Cooking may be just about the most demanding and time-consuming activity going on in the Maoist camp in Surkhet these days. The ex-guerrillas here spend six hours daily in the kitchen. Morning drill is the only official activity. Guerrillas who once roamed the mountains, planning attacks on army bases, now play carom all day. And if it’s not too hot, they muster the energy for a game of volleyball.

The fighters say they are content with life in the cantonment. Says 32-year-old DBS Rana: “Peace has come to our land and we are enjoying every moment of it.” There is also anticipation here that with UNMIN’s mandate running out in June, cantonment life will come to an end one way or another.

The all-party Army Integration Special Committee has finally started regular meetings and sent a technical committee to the seven cantonments and 21 sub-cantonments across the country. “Our target is to conclude the process by June, but even if we can’t meet that deadline we will have decided on how many to integrate and how many to rehabilitate,” says committee member Mohamad Habibullah of the MJF.

There are nearly 20,000 verified guerrillas in the cantonments, but the situation is complicated by the presence of some 4,000 adolescents and children rejected by UNMIN who continue to live in the camps.

UNMIN has to present a mid-term report to the Security Council in New York in mid-April, but there is skepticism that the committee can finish its work by the time its mandate expires in June.
PARAS OFFENSIVE
Your contributor in the web edition Eric Ellis has taken it upon himself to attack the journalistic integrity of Singapore’s The New Paper (and the Singapore press in general) for publishing the recent interview with former crown prince Paras (‘Paras’ PR offensive’, by Eric Ellis, www.nepalitimes.com).

‘Paras’, claims Ellis, ‘is not a nice man’ or ‘a particularly bright man’ and maintains that any true journalist (apparently counting himself in) would have made certain that these quotes received the most emphasis in any journalistic treatment of the former prince. It has been a persistent delay at the hand of journalists and editors to attack Ellis on this.

John M Kelleher, email

APRIL FOOLS
JOHN CHILD
Eric Ellis is right in his blog on the Nepal Times site that the native editor of The New Paper in Singapore obviously thinks it’s the Daily Mail and is trying to boost its sales through titillating paparazzi-style royal gossip. The fact that a guy from a public relations firm wrote the serialised story doesn’t seem to bother the editor. Luckily, most Nepalis will never read The New Paper and the article, and a publicity-seeking ex-prince, will soon be forgotten.

Gyan Subba, Kumaunpati

CHANGE
I am among the many Nepalis who want to live in Nepal where I can utilise my personal capability. Apart from a handful of Nepalis who were in power or were in close proximity to the illegitimate power structure, this was an impossible dream for millions like me. Apart from a handful of Nepalis who were in power, the Maoists themselves have brought the 2001 incident back into the political limelight for their own purposes. A 2001 incident back into the political limelight for their own purposes. Although I have not always found his mannered and bad-tempered petulance as amusing as Eric Ellis.

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Objective situation
Nepal’s revolution has international significance

The proletariat is an international class. The communal movement of a certain country is therefore in essence an inseparable part of the general movement of the proletariat. When the tactics predicted the party would really get moving and prove to the people that it meant business. The Maoists will be different, everyone thought.

It is still too early to call the coalition a complete failure, there are some ministries that have managed to crank up the machinery of government. The Finance Ministry under chief Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai has impressed everyone with his revenue-generating skills. But all this cash is sitting unproductively in the treasury. Despite the need to show results, the rest of the government seems incapable of spending the money. Not everything can be blamed on this government, this paralysis has mystified even the Maoists’ leadership.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal (wherever he is while we write this) needs to realise that he is heading a coalition government under a parliamentary system. Its successes, failures and future will be, as its. But so are its failures. He can’t blame the UML for a worsening law and order situation, or other members of the coalition for the renewed fuel crisis and continued power cuts. Ask motorcyclists waiting hours for five litres of petrol at Bhadrakali in the pouring rain who is to blame, and they will all point at the party heading the government.

The buck stops at Baluwatar. The Maoists are lucky the tolerance and pain threshold of Nepalis is so high. They have wasted precious time on resolving intra-party contradictions.

The people need at least a perception that their lives will improve, and this is even more urgent than the completion of the peace process and formation of an acceptable constitution. Nobody expects miracles from Dahal and his fellow travellers. But they need to prove that they are doing more than just blaming everyone else, or at least once a week threatening to overthrow a government they themselves lead.

We have the unenviable task of trying to wake up rulers pretending to be asleep. We have the unenviable task of trying to wake up rulers pretending to be asleep. We have the unenviable task of trying to wake up rulers pretending to be asleep.

We must use the excellent prehistoric era that Nepal is experiencing to make sure that their children can get a good education.

After reading your story on the scam involving the channelling of incoming international calls through VOIP (‘Fraud calls’, 4442) I have no doubt that NT employees are in cahoots with the international mafia. On a recent conference call with Dubai, my incoming calls all had the same number, a mobile caller ID. It would be relatively easy for NT and Mero to go after the crooks. Here are the numbers: 9803946477. The conference call was routed: 9804772524, 9804772618, 9804772524, 9804773460, 9804773708, 9803946477. The reason there are so many numbers is because my conference call kept getting interrupted because of the shoddy quality of service.

