arguments against such policies, but they have been proved wrong. However, there are also people who demand reservations in every field.

How do we respond to reservation demands of so many groups?

We face the same problem in India: there is the need to address inequality not just on the basis of caste but also gender and class. We are now calling to revise and update the reservation policy. The reservations should not be limited to just caste but other social dimensions as well and should be sensitive to the weighted inequality between the groups. It should be based on proper verification documents.

After the problem is identified, we have to come up with a broad solution. We have to formulate time-based strategies. There is a danger that a group may be divided into several sub-groups. We have to work in such a way but still remain united.

Positive discrimination is not a political tool to satisfy certain communities. Rather it is an instrument to free the society from the vicious circle of inequality and discrimination.



SHITU RAJBHANDARI

Jazz, more than any musical genre, defies definition. Most musicians define it as an improvisation of the idea that is formed in the head and later expressed through music.

Ozma, the French quintet jazz band define jazz simply as freedom.

“For us it is the artistic freedom to incorporate our personal influences which could be funk, rock or even hip-hop through the five different musical instruments we play to create our sound,” says Stéphane Scharlé the drummer of the band. “Today’s jazz doesn’t sound like the jazz you’d hear 40 years back,” says sax player David Florsch, “it’s constantly evolving and as a jazz band Ozma’s goal is to create a fusion of the influences and improvise while having fun.”

“Jazz has no boundaries and that’s what makes it enjoyable,” adds David.

Ozma is currently in Kathmandu as a part of the ongoing week-long Chevrolet Miles Music Festival which started on 21 March. Jointly organised by The Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Alliance Française in Kathmandu and Infinity International. The festival aims to provide a platform to exchange ideas and explore Nepali traditional music alongside Ozma’s music.

The band was initially formed by three Strasbourg Conservatory students namely Adrien Dennefeld who plays the guitar, Edouard Séro-Guillaume who plays the bass and Stéphane in 2001. Guillaume Nuss, the trombone player and David joined them in their jam sessions a few times before they were invited to join the group in 2004.

“We felt a little lonely,” says Stéphane jokingly but on a serious note adds, “We wanted to add a melodic dimension to our music. When it was just the three of us, one took the lead and it was difficult for the other two to step away. With five, it’s easier.” A year later they released their first album and in just two years were named the Best French Group at the National Jazz Competition.

They put their sync and strength down to their great friendship. “We’ve known each other for around nine years and this sort of friendship is very rare in jazz. Most musicians come together for a very brief period of time and then go their separate ways,” explains Stéphane who

compares the band’s friendship to that of rock bands. “It is this compatibility as friends that is reflected on stage,” adds David.

Other than that their music is also characterised by the huge dose of humour that’s incorporated into their sound. “We are happy guys,” says Stéphane, “who make dark music, as paradoxical as that might sound.”

So what is Ozma’s sound like? In their own words—it is ‘jazz metric-rhythmic-swinging-warmly-festive-dynamic-rough-explosive-music.’ Or we could just say radical, at least for Nepal.

Often their soft, melodic and at times melancholic and incomprehensible tones each

French quintet jazz band Ozma, find freedom in Nepal.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA



weave out fairytales, which start out with ‘once upon a time’ and end with ‘happily ever after’. They have spent two years working on some of them. “During rehearsals we sit together and just start playing without talking to each other at all,” reveals David. These rehearsals are recorded and replayed, then edited. Pieces are either added to existing ones or a new piece is created around it, like building a Lego house.

“Adrien is the composer. We listen to his creations and give him our honest opinion—whether to scrap it or work more on it,” informs David. “All the decisions are very democratic and involve a lot of brainstorming,” adds Stéphane.

In the course of the festival, Ozma has been practising with Nepali musicians such as flutist Rubin Shrestha, *tabla* player Nawaraj Gurung, *sarod* player Suresh Bajracharya and *ishraj* player Santosh Shrestha for a special repertoire concert on 28 March. “We have no idea what to expect but definitely know that we are going to create something new and special,” says the drummer. To which David

adds, “no matter what we create it will be music irrespective of genres. It will be a result of an evolution of thoughts and that’s what jazz is, evolution.” ●

Ozma Concert

27 March, 6PM
Army Auditorium- Shava Mandap
Rs 800 (1st Row), Rs 400 (others)
*Tickets available at Alliance Française in Kathmandu (AFK), Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC), Siddhartha Art Gallery, The Bakery Café, Chez Caroline Restaurant, Sangeeta Thapa (9851030873), Pratima Pandé (9851022365) and the Army Club on the evening of the concert)

