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**RUNNING OUT OF TIME:**  
Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal at the Khula Manch on Sunday before delivering a speech in which he lashed out at the political parties for slowing him down.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

## Hurry up

When the results of Friday's by-elections in six constituencies come out next week, they will offer an indication of the support base for the Maoists, who themselves admit that after eight months in power they haven't been able to show tangible progress.

The current session of parliament has been disrupted for two weeks in a row after the UML, partners with the Maoists in the coalition, demanded action over

the killing of its supporter in Butwal last month. Time is also running out on integrating the armies before UNMIN's mandate expires in June, and in writing the new constitution by April next year.

The run-up to the by-elections have been marred by violence with even a gun battle breaking out between supporters of the Maoists and a break-away faction led by Matrika Yadav in Biratnagar on Thursday.


Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal appears to be increasingly frustrated with the delays and has been trying to use his deft negotiating skills to try to convince the leaders of the UML and NC to smooth things along. Analysts say that a lot is riding on the outcome of the by-elections, and the results will determine whether or not the coalition remains intact, and if the NC will join the government.

The prime minister has been barely able to hide his frustration. A day after returning from a week-long visit to Norway and Finland during which he assured leaders there that he was serious about protecting

democracy and the free press, he lashed out publicly using abusive language at his colleagues in the NC and UML. The next day, he turned his aim at the media, accusing publishers of being "smugglers" and under the control of "feudalists, capitalists and

**EDITORIAL p2**  
**Voice of the violent**

reactionary forces". The Nepal Media Society, Television Broadcasters Nepal, Community Radio Broadcasters Association, Broadcasting Association of Nepal and Kathmandu Valley Broadcasting Association deplored the prime minister's remarks, calling them "uncalled for and irresponsible". ●



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 446

**Q. How would you describe the prime minister's visit to Europe?**

Total votes: 4,245

Waste of money 73

Much-needed break

Major achievement

Weekly Internet Poll # 447. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

**Q. Should the army have pulled out of the National Games?**

**LAVAZZA**

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## VOICE OF THE VIOLENT

Maoist ideologue Baburam Bhattarai supposedly heads the cleanest and most efficient ministry. Which is why his recent tantrums are so unbecoming.

But for the dubious distinction of worst managed ministries, competition is keen between Home, Water Resources and Local Development—all headed by the UML. That says more about the politics of Messrs Madhav, Jhalnath and Oli than all their grandstanding since the recent killing of a Youth Force member in Butwal. Despite their threats of quitting the government, the truth is that the UML needs the Maoists more than the Maoists need the UML.

The results of the by-elections in Morang, Dhanusa, Kaski, Rolpa and Kanchanpur this weekend will probably lead to a reassessment of the UML-Maoist coalition. The arrangement has certainly helped UML recruit, train and expand its militant Youth Force under the benign neglect of the home ministry that it controls. But by copying the Maoist YCL, the UML has fallen into the same trap of unleashing a criminalised militant force that is going out of control.

In all the confusion of name-calling in Nepal's day-to-day politics, it helps to divide political forces into two types: those that believe in legitimate non-violent politics and those that use violence and intimidation as a political tool. By not renouncing violence and behaving like bullies even though they were elected to power, the Maoists have undermined themselves. By unleashing the YF, the UML has lost the moral authority to lecture about non-violence.

It would be naïve to assume that prolonged power cuts, the complete collapse of local governance and a worsening law and order situation will only harm the prime minister and his party. The UML will also be tainted by eight months of governmental paralysis.

The UML wants it both ways: benefit from being a ruling party and criticise the government as if it is the opposition. But there is no free lunch in the universe, and this is an illusory advantage. The UML needs to decide whether it wants to be an appendage of the Maoists or chart its own course as a party that stands for non-violence and democracy.

The rest is easy: if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.



KIRAN PANDAY

# Banking on real estate

## When the real estate bubble bursts, it shouldn't take banks down with it

**B**anks in Nepal seem to be thriving. According to Nepal Rastra Bank, Nepali commercial banks hold close to Rs 470 billion in deposits, but for banks to be profitable they have to put this deposit to work.

Given the poor business climate and soaring property



**GUEST COLUMN**  
**Raju Sitaula**

prices, it is a fair guess—this cash is feeding the real estate bubble. Such a bubble driven by excess credit fueled liquidity is exactly what brought many US banks to their knees, and there is a good lesson there for us.

As property prices went up, banks in the US found increasing their real estate loan portfolio an easy way to boost earnings. They not only kept loans in their own balance sheet, but packaged them into securities which were sold to investors worldwide, further increasing the demand for mortgage loans. Borrowers were

approved for loans they were not capable of paying and many jumped on the bandwagon assuming that real estate prices could only go up.

What initially started as a problem in the subprime loans or loans made to risky borrowers, has spread to prime loans as decreasing real estate prices and increasing unemployment rate are putting even credit worthy borrowers at risk. As a result, banks are now stuck with hundreds of billions of dollars in real estate loans, some of which are practically worthless, and are thus forced to book billions of dollars in losses. The massive loans are threatening the solvency of some US banks. The FDIC has seized more than 21 failing banks so far in 2009 alone.

We are inside a real estate bubble in Nepal, and this bubble could burst. Among other things, the excess cash available to drive prices higher may not be there in the future. The global economic slowdown is already impacting on the remittance flow into Nepal which will reduce the liquidity in the banking sector and the money chasing real estate assets.