Name withheld, email
Maoist support in Nepal is sure to be gradually expressed in the form of a worldwide political crisis, so the objective situation is becoming favourable for a world proletarian revolution. But the subjective aspect of the revolutionaries is still weak.

Only by raising to newer heights the ideological struggle against right revisionism, the main danger, and dogmatosectarianism, can this problem of the international communist movement, including the Nepalese communist movement, be resolved.

Some revolutionaries have reached the conclusion that Nepal’s revolution has been liquidated as a result of right deviation. Only by crushing the entire conspiracies of imperialism, Indian expansionism and domestic reaction and thereby accomplishing a new democratic revolution in Nepal can this incorrect conclusion be proven wrong.

Now the whole world is looking at us. Reactionaries are centred on Nepal to root out revolution, just as the oppressed centrals of the world are impatient to see the success of revolution in Nepal under the leadership of the Nepali proletariat.

In the present world situation, a possibility that can turn this possibility into reality.

Indra Mohan Sigdel is the chief editor of the Maoist English paper, The Red Star (www.krishnasenonline.org)}
**Damage Control**

"Remember, Hitler came after the Great Depression"

LONDON: As leaders of 20 countries that account for 80 per cent of the world's economy sit together, they may face protests like that of last Saturday that rocked central London. It represented the anger and the helplessness at losing livelihoods that people feel in this part of the world. Those on the sidelines on the streets cheered the protests on, revealing the depth of the feeling.

And for once, the state has not been able to ignore it. The entire police force was deployed for Thursday's G20 summit and lectures were cancelled. Those working in the financial sectors, the City as they call it here, have been asked to dress down or not come to office fearing attacks by an enraged mob. More than a terrorist attack, the world leaders and the financial elite seems to be in fear of their own people.

There are predictions that the UK's economy will contract by 3.5 per cent in 2009, the first negative growth since 1931. All sectors are affected: from the media that is losing advertisements to academic universities where funding will dip drastically. South Asian friends who were just celebrating a huge salary hike are now laid off and looking to come back home.

While some are hoping that the crisis would signal the possibility of the resurgence of some form of radical left politics, others are skeptical that it may in fact strengthen the anti-immigrant right wing. "Remember, Hitler came after the Great Depression. The world cannot afford to get this wrong," comments an Oxford history scholar.

What is certain though is that there can be no business as usual. Economic nationalism and protectionism, to varying degrees, is back. The basic logic of Keynesian economics, massive state intervention to create jobs, is fashionable again. The basic logic of Keynesian economics, massive state intervention to create jobs, is fashionable again. The basic logic of Keynesian economics, massive state intervention to create jobs, is fashionable again. People will no longer accept an era of no regulation where a few indulge in reckless economics, yet make obscene amounts.

The G20 is significant because it signals that the world cannot be left to a few white western men. The presence of India, Brazil, South Africa and others from Latin America and Asia is reaffirmation of the need for a broader global leadership. Others see the G20 as a club where China will play as important a role as the US.

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**PLAIN SPEAKING**

Prashant Jha

At the time of going to press, there is no policy consensus among the top leaders. Obama and Brown will push for a global stimulus package. Some reports suggest figures as high as $2 trillion. A few EU governments are resistant to more government spending and are worried about deficit, inflation and debt issues, with the Czechs even calling Obama's domestic $800 billion stimulus as a "road to hell." France and Germany are consistent that the immediate need is an overhaul and strengthening of the entire international regulatory system. Europe and US will talk about the effects of the US financial elite seems to be in fear of their own people.

The meetings on the sidelines will be significant. The Afghanistan-Pakistan issue is sure to figure in the Obama-Singh talks. It will meet his Russian counterpart and discuss arms control, Iran and Afghanistan. But the highlight will be the US-China meeting where leaders will size each other up and discuss a host of global issues.

In the ingrown world of Kathmandu politics and its petty intrigues, it is often easy to forget that there is a world out there: a world that is changing because of the enormity of the global recession. We may get affected primarily through a dip in remittances and tourism. But policymakers in the foreign and finance ministry must keep an eye on London summit, and the larger rapid evolution of global political and economic dynamics.

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**TOP GEAR:** Sherpa Adventures brand athlete Lakpa Rita on the summit of Chomolungma last year.

KUNDA DIXIT

Tashi Tiering Sherpa should look hansom. There is only eight hours of power a day, his new generator hasn't yet arrived, and thousands of samples of a new quarter zip jacket for the Spring 2010 season need to be shipped out to stores in the US by Thursday.

Yet, Tashi is cool. He has worked around the problem and feels confident he can meet the deadline. His workers don't look overworked and concentrate on precision laser cutting machines that slice through high-tech fabric.

"Every country has its own risks," Tashi explains, "but Nepal is actually quite competitive, importing raw materials is easier than Vietnam or Bangladesh, it's my backyard so there are no barriers to doing business and there is a pool of skilled garment workers."

This goes against conventional wisdom. At a time when many investors have shied away from Nepal because of security concerns, power shortage and labour militancy, Tashi has not just returned to Nepal, but has decided to set up the world's highest mountain's first adventure gear company in Kathmandu.