Ozma and Nepali musician

A unique shared-repertoire concert
28 March, 7PM
Dhokaima Cafe
*Contact AFK or KJC to book



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Rock weds with tabla and sarangi

MARIANO ERNESTO ABELLO

Last year, Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory (KJC) launched a new music festival, the Nepal Jazz Jatra, with the aim of providing a space for predominantly Nepali musicians to come together and fuse various forms of music and create a different sound. The festival was a success. This year KJC has changed the name of the festival to Miles Music Festival, dropping jazz from the title to encourage interaction between various genres of music. And why Miles? Because Miles Davis was an innovator and a pioneer of fusion.

Miles Music Festival (MMF) is about the human interplay between musicians. The idea is to have a Nepali rock group play with a tabla or sarangi player. The festival is about music in general rather than a certain genre. It should be accessible to everyone—the festival will offer a bit of everything—performances, workshops, movies, lectures and concerts.

Many youngsters are getting hooked on knowing how jazz works and how much fun it can be

KJC was launched in October 2007 to support music and give professional music education in Nepal. It currently has more than 180 students learning instruments, music theory, ear training, ensembles, audio engineering, electronic music and video editing. Apart from teaching music, KJC also stages concerts in which many national and international artists such as trombonist Jeremy Borthwick, vocalist Sachal Vasandani and saxophonist Jorge Pardo have performed.

Miles Music Festival brings together three events: Women in Concert, OZMA (collaborating with Alliance Française in Kathmandu) and Miles Festival itself. It's not about being better than other festivals in Nepal, but about planting the seed of culture and uniting people with music.

In the past decade or so jazz music has put down a very strong and solid root in Nepal. Many youngsters are getting hooked on knowing how it works and how much fun it can really be. The other reason for jazz's popularity among the youth is the realization that it is flexible and easy to fuse with other genres.

KJC believes that Kathmandu can be the capital of the arts in South Asia and this requires a higher level of musicianship: to achieve that we must share our knowledge. ●

28 March- Chevrolet Concert at 1905 Restaurant

- KJC Combo
- Baja Gaja with international guests (Nepal and France)
- Astha Tamang Maskey Group (Nepal and Canada)
- Kathmandu Empress with Nick Jost on bass and Eric Slaughter on guitar (Nepal, Norway, Spain and US)
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*Information provided here is a summary, please refer to the ALA Scholarships Handbook for full details.

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Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply online. Online applications can be submitted at: <http://www.ausaid.gov.au/scholar/ala.cfm> and is open from 19 March 2009 until 30 June 2009.

For all Nepali applicants applying by Post, hard copies of the application and all supporting documentation should be sent to the following address no later than 5:00pm of 30 June 2009.

Australian Leadership Awards Scholarships
AusAID Section, Australian Embassy
PO Box 879, Bansbari, Kathmandu, NEPAL

All ALA - Scholarships enquiries should be forwarded to: ala@ausaid.gov.au

The wild east



REEL LIFE: A rickshaw with posters advertises movies currently showing in Janakpur, which reflect the town's epidemic of violence and crime.

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
in JANAKPUR

On the evening of 16 February Narendra Khati had just stepped out of his house for a walk when he was shot dead by assailants belonging to the JTMM (Jwala Singh).

Khati, 40, worked at the state-owned Janakpur Cigarette Factory and had a wife, two daughters and a son. Like hundreds of other families in the eastern Tarai, Khati's brother Yubaraj has decided to move the

entire clan, including his 72-year-old father, to Kathmandu.

"The Jwala Singh group had warned they'd kill a person of hill origin to mark their anniversary, and they made my innocent husband the target," says Khati's wife, Kamala.

The war has never ended here in the eastern Tarai. But in recent months, fear of criminal gangs, terrorist and political militant groups has increased the exodus of families. Local and national media, wary of unleashing a backlash against Madhesi in the

hills, have under-reported the extent of this internal displacement.

No one is keeping exact count, so reliable figures are hard to come by. There is anecdotal evidence that out of the 900 non-Madhesi families in Janakpur municipality, 700 have left. CDO Sambhu Koirala estimates that half the hill-origin people from Mahottari have moved north. "Those that remain are living in fear and terror," he says.