When the bubble bursts, not only will many Nepalis feel much poorer from reduced property prices, but their deposits in banks could also be at risk if banks that are overexposed to real estate lending face defaults, threatening their ability to meet obligations to depositors. The margin of error for Nepali financial institutions,

and the public, is very small. Unlike most other countries, there is no established deposit insurance program in Nepal and it is questionable that Nepal Rastra Bank has the ability to manage a run on the banks.

Outstanding loans of commercial banks to the real estate sector grew at a staggering rate to Rs 17.9 billion in February from Rs 6.6 billion just a year earlier. The questions to ask the banks are: what percentage of outstanding loans is real estate related, including both direct and indirect loans where real estate asset is kept as collateral? How will the real estate price reduction affect the performance and recovery of these loans? Have the banks done a sensitivity test for the worst case scenario and are they adequately capitalised if that scenario materialises?

The government and Nepal Rastra Bank should also look into the feasibility of instituting a deposit insurance program up to a certain threshold. Such a program can be funded from the premium paid by the deposit-taking institutions and the premium should be based on the risk assessment of each participating institution.

It is not too late for Nepal, but it is time to ask tough questions to the banks and the regulator and focus on risk management so that when this real estate bubble ultimately bursts, it doesn't take the banking sector down with it. ●

*Raju Sitaula is a banking professional based in New York.*

## LETTERS

### 30 YEARS

CK Lal says that the NSU has 'lost the will to compete' in student elections (State of the State, 'Thirty years of struggle', #445). The NSU is willing to compete in an ideological battle but not with violence. The Nepal Student Union is a democratic institution of energetic youth who time and again have shown their readiness to sacrifice themselves for the cause of democracy. The NSU has won a significant victory in the recently held FSU elections, and this is a blow against totalitarianism and fascism. Despite the terror and violence led by YCL and YF, the NSU is committed to non-violent struggle and democracy. These are values that young Nepali students that NSU represents aspire to.

**Sandesh Adhikari, Joint Secretary  
Nepal Students' Union**

### PARAS

While I found Eric Ellis' piece in your online edition ([www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)) very analytical the quick jab at the downfall of Nepal monarchy was unwarranted. True, former prince Paras was the focus of hate factor for many but Ellis' assertion that this led to the dysfunction in governance during absolute monarchy borders on hyperbole. It was former king

Gyanendra and his senile cronies who were running the show. What about the revelation that the People's Movement Part II was funded externally? Paras is definitely not a nice man and he doesn't deserve to be a royal, but Ellis shouldn't be inciting the public with innuendo.

**Rishav Shrestha, Kathmandu University  
Teaching Hospital**

### TASHI

Congratulations to *Nepali Times* and to Tashi Tsering Sherpa on a brilliant article ('I did some calculations and took a calculated risk', #445). About time something positive came out of Nepal. Please, give my 'Tujeche' and a hand shake to Tashi Sherpa. One can tell he strives for perfection in all aspects. Nepal could benefit a lot from visionary people like him, especially at a time when Nepalis are giving up and moving away, here is a man who could have easily stayed away but decided to come home and generate employment. Any time someone does something for the benefit of others, it scores him some good Karma points, whether it was his original intention or not.

**Luba Svrčina, Canada**

### OBJECTIVE

Who is the brilliant mind masterminding the article 'Objective situation' (Guest Column, #445)? Which century does Mr Sigdel live

in? The international importance to communism may have been there 50 years ago, but it is totally obsolete now. Mr Objective is completely subjective and out of touch to boot. The writer conveniently omits the fact that in the name of communism 60-80 million people died worldwide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The number still has a plus-minus margin of 20 million because we don't have accurate reports from China's Maoist Cultural Revolution. Sigdel also overlooks the fact that most formerly-communist countries fell apart and ditched the system as non-functioning some time ago. And 'democratic revolution'? Those two words can't even exist side by side in the same sentence.

**Subarna Karki, Shanghai**

### ETHNIC WOMEN

Reading the translation 'Non-indigenous' and the list of the Maoist heads of various indigenous groups right down from indigenous-in-chief Deb Gurung, I noticed that the fifth item from the bottom is 'Women'. Since when did women become an ethnic group? Is it because we come from Venus? In that case they should list men as coming from Mars and Dr Spock as a Vulcan.

**Tara G, email**

### BASANTAPUR

I appreciate Roma Aryal's attempt to

romanticise Kathmandu's central square ('Basantapur by night', #445) but there can be no doubt that this once pristine place has turned into a hideous neighbourhood. Activities by drug peddlers, unruly youngsters, hawkers, and a largely ineffective state security apparatus have rendered the Hanuman Dhoka Darbar Square and its vicinity a citizen's nightmare. Heritage conservation has received a setback due to heavy traffic and a flea market. I wonder what Nepal Tourism Board does with the fees it collects since there is no visible attempt to provide a facelift to the area in terms of either sound infrastructure (good roads, toilet facilities) or check congestion. The government's callousness for heritage conservation is there for all to see.

**Ram Chaudhary, Basantapur**

**CORRECTION:** Due to an editing error, the village of Palchok where the constitution interaction took place ('We are all Nepalis first', #445) was given as being located in Kabhre. The village is actually in Sindupalchok.



# Leadership deficit

PKD should behave like the prime minister of the country, not just a party supremo



KIRAN PANDAY

Circumstances sometimes propel weak personalities to the top. Nagendra Prasad Rijal became prime minister of the country twice during Panchayat regime, but few outside the Marwari community of Biratnagar remember him. Other than his role as a reluctant



STATE OF THE STATE  
C K Lal

midwife of multiparty democracy in 1990, it's difficult to pinpoint contributions of Lokendra Bahadur Chand even though he served four stints at Singha Darbar.

Rijal and