"I'm not a fool, I didn't come here because I felt I needed to score karma points," says Tashi, "I came here because there is a high return on investment. I did the calculations and took a calculated risk."

Tashi is building a new five-storey flagship store that is nearing completion in Naxal. It will house his research and development unit, have two floors of a one-stop shop for down jackets, sleeping bags, tents and trekking gear and the top floor will have a bed and breakfast. The complex is set to open in June.

Tashi, 53, ran his garment-export business in Nepal till 1989. When he saw the writing on the wall with WTO coming he sold everything to move to the US. He has handpicked some of Nepal's best garment workers. Sherpa runs a tight shift and keeps everyone motivated by spending a lot of time on the factory floor, discussing and solving problems. It helps that Sherpa has control of the whole production chain from design to sourcing the new material to manufacturing, packaging and dispatch. His daughter and son help out from the US.

To market the Sherpa range of gear, Tashi has enlisted 'brand athletes' like celebrity climber Lakpa Rita Sherpa who has climbed Chomolungma 11 times, extreme alpinist Joe Puryear, Pasang Lhamu Sherpa who has climbed the world's highest mountains from the north and is attempting the south route this spring, and Everest marathoner, Nima Yangjee.

Sherpa Adventure Gear insulation jackets, fleece hoodies, technical jackets and base layers, and even wooden hats with their proud Made in Nepal tag are now available in stores across the US, Taiwan, Japan and Europe.

Asked how come he remains so upbeat about Nepal, Tashi replies with a hearty laugh: "Optimism is human nature. You do your arithmetic, and you weigh that with the emotional attachment to your homeland."

www.sherpaadventuregear.com

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"I know, it was a huge jolt of faith to return to Nepal," Tashi admitted this week after being selected by Nepali Times as Company of the Month for April. "But it’s not about me, I’m just the custodian of the brand.

Tashi has no illusions about the problems Nepal faces, but takes it as a given. "There are some things about this country that drives you up the wall, there are some days when I ask myself what am I doing here. But my past is my future."

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KUNDAY DIXIT
Empty seats

Figures released by the Tribhuvan International Airport indicate that tourist arrivals by air this month, compared to March last year, have decreased by 17.6 per cent to 33,055 tourists, due to the worldwide global recession and decreasing spending power. While arrivals from Bangladesh (29.6 per cent) has seen growth in incoming number of tourists, there was a marked decrease in arrivals from India by 24.7 per cent. Thailand and Singapore maintained their trend upwards, while arrivals from Japan, South Korea and Malaysia have decreased. However, the difference in arrivals from China was negligible. European and Oceania regions registered negative growth of 15.0 per cent and 11.6 per cent respectively and arrivals from Canada and the US also show negative growths of 9 per cent and 10.5 per cent respectively.

Linking places

The government has started a feasibility study for an electric railway linking Mechi and Mahakali. According to the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works, 19 international companies have already submitted proposals. Six companies from 12 countries including China, Japan and Australia who applied will be shortlisted to six within the next week. According to the ministry, the required investment for the project will amount to more than a total of five years national budget of Nepal and it will take 2-3 years for planning only.

Darkness no more

Kyocera, a Japanese corporation, is donating 600-watt solar power generating systems, with storage batteries, to 15 middle schools in Nepal. Kyocera will install these systems in the schools, each of which will also have audio-visual equipment and lights. Kyocera plans to install the systems in three schools a year, which will total to 15 schools.

Summer schedule

Emirates has announced a new flight schedule for the summer, which will total to 15 schools.

Business

Non-logical factors that can lead the decision-making process astray

When dealing with business executives, the one and only one important question to ask is: how do they make decisions. Business executives can outsource functional works related to finance, marketing and administration to capable staff. But they can’t outsource the process of making important decisions. It’s not necessary that they make decisions that turn out right all the time. But it is important to see what thought process and what is the balancing between what’s known and what’s unknown leads them to make decisions that affect people, resources and results in the long run.

I picked up this hobby several years ago, after falling more often than I dared to. I have learned to my own various decision-making processes, and after having kept a log of my mistakes and that of others’ from which I continue to learn. One lesson that comes up time and again is the elementary psychological biases that executives fail to be conscious of when they make decisions.

Confirmation bias: This bias leads executives to use new information to further believe what they already believes, usually by ignoring evidence that stand contrary to the existing beliefs. Let’s say that you believe that Shyam is unpopular with his colleagues. One afternoon, you see him eating lunch alone. You interpret this observation to further believe that Shyam is really the most hated person in the office. After all, you ask, why else would he be eating lunch alone?

But unless you talk to Shyam directly and find out more about his work and lunch eating habits, you are merely reinforcing beliefs about his unpopularity based on a set of observations. This is not going capture what’s really true about Shyam. Who knows, Shyam may be a hard worker who’s disliked by his colleagues simply because he makes them feel like slackers.

One antitode is to ask: “Could it be that what I believe and what the verifiable truth is are actually two different things?” Framing bias: Executives often frame issues in such narrow terms that they miss making decisions that get to the heart of their business problems. I once started colleagues by arguing that my company is not really in the media business, but in the attention business. That is, we have to constantly do innovative things that legitimately attract subscribers’ and advertisers’ attention. In a world full of choices, we are in the business of competing for our customer’s attention. One way to guard against using narrow frames when making decisions is to first define issues in broadest possible terms, and then zero in on the core business problem.