A 70-year-old man who has lived in Janakpur's Pidari Chok most of his life has just sold his house for Rs 2.2 million even though it would have fetched Rs 4.5 million. He is now living in a rented flat nearby. "My sons moved to Bardibas, but I don't want to leave, this is my home," he says.

Indeed, at this rate, Bardibas on the East-West Highway could soon have a larger population than Janakpur. The highway has now become the de facto border between the Madhes and the rest of the country.

The government's recent decision to classify 92 groups as 'Madhesi' not just fuelled the Tharu movement this month, but also made people of hill-origin even more insecure.



"I will hire 10 hit men for protection, but I'll stay in Janakpur."

Former mayor, Krishna Giri



"I am from Mahottari, but even I am thinking of moving out."

Janakpur Zonal police chief, Gopal Bhandari.

Is the violence in Janakpur a sign of things to come for the rest of the country?



"We can't live here anymore."

Kamala and Krita Khati, wife and son of Narendra Khati, who was killed by the Jwala Singh group last month.

The police seem incapable of dealing with the criminalised politics. "Even if we nab someone, we have to let him go because of political pressure," says police inspector Yadav Raj Khanal. Police sub-inspector Bigan Ram Yadav concurs: "There are more guns confiscated in Janakpur than in Hanuman Dhoka."

Former Janakpur mayor Krishna Giri, whose family has lived here for two generations,

says for every one Pahadi that has been killed by a Madhesi group, two Madhesi have been killed by Madhesi. Yet he says the level of fear is greater among people of hill-origin.

Brij Kumar Yadav, Editor of *Janakpur Today* says that the crime rate has gone up since the murder of his colleague, Uma Singh, in January. He says: "The criminalisation of politics has fostered impunity." ●

Life after Uma



RADIO ACTIVE: Seema Sharma and Gayatri Mishra, in the studio of Radio Today radio hosting the show *Ajab Gajab*, the hard-hitting program Uma Singh used to broadcast.

The brutal slaying of journalist Uma Singh on 11 January cast a pall of fear over Janakpur that has still not lifted. The message from the killer was in the method of her murder, and it has had a dampening effect on press freedom nationwide, but especially in Janakpur among Uma's colleagues.

Since January numerous journalists in Janakpur have been assaulted and threatened. But it speaks of the courage of the journalists here that the radio stations and newspapers continue to report under very difficult circumstances. Women journalists have been under pressure from families to give up the profession, and some have decided to stay home.

Five people are currently under detention awaiting charges: Lalita Devi Singh, Nemlal Paswan, Shrabhan Yadav, Bimlesh Jha and Abhishek Singh. Lalita Devi is Uma's sister-in-law and wife of her brother who was disappeared by the Maoists in 2007. Her arrest has been made on the evidence of the number of telephone calls she made, prior to the murder to Umesh Yadav, a former Maoist who is still absconding. He is now known to be with the Jwala Singh group.

Shrabhan Yadav is a Maoist who police suspect was involved in the disappearance and suspected murder of Uma Singh's father and brother three years ago. Lalita Devi is known to have been close to Shrabhan, who is a Maoist. Nemlal Paswan and Abhishek Singh are known local criminals with several indictments against them.

However, in a report last week, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) concluded that Uma Singh was killed for her investigative journalism which was embarrassing to Maoists and former Maoists in the eastern Tarai.

See also: 'Flame of truth', #434
'Press post mortem', #443

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Electronic election

The by-election next month will be Nepal's first all-digital voting

DEWAN RAI

Voting in the by-election in six constituencies on 10 April is going to be different from the last April election of Constituent Assembly. The ballots will all be cast in Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) and voters are required to produce a citizenship card for voting.

After a successful experiment with the EVMs in Kathmandu constituency 1 during the CA elections in April last year, the Election Commission had decided to go digital this time. "Electronic voting is more cost-effective, efficient and prevents rigging," says election commissioner Neel Kantha Uprety.

The by-elections will be conducted in Dhanusha-5, Morang-5 and 7, Kaski-1, Kanchanpur-4 and Rolpa-2. There are 139 candidates representing various political parties including 54 independents.



KIRAN PANDAY

Uporety says political and technical preparations are complete and campaigning, voters' education, supervision of the code of conduct in the constituencies began this week. Officials and volunteers have started visiting door to door with dummy voting machine for training voters on the use of the machines.