Fundamental attribution error: You see a good-looking person. He speaks flawless English, talks easily about the state of the world, and you find out that he had attended all the right schools. Impressed by what you see, you assume that he must be excellent at his business. But being an excellent businessman has nothing to do with having been good-looking, speaking foreign languages or being a graduate of elite schools. What you, as an observer, have done is attribute what you see in one context to success in another, even when these contexts are completely different. In this case, the only way to judge the businessman’s worth is through his measurable work-related performance, and not so much by how he charming he is in public. Executives do not make decisions in a vacuum. As flesh-and-blood human beings, they make decisions by using their head, heart and guts, all of which are influenced by non-logical factors that can lead the decision-making process astray. But being aware of these three biases in a good step toward sharpening one’s decision-making skills in business in these uncertain times.
Splits within splits

Kantipur, 18 March

Four days after the Tarai districts were lumped into the Madhes by the first amendment of the interim constitution in 2008, Laxman Tharu defected from the party. If he had stuck with the Maoists, Laxman would be a minister or CA member by now.

But Laxman isn’t the only one seeking a future in the politics of ethnicity. More recently, Matrika Yadav split from the Maoists, arguing that the party would be a minister or CA member by now.

The new groups are secondumpy Biswas, who was secretary of Sadbhabana and ethnicity and class based agitation. Kishor Kumar Nagendra Chaudary, is chairman of Nepal Tharu politician Thakur Singh Tharu and two-time NC parliamentary Padma Narayan Chaudary are also members.

Ex-state minister and UML regional member, Nagnendra Chaudary, is chairman of Nepal Tharu Loktakrithi Sangh, which is concerned with both ethnicity and class based agitation. Lahor Kumar Biswas, who was secretary of Sabinabana and vice-chairman of MFU and his break-away party Madhesi Forum (Madhes group), is now second chairman of the Rastriya Adhikari Janadiitat Kantipur.

Khemraj Keshabsharan

In the fourth and sixth centuries, two Chinese theologians wrote about Nepal in the name of the Hindus enjoyed in the past? The people told us what their priorities were: free education, primary health services and employment. The state has to provide jobs, ensure reservation for women, the marginalised and downtrodden. They are fed up with corruption and inefficiency.

A constitution that does not address these issues will fail to close the gap between the rich and the poor, they felt.

They also want the state to help in making use of agricultural and forest resources, support for the landless and respect for the old, women and children. It was evident the government hasn’t been able to win over the people’s trust.

There is deep frustration about the collapse of law and order and extended periods of strikes and blockades. The people want the disruptive culture of blocking highways stopped.

An over-politicised administration will never be able to address these grievances. The people are very clear about what the problems are and what needs to be done. Are our politicians ready to address them?

Religious revival

Himal Khabarpatrika, 1-15 April

Khemraj Keshabsharan, Santa Shromani

In the fourth and sixth centuries, two Chinese theologians wrote about Nepal in the past. The reasons why they are trying to find answers in spirituality.

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Non-indigenous

Parsuram Kaffe in Naya Patrika, 1 April

Maoris have always supported ethnic equality. They have identified 19 ethnic groups and appointed co-ordinators for them who are different from the ethnic groups they represent.

Maori spokesperson Dina Nath Sharma said, “We don’t believe that absolute inclusiveness is possible. But we are against ethnic inequality and racism.”

Ethnicity In-charge Deb Gurung

Magar Hemanta Prakash Oli ‘Sudarshan’

Tharu Hari Bhatra Kande

Tamang Agni Sapkota

Newar Hitman Sakya

Kirat Indra Mohan Sigdel

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Tamu Hit Raj Pandey

Sherpa Agni Sapkota

Lama Khabadur Blk

Mag’i Ganga Shrestha

Thami Jibil Lama

Chepang Surya Subedi

Kuma Hari Adhikari

Danuwar Kumar Dahal

Kochila Prahlad Budhathoki

Madhesi Haribol Gajurel

Women Lila Mari Pokhariel

Baram Hari Adhikari

Thakali Srijam Dhusik

Chhardtel Hemanta Prakash Oli

Muslim Debendra Poudel

“Whose victory is this?” “It’s ours.”

Rabindra in Nepal, 5 April

Notes

From the Nepali Press

Kantipur, 30 March

I’ve just returned from the public consultation in Nawalparasi. We toured Parasi and villages in outlying areas. There were many people who had walked hours to collect their old age state benefit of Rs 500.

Previous constitutions have not compelled the state to respect the people. For this reason, we, the party members, made sure that those left out. People are clear about the new constitution will be written. Although past constitutions were written by the name of the people, they could not change the face of Nepal and inequality and discrimination persisted.

The people told us what their priorities are: free education, primary health services and employment. The state has to provide jobs, ensure reservation for women, the marginalised and downtrodden. They are fed up with corruption and inefficiency.

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Residents of the Tamang-dominated Palchok of Kabhre gather to discuss the issues that the new constitution should address.

How is the government doing? Norsang Lama, social worker: The Maoist-led government has not been able to work effectively and efficiently. Instead of decreasing the problems, it is increasing them. The government has sidelined the task of writing the constitution and is stuck over small issues.

Surya Tamang, Yu-Shyung Hysimo Mongolian Youth Society: Everyone, including those in the government, talk of the New Nepal, but the work they do remains unchanged. They had made many promises, but it does not look like they will fulfil them. Those who had pledged to work for the people should not lie and cheat now that they are in the government.

Nepalis first. Demands for Tharuhat, or provinces will invite conflict. We are a Tamang, I don’t agree with the ethnic division of the states, they should be based on geography. We should be formed through discussions with intellectuals of that region and language or religion. Instead, the name of the state should not be based on any caste, religion or discrimination. Whether you are a Chetri or Bahun, a Yadab or a Tamang, those who live in Madhes are Madhesi.

What is the idea of affirmative action? Surya Tamang: We need inclusive policies to maintain political stability. It will only if possible if the new constitution includes the rights of discriminated sections of society like women, ethnic groups and dalits. One does not always get the chance to write the constitution with the direct participation of the people. We have to utilise this opportunity to include all sectors and areas.

The judiciary in a federalism

Prof Siegfried Bross is a judge at the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany and chairman of the Executive Committee of the German Section of the International Commission of Jurists. He was in Nepal last week for a GTZ program to support the constitution-building process. Bross spoke to Nepali Times about how the judiciary should function in a federal structure.

Nepali Times: How practicable is a federal system in a multi ethnic country like Nepal? Prof Siegfried Bross: Actually, a federal system is desirable in a multi-ethnic set-up like Nepal. It can accommodate different cultures and ethnicities. This does not mean drawing up states based on ethnic grounds only and marginalising other communities, but giving them the freedom to run their own government. This structure does not mean ceding to separatist aspirations but allowing certain groups to live within their own jurisdiction.

But there is no majority of a particular ethnic community in a particular place.

MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

You should look at it from a local level and see which different groups will invite conflict. It is not possible to draw boundaries based on ethnicity alone. We should take into account the geography, infrastructure, economy and cultural identities of different communities. For instance, there are certain minorities in Germany. They have been able to preserve their own culture and language at a local level. The provinces will have their own statute. This can refer to setting holidays depending on the local culture and traditions, creating a sense of togetherness and giving other people a say. Strengthening provinces strengthens central government at the same time. There can be a three-tier government-central, provincial and local for better governance.

What kind of a judicial system could be applicable to Nepal? In a federal system, there should be a court at the provincial level. There should be Supreme Court at the central and also a separate Constitutional Court which is independent from the Supreme Court. One of the reasons for setting up the Constitutional Court is to take into account the diversity of the people within the country through the appointment of the judges.

Why do we need a Constitutional Court? We have to look at its composition first. It is made up of judges from different ethnic groups who have no ties with the CA. This is why it is impossible at the Supreme Court. The judges’ independence is ensured because they are not allowed to serve more than 12 years and cannot be re-elected. Although there aren’t different ethnicities in Germany, following this principle, different judges from different provinces come to the court so it ensures a much greater ethnic representation.
Basantapur by

Among throngs of people and bustle of market, the old town
As night falls in Basantapur, the frantic rush of people is replaced by the shuffle of feet on the cobblestones. The crowd becomes more Nepali as the small tourist nik-nak shops beside the Kumari’s house pack up.

On the walls and benches around the market, youngsters start gathering in groups, sipping tea from small plastic cups and chatting noisily. Street children cartwheel around the benches, carefully avoiding the old men seated on fallen wooden pillars around the temples. Some of them are porters, resting after a hard day’s work. Others sit quietly huddled together, watching the rush of people coming and going.

As the tourist market packs up, the night market takes its place. By dusk, the market is a glowing caterpillar of fake diamond earrings glittering under the feeble light of bulbs. Hundreds of young people throng the market, bargaining and passing from stall to stall of cheap glasses, scarves, t-shirts, bags and slippers. Sometimes, Kollywood actors come to stock up on fake jewellery for their movies.

A bigger crowd gathers around the stalls at the entrance to the square. Wheeler in stalls crowd the streets, displaying copious piles of food, the fat spitting as vendors dip meats and rich tofu into vessels brimming with oil. There’s everything from sausages, salami and burgers to fish, goat’s tongue and chicken lollies.

Even in the inner reaches of Basantapur, the local markets are still in full swing. Behind the Ganesha Temple, a man sells baskets of dried fish and vegetables in a pati. Kasthamandap is empty, except for women selling marigold garlands, who still have heaps left from their daily stock. As they try to convince you to buy some, they keep watchful eyes on their children, their shadows prancing about as they play hide and seek in dark corners. A woman at a madal shop spreads black coal on dried skin to make the black circles on the drum. “It would be so much easier,” she jokes, “if the Chinese made our-madals.”