The EC received 197 ballot units and 676 control units required for this election were gifted by India. A single ballot unit can accommodate the serial number, names of 16 candidates and their election symbols. When there are more than 16 candidates, two EVMs are connected.

Single ballot unit will be used in Rolpa-2 and Kanchanpur-4, double ballot units for Morang-5, 7 and Kaski-1 and triple ballot units for Dhanusha-5, where there are 46 candidates. There are altogether 490 poll centres.

The EC has barred public office bearers including ministers and chairman and deputy chair of the CA from being involved in publicity campaigns. It has raised concerns of political parties but the EC is committed to enforce the code of conduct to make the election free, fair and credible by avoiding possible misuse of government resources. However, they can visit the election constituencies as common citizens.

To make the election fair, the EC has made citizenship certificates mandatory for voters. The political parties had asked the EC either to introduce voters' identity cards or check their citizenship certificates to avoid possible rigging in the polls. However, the political parties had mixed opinion on the EC's decision. Chure Bhawar Rastriya Ekta Party and Sadbhavana Party, among others, present at a meeting with the EC on Monday had said making citizenship certificate mandatory for voting could deprive some genuine voters from their right to vote.

The EC has asked the political parties to educate the voters to bring along their citizenship certificates for exercising their franchise. The EC has asked school teachers in the villages to participate in educating voters about the use of EVMs.

"This is a learning process," says Uporety, "we will take feedback from this election, and then we can go nationwide in future elections." ●



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Post Traumatic Stress



Browsing through a bookstore in Mumbai recently, I asked the convivial proprietor whether he could recommend a title on the history of Pakistan. He hadn't any, and instead recommended a book on the history of Indian Muslims, then a book on

CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

international terrorism, followed by a new title on the recent Mumbai bombings, and finally *The Kite Runner*. It was a bemusing episode, almost comical, if it weren't so telling about the strange and troubling constellation of related images the Indian Muslim is identified with in India: foreign, dangerous, untrustworthy and un-Indian.

With *Firaag*, taking the aftermath of Gujarat riots of 2002 as its starting point—riots being a wholly inadequate word for the systematic violence that claimed 3,000 Muslim lives with the apparent support of the state apparatus—Nandita Das, in her directorial debut, highlights another designation that the Indian public may not readily acknowledge—that of the 'victim'.

Firaag is primarily a project of witness, an insistence of remembering both one particular event and the violence that seems to recur only to quickly recede from memory. Yet, by shifting our attention post-violence, Das

explores the climate that chokes the victimised, the lingering effects on the psyche and the simmering suffering, rage, guilt and frustration on one hand, and the nonchalance or even approval on the other. The opening scene depicting a mass burial provides a sickening punch suggesting a level of aggressive confrontation *Firaag* simply cannot maintain. Instead it is a prologue that contextualises the one day a month later where *Firaag's* characters navigate the tinderbox of their homes, city, relationships and their own psyche.

Reminiscent of *Crash* in its structure, subject, and approach, *Firaag* follows multiple and intersecting storylines cutting across class and community. One Hindu household has its men disparage the news of the carnage even as it becomes clear they participated in the violence, while the wife played by Deepti Naval is wrought with guilt and empathetic remorse that frays at her very sanity. Elsewhere, an elderly and respected Muslim musician is shielded from the events of the riots by his protective caretaker. An upper-class Hindu-Muslim couple agonise over their decision to relocate to Delhi. A group of young angry Muslim men are keen on meting out vengeance for the loss of life and home. Munira, a young Muslim woman and mother suspects her friend, who comes to her aid,

knows something about the destruction of her home. And a lost and possibly orphaned young boy wanders the streets. In that dense list of characters, it is to Das and her co-script writer Shuchi Kothari's credit that *Firaag* doesn't feel crowded or the plot convoluted, but it would be overly generous to say that each segment works equally well.

Firaag is capably photographed with the aid of cinematographer Ravi Chandran, but it is the performances of its large ensemble cast that Das seems to have most skillfully managed with a particularly insightful and elevating performance by Naval. There's a touching tenderness between Naeeruddin Shah playing the musician and his loyal servant played by Raghbir Yadav. And Shahana Goswami (*Rock On's* Debby) is excellent as Munira. Yet, the theatrical styling also has some pitfalls. The exchanges, particularly with the upper class characters, have an overly scripted feel, and statements that might have been poignant if delivered from a stage have an awkward and sometimes unauthentic twang on screen.