From a small café around the square, the white stucco palace at the centre is bathed in reflected glory. Youngsters chatting on the highest steps of the temples start making their way to their bikes, and lovers stand up to leave. Even in the dark, noisy square, most people seem to come here for peace, and many leave for home having found it.
Peace is

Enlisting in the

Despite the Supreme Court’s decision to block recruitment, many line up to join the Maoist army

CHONG ZI LIANG in SURKHET

I t took Angana Chaudhary and Ram Kumar Chaudhary four hours by bus to get to the Surkhet cantonment to apply to join the Maoist army, but they will return home disappointed. Together with 14 friends from the same village in Bardia, the two had been hoping to join the People’s Liberation Army. They had heard on FM that the Maoists were accepting applications, but news of the Supreme Court stay order failed to reach them. And such is the desperation for jobs, that many like Chaudhary rushed to the camps. "I only studied till the 5th grade so I can’t join the national army," explained Chaudhary, "and none of my friends have passed SLC.”

At the main cantonment in Surkhet, 6th Division Commander Pratik confirms that recruitment went on for about a week in early March and he received 1,800 applications. "We stopped recruitment out of respect for the Supreme Court’s decision," he says, "but even after that at least a thousand more turned up at the camps."

The Maoists announced recruitment to retaliate against the Nepal Army going through with the induction of 3,000 recruits, and it’s not like the people will be distrusted and won’t question their moves," he says. "In other words, they may not have understood that the candidates they were voting for would help write the constitution, but they expected them to improve schools and health posts.

That hope has all but evaporated. There is a mood of gloom and doom in this generally relaxed town. “The only thing I find comfort in is that when there was a king Nepalis were dying, now at least that has stopped,” says Gita Shrestha. But she says there are new problems: power cuts, inflation and water scarcity. Her family hasn’t watched tv together in months. “They say the Tarai is burning, that there are bandas by various ethnic groups, I haven’t even been able to finish my homework in the dark.”

Panauti residents says they are tired of hearing about yet more committees and task forces that politicians set up in Kathmandu. They are sick of the parties attacking each other, of empty promises of 10,000MW of electricity, the assurances on law and order when businesses, media and schools are all being extorted and attacked. They are willing to give the politicians a chance.

Now, the feeling is that the government just doesn’t seem capable of dealing with the political and development challenges. “The Maoists used the ethnic card to fight the war, now they have no clue how to deal with it, things are going to get bloody and messy,” predicts an elderly resident.

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Julum Pariyar, 52, makes a living sowing mattresses for her neighbours. “We had so much hope that the new party would do new things, but almost a year has passed—what have these Maoists done?” Pariyar has worked all her life to raise her two sons, but they couldn’t find jobs so they’ve gone to Malaysia.

Akrit Sapota, 18, is a student and is lounging in the sun with his friends. He voted Maoist this past election and is an active student member of the party in Panauti. But he says the government isn’t doing its job properly. “Jobs, education, health, roads, development, controlling inflation, those should be the top priorities,” he says.

Badri Sapkota in Sarada Batas VDC runs the little tea shop. “Those in government are deliberately trying to create a situation of chaos so that the people will be distracted and won’t question their moves,” he says. “Why do the CA members have to go to the villages to collect suggestions for a new constitution? They were elected by the people and it’s not like the people will be distrusted and won’t question their moves.”

Laxman Dahal, 73, worked as a contractor in India for 42 years and has retired in Panauti. He is disillusioned with the new rulers: “The Tarai is burning and the Maoist leadership in Kathmandu either doesn’t want to or has no idea how to deal with the situation there. Federalism may be a good thing but if it is not done properly, it will only separate the people along ethnic lines.”

MALLIKA ARYAL in KABHRE

A year after the elections and almost three years since the ceasefire in 2006, Panauti is still stuck in time. The bombed out hulk of the municipality building destroyed during a night of fighting in March 2006 still stands as a monument to the war. But the people of Panauti don’t want to talk about that war. They want to talk about their war against inflation, poverty, illiteracy.

A week after the CA elections when the results were tricking in and it was certain that the Maoists were going to lead the government, there was much jubilation here. The locals had hopes that the Maoists would be different. They had promised employment to the young, education, health and development. Most may not have understood that the candidates they were voting for would help write the constitution, but they expected them to improve schools and health posts.

You don’t have to go far from Kathmandu to gauge the disillusionment.

WHAT TO DO: Angana Chaudhary and Ram Kumar Chaudhary part of a group of 16 from a village in Bardiya, prepare to return home after being told at a cantonment in Surkhet that the Maoists are not recruiting.
ach month Nirmal Debkota earns Rs 10,000 from renting out apartments opposite his residence. That is more than double what the 55-year-old earns as a teacher.

“It’s the only way I can afford education for my children,” says the economics professor at Mahendra Multiple Campus. The property he inherited from his father is now worth ten times more than its value five years ago.

Indeed, the only peace dividend that Dang has got with the end of the war is the surge in property prices. There is no investment, hardly any presence of the state, and seven months after the Maoists came to power no tangible improvement in delivery of services.

Highways here were closed for two weeks during the Tharu protests last month and there are blockades every other day. Inequality is on the rise as speculators and businessmen monopolise benefits from the post-war economy.

With land at a premium, property that the Maoists seized are not just not being returned, new land is being seized in the name of the internally displaced or freed Kamayyas. Along the highway from Ghomali to Tulsipur, there is almost no portion that don’t have huts of ‘stukumbasi’ squatters.

There is no visible effort to develop housing and sanitation facilities for the new settlements. “We were issued red cards three years ago to sit in our boxes, nothing more than that,” says Khatini Chaudhari who lives in the squatter settlement. Alienation is also deepening among the indigenous Tharu community of Dang. “The war might have been over and there is no fighting, but we’re still not being treated as Nepali citizens,” says a local Chandrakala Chaudhari (pictured).

There are signs of a widening rich-poor divide. Villagers from the mid-western districts of Rolpa, Pitham and Rukum funnel down to Dang, fueling the real estate bubble in the towns.

The new settlements and buildings are haphazard and do not follow any zoning rules. Local officials all say what should be, but seem powerless to control what is happening.

“All construction activities should have official approval to make sure that land use is strictly classified and regulated,” says local development officer Madhu Sudan Poudyal.

Ethnic friction is mounting, and climaxed in the Tharu protests in which two were killed in Dang. “The war ended but there is no peace,” says population studies teacher Sudharshan Rijal, "the people are still waiting for peace and justice."

But for those who've lost loved ones during the conflict, it has been one endless struggle to survive. Six years ago Bahuni Chaudhari's husband was killed in a crossfire while harvesting rice in fields. The 35-year-old has brought up two young children on her own, toiling in the farm and doing odd jobs.

“I'm living only for my children and working hard to give them a better education and future,” says Bahuni. “I have no more fear because I have suffered so much.”

There are some signs of progress. The rural road network is expanding and the Ghomati-Lamahi-Koilabas road will join Dang directly to India. School enrollment is up and the dropout rate has fallen.

Says Ghomati English teacher Ram Hari Rijal: “People are starting to recognise the importance of education, the presence of girls in the classroom is also increasing.”
Don’t eat fish, let them eat you
Meet Nepal’s new dermatologists in a fish tank

When spa entrepreneur Megha Chaudhary returned from Singapore after a two week holiday, she came up with an elaborate business plan: to set up a fish spa in Kathmandu.

It required clients getting used to confronting their spa therapists in a tank, as live Garra Rufa fish get busy as skin exfoliators. As soon as Midas Spa was set up in Durbar Marg, the business took off.

“I’m constantly on the lookout for new technologies and innovations, and I thought the gently ticklish sensation of the treatment, together with its beautifying properties will catch on among young women,” says the 27-year-old.

“These fish are a member of the carp family which nibbles dead skin producing enzymes at the same time that leave skin smooth and healthy. Customers have the option of dipping either hands or feet into the tank for a 30-minute session.

Commonly found in the rivers of Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran, they have been used traditionally to treat psoriasis, a chronic skin disease. While it may seem novel here, such doctor fish spas have been taking Europe and Southeast Asia by storm.

Megha’s uncle physically carried 50 fish in bags to Nepal by plane. Keeping them alive has been a challenge, as they require water of 32 celsius maintained strictly at an acidity level of pH7.5.

The entire investment cost Megha Rs 25,000 and the next hurdle was to establish a niche market. While other services like ayurvedic massages, mani-pedis and facials are offered, she aims to make the doctor fish spa Midas’ signature product.

“I’m not sure if the dead skin will go, but the dip is very soothing and therapeutic,” says Ruchi Goel, a Midas regular.

Reeta Shrestha, a lecturer of dermatology at the Tribhuban University Teaching Hospital agrees that the unique selling point of the treatment lies in its “feel-good” factor rather than medical benefits. The hospital sees an average of 50-60 psoriasis patients during the dry seasons, and administers moisturizing and keratolitic treatments such as steroid creams. Recovery takes about one to two months.

Her spa may still be a start-up, but Megha is already making big plans to set up a branch in Delhi and a spa resort in Kakani.

Doctor Fish Spa is priced at Rs 1,500 for a 30-min dip and Rs 2,000 for a dip with reflexology.

Kong Yen Lin
Jim Edwards, 75
Put Chitwan on the world map

From artisan to artist

Thunder, hail and jazz

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3 - 9 APRIL 2009

ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS
- Silent Witnesses, stencil artwork by Aymeric Hamon, 3-24 April, 6 PM, The Bakery Café, Pulchowk.
- Caravan art show 2009 by Narayan Shrestha at Hotel Summit till 30 April, 9851000519
- Unexpressed Expressions by Sangee Shrestha, 20 April, 11AM-6PM, Siddhath Art gallery, 4218048

EVENTS
- Malaysian Educational fair, 3-5 April, Malla Hotel, 10AM-5PM
- The curious case of Benjamin Button, 6PM, 4 April, Lazimapit Gallery Café, 4428549
- Literature and Book discussion, 5 April, 3PM, Marti Chautari
- Call for entries for Film South, Asia till 31 May, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified, 5552141

MUSIC
- Rock Classics by return of Bob Marley along Desmond O’Flattery and Anthony Correll, 5-30- 8 PM, Lazimapit Gallery Cafe, 4428549
- Sunday Jazz brunch barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM, 4491234
- Jazz evening at Delicos 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 Chineh 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 Vankey every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- Fusion and Loozu 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, 5521-408