Some critics will undoubtedly dismiss *Firaag* as narrow and unbalanced, (as if a Hindu audience cannot identify with the characters who don't apologize for or perpetrate the violence) but through its subtext, Das appreciates the oft-quoted 'banality of evil,' which uncomfortably situates the responsibility in the mainstream and the ordinary. It cannot pass without comment that the release of the film coincides with the peak of India's election season. It is an important reminder in the recent jingoistic expressions of pride in Indian democracy, how dangerously frayed is India's secularism, its foundational and constitutional tenet. ●

Director: Nanadita Das
Cast: Deepti Naval, Shahana Goswami, Naseeruddin Shah, Raghbir Yadav, Paresh Rawal, Tisca Chopra, Sanjay Suri
2009, 101 min

Mercury's return

Meteor shower can be seen later in the month

This month during the evening, the ringed-planet Saturn appears in the east, the elusive planet Mercury in the west and a meteor shower later in the month.

The April night sky also displays a variety of stars and constellations. During the evening, the Winter Hexagon will be dominating the western skies, where you can still enjoy the constellations Orion the Hunter, the V-shaped Taurus the Bull and the Pleiades (Seven Sisters) star cluster. Starting next month, many of the brilliant stars and star clusters of the Winter Hexagon will become lost in the glow of the setting Sun. So take some time

this month to view these interesting sights. In the eastern sky you can see the constellations Leo the Lion and Virgo the Virgin. Saturn is just to the south of Leo and its

incredible moons can be seen through the telescope. In the north eastern skies, you can easily identify the Big Dipper, Saptarshi.

The **Lyrid** meteor-shower is active during the third week of April, peaking probably on 22 April. The meteors seem to radiate outwards from a point in the constellation of Lyra, close to the bright star Vega, which is high in the south-east after midnight. The best time to look is in the early hours, before the sky grows bright towards dawn. We might expect to see one Lyrid every 10 minutes or so, and there will be little interference from the waning Moon.

This month amateur astronomy groups in Nepal will be organizing star parties for the public as part of the **International Year of Astronomy's** (IYA 2009) four-day event from April 2-5 called '100 Hours of Astronomy.' Designed to bring astronomy to the public around the world there will be public stargazing events throughout the world. Those of you who wish to participate in this global event, please visit: www.100hoursofastronomy.org



Other Highlights for April:

Mercury is at it greatest elongation east of the Sun on 26 April, so this month we have an unusually good chance to spot this elusive little planet, in the western sky after sunset. Binoculars will help locate it, but it should be visible to the unaided eye once you know where to look.

Venus was at inferior conjunction (almost directly in front of the Sun) on 27 March. Throughout April it is rising in the east about an hour before sunrise. Although the 'morning star' is very bright indeed, it will be hard to see it, very low on the eastern horizon at dawn.

Mars is still rising only a few minutes before sunrise. We won't be getting good views of the 'red planet' until after the summer.

Jupiter is rising about an hour before the sun, so it's very low down at dawn and not so bright. However, as the month goes by, Jupiter rises earlier every day. By the end of April, Jupiter will be easier to see though it's still quite low in the south-eastern sky at dawn.

Saturn is more conveniently placed for evening viewing. It rises in the east in mid afternoon, and will be overhead by late evening. Don't miss observing Saturn on 6 April, when it will appear close to the Moon.

Bon Appetit

Spicing up the food variety in their menu has always been a Hyatt specialty whether it is through their monthly food promotions or introducing new chefs. They believe that with so many people travelling abroad and getting more attuned to cuisine over the world, bringing in exciting new flavours is a big priority.

This month Hyatt Mumbai chef Jean Christophe Fieschi, who has worked in Hyatt branches all over the world, ran a training program for the chefs at the Kathmandu hotel.

"Attention to the small intricate details makes all the



difference when enjoying an evening out", says Fieschi. While training the staff at the Hyatt, he considers each aspect including presentation and ambiance. With any food, the basic thing that he teaches all chefs is "keep it simple". His training is also about encouraging chefs in Nepal to experiment with fusing global and local flavours.