DIETING
- Dhaba, Indian food festival, till 11 April, Garden terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 7-11.45 PM, Rs 1300
- Australian Food Promotion, 3-12 April, from 6PM onwards. Hyatt Regency. 4486082
- Gourmet trout at Olive Garden, 6PM onwards at Rs 850+, Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, 4411918
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited. 4260370
- High tea with cheeses 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
- Nhuiche goes Thai at Nhuiche’s Thai Kitchen, Balkuwata, 4429003
- Fusion of Marcela Ragan’s new menu and Manny’s new bar at Dhoikama 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. 4373909
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels. 9AM-10PM, 4425341
- Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs at the Aazhi’s 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 Shamabala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412699

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
BEING JUDGEMENTAL: Judges from all over the country gathered for their two-day national convention at the National Academy on Tuesday.

GORKHALI WOMEN: Maoist women leaders speak about the new constitution at a district conference in Gorkha on Monday. Maoist brigadier commander Kamla Naharki, who broke out of jail eight years ago, addresses the gathering.

NICE TIE: Chief of Army Staff Rookmangad Katawal (centre) with Dharmendra Jha of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) and former NC minister Purna Bahadur Khadka at the 54th anniversary function of FNJ on Monday.

LAKE CITY: Tuesday night’s downpour inundated the Khula Manch, and submerged many streets in the city centre.

AIMING HIGH: Minister of Physical Planning Bijay Gachchedar at the inauguration of the Real Estate Expo at Bhrikuti Mandap on Thursday.
Knational knife

Only in Nepal will activists belonging to a party that controls the Ministry of Water Resources go out into the streets to protest the shortage of water and electricity. Those UML fellows brandishing buckets should have staged a sit-in at Balkhu instead, and set fire to a few tyres if their demands were not met.

The Ass hadn’t been able to figure out the reason for the latest fuel shortage, but by Jove I’ve got it now: existing fuel tankers are 30 years old and are time bombs on wheels. Their tanks can’t be sealed properly, leading to pilferage. The supplies ministry decides to upgrade the tankers so the owners go on strike. The government invokes the essential services act, but can’t open the supply lines. Surprising that people who block highways for weeks on end tolerate all this, and haven’t set fire to some petrol tankers yet.

Millions of people worldwide joined in solidarity to combat climate change by turning their power off for one hour in celebration of the second annual Earth Hour last Saturday. Floodlights were turned off at monuments from the Pyramids to the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and all this got headline treatment in the media. But the international press missed the biggest story of all: that we in Nepal are far ahead and have been celebrating Earth Day for the past eight months by not using electricity for 16 hours a day.

Unfortunately, we squandered all the environmental browniepoints we earned for saving the planet by burning tons of diesel and petrol by being stuck in monstrous traffic jams caused by the prime ministerial motorcade headed to the airport. Even bicyclists weren’t allowed to stray into the streets from Balkuwatar to Gauchar. The total greenhouse gases we emitted that day must have exceeded all savings we had made since January. The more things change in this country, the more they remain the same. How is this any different to when the entire city ground to a halt when Kingji went off on state visits?

Good thing it was a Saturday, otherwise Awesome’s departure would have given us a carbon footprint double the size of Saudi Arabia. Double because the roads are going to be blocked all over again when Comrade Terrificness returns over the weekend.

But something will be different when PKD comes back: he will ride home in the brand new black bomb-proof Toyota Prado GXL that Balkuwatar has ordered at the cost of 15 million bucks. Why don’t the rulers of New Nepal just take a helicopter to the airport and save us all the bother, and save the environment at the same time?

Which brings us to the question of why the Prime Minister of Nepal and his 19-member entourage broke the government’s own regulation by not flying the national airline to connect to his final destination. He could have flown Nepal Airlines to Dubai and had a less roundabout link to Oslo. The Ass’ back-of-envelope calculation shows that we spent $150,000 just on tickets and TADA.

Those who went to bid the entourage farewell were surprised to see First Son Prakash in the cabin even though his name was not on the original manifest. Looks like Mom and Pop don’t want to let the Dear Leader out of their sight, lest he raid the bar again and pass out on the sofa. Bad idea on the part of Sita Dahal to take mean-looking Bhojpuri khukuris to gift her pacifist Norwegian and Finnish hosts. Even if they were told it is our knational knife, it is unlikely they can use them as envelope slicers.

More and more it is looking like the Paras Files of Singapore’s The New Paper was not an elaborate April Fool hoax after all, and that the Singapore press is even more incredible than we thought it was. Up to the point where ex-CP expressed his desire to run for elections and save Nepal we could see the handiwork of the Singaporean public relations firm named Bang. But then they brought Angela Cheng in and printed a picture of her being cuddled by none other than our own Girijababu. And Angela is threatening to visit Nepal to convince Prachandababu to convince him to save the monarchy.

Even The New Paper’s editorial found this too outrageous and they pulled the story out of their website. Oh yes, and Angela also claims she was the person who convinced Gyanu to give up his throne in 2006 by getting Girijabahu to talk to the erstwhile majesty. Fat chance.

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