If more small innovative programs like this are organised, Nepal will be able to develop a more global food experience. Chef Fieschi says, "I see a lot of potential in Nepal's food market. People are gradually getting ready to try new things." ●

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Ceramic works** - an exhibition by Patrice Rouby & Barbara Weibel and Kathmandu University Students at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, till 29 March, 11AM-6PM. 4438979.
- ❖ **Shaastra**, art exhibition by Ramesh KC, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 29 March. 4438549

EVENTS

- ❖ **Paleti with Yogesh Baidya**, 27 March, 6PM, Nepa-laya r sala, Rs 565, 4412469
- ❖ **The Wrestler**, starring Mickey Rourke, 28 March, 6PM, Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **The First Annual Garden party**, Lazimpat Gallery Café, 29 March, 5.30 PM.
- ❖ **Community Animal Treatment (CAT) Volunteer training** - 28 March-3 April (afternoon). 9841745913
- ❖ **Call for entries for Film South Asia** till 31 May, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5552141

MUSIC

- ❖ **OZMA concert** at the Army Club Auditorium, 6PM, 27 March
- ❖ **Chevrolet Miles Music concerti**, 28 March, 5-10PM, 1905, Kantipath, Rs. 600
- ❖ **Fusion Finale Concert**, 29 March, 6.30 PM, Dhokaima Café, Rs.999.
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **Dhaba**, Indian food festival, 27 March-11 April, Garden terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 7-11.45 PM, Rs 1200.
- ❖ **Australian Food Promotion**, 3-12 April, from 6PM onwards at Hyatt Regency. 4489362
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **High tea** with scones and sandwiches everyday at the Lounge from 4.30-6.30 PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Mediterranean cuisine** every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- ❖ **Nhuchhe goes Thai** at Nhuchhe's Thai Kitchen, Baluwater. 4429903
- ❖ **Fusion** of Marcela Ragan's new menu and Manny'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

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

Quest Entertainment



In *Videsh- Heaven on Earth*, Chand, a bubbly girl from Ludhiana, India is married into a family in Ontario, Canada. Chands' optimism for her new life ends when she realises that she has married into a dysfunctional and miserable family, where her husband Rocky is the sole bread earner. Unable to express his anger with his dire situation, Rocky releases his frustrations on Chand. However, hope does come to Chand in the form of Rosa (Yanna McIntosh), a tough and savvy Jamaican woman who works alongside Chand in a factory. Rosa gives her a mystical root that makes the recipient fall in love with the giver. Chand then gives it to her husband and surreal incidents begin to happen.

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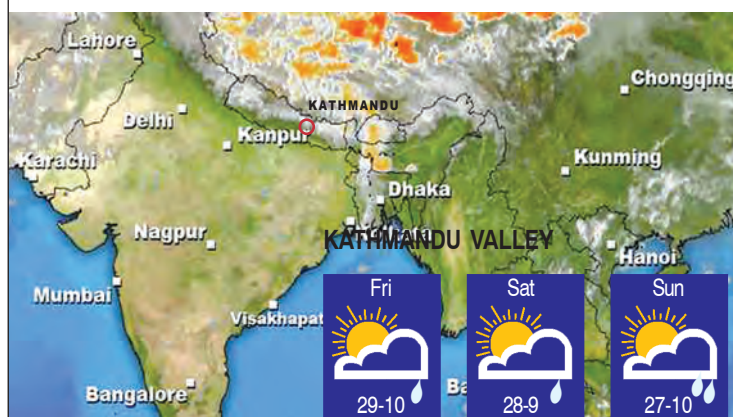
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Yes, finally the weather pattern has changed since last week when the historic drought broke with the arrival of light rains. Since then afternoon thunder claps followed by drizzles or short showers have been the pattern in eastern and central Nepal. The Kathmandu Valley has also received several scanty rains totalling 2.1 mm. Wheat farmers, however, are still desperately waiting for a good amount of rainfall as a last chance to save their crops. The satellite picture of Thursday afternoon shows fresh westerly fronts flying in clouds in multiple streams- first one, heading over the Pamir and southeast China, second one over Kashmir and the third, over Pakistan and Afghanistan. Conclusion: The Valley residents may expect double digit morning temperatures, sunny intervals and afternoon thunders followed by light rains.



'MANDU MANDALA

by PRERANA PAKHRIN

April 1, 2009

BREAKING NEWS
Unveiling of the
new constitution:
a hoax!



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KIRAN PANDAY

ESSENTIAL DEMANDS: UML activists protest against loadshedding, inflation, and lack of drinking water and security at a rally in Ratna Park on Tuesday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

VISION FOR THE FUTURE: A visually impaired student, Imran Ahamad, sits for the SLC exams assisted by ninth grade student, Biju Maharjan, at Lalitpur on Wednesday, the first day of the SLC exams.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

HARD FACTS: Activists and locals lobby for improvement of water quality to mark World Water Day at Swayambhu Nath on Wednesday. At least 10,500 children die annually due to unclean drinking water in Nepal.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

THE BEEB TRIUMPHS: The drama team of BBC World Service Trust, Nepal celebrates in Kathmandu after winning best non-English production and best team at the BBC Global Reith Awards in London earlier this month for their radio play *Katha Mitho Sarangiko*.



KIRAN PANDAY

BANNER MAN: Laxman Singh Khadka, self-proclaimed cleaner of Nepal, decorates the statue of Jung Bahadur Rana at Sahid Gate on Tuesday.

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Toxic assets

The good news this week is that the rain raised the level of Kulekhani reservoir by 1cm. The bad news is that the level went down by 50cm the very next day because the water was drained to generate power. What all this means is that when Kulekhani goes completely dry, NEA is going to scrap its loadshedding schedule. After that, instead of the power going off at 4PM and coming back at midnight like clockwork, the **Nepal Eletrocuted Authoritarians** will surprise us by turning off the power anytime they like.

ॐ

The most sensational bit of news this week was the antic of First Son Prakash in Dhulikhel where he got himself **plastered** and was photographed in an advanced stage of inebriation while Daddy and Uncle Babu were meeting KU honchos. (Editor's note: The PMO has clarified that the Tremendous, Jr had "dozed off.") Even so, the Heir Apparent was overheard exhorting the PM's bodyguards and security to join in the **merry-making**. The second generation comrades are really making up for lost time for having tried to turn the whole country dry during their revolution.

What's with **clown princes** in this country anyway that they all end up turning into spoilt brats, at best, or mass murderers at worst? Immediate parallels were of course drawn between Prakash and Paras. And speaking of whom, the ex-CP was seen recently at a Burgis St watering hole swinging back one too many Singapore Slings and essentially **making a donkey** of himself. If he gets another speeding ticket on the PIE they may actually cancel the registration of his Lamborghini, and there's no way he can bribe his way out of that one. At the rate the ex-prince is going, it appears he is personally working towards making the Baby King proposal a reality by disqualifying himself from the contest.

ॐ

Is Comrade Shock & Awe thinking of setting up a parallel YCL? Probably not, but it was disconcerting to see him giving the three finger salute wearing a neckerchief and merit badges at a jamboree of Nepal Scouts the other day. Lt Gen Robert Baden-Powell must be turning in his grave, or maybe he is **pretty chuffed** that someone actually wants his former guerrillas to become Boy Scouts? But the

YCLs just doesn't sit when the chairman tells them to sit. The leaguers aren't going after wilful defaulters with toxic assets, they are still on the rampage terrorising multinationals and schools, still confiscating property and conducting wallaby courts in rural areas. Now that the media spotlight has swung away from Pashupati, YCL-backed goons are now extorting money from people wishing to perform pujas by the banks of the **unholy Bagmati**. There is a standard rate of Rs 5,000 for Indian pilgrims and Rs 2,000 for locals. If you don't cough up, well, you can't say "Om Nama Shivaya" because the YCL control the gates of heaven.

ॐ

We now have it on fairly good authority that Nepal is like Rwanda. Although Comrade Navi was quoted out of context, she was obviously trying to make a pitch for a three-year extension for OHCHR mandate in Nepal by implying that things ain't all **hunkydory** in the boondocks yet, the gaffe may have actually made it easier now for NHRC to attain its goal to drive out the high commission.

ॐ

US embassy officials, always very obsessed with security around the **Maharajganj Fortress**, apparently haven't been able to do anything about a huge

billboard that has sprouted on the south side of the embassy parking lot put up by an education consultancy advertising colleges in Australia. The advertisement is obviously aimed at Nepalis wishing to go to study in the US whose visas are refused. So, if the gloves have come off in the **War of Overseas Education**, can we expect the Americans to retaliate by putting up a neon sign up the road opposite the Ozzie Emb advertising consultancies that offer to smuggle people to the US via Mexico?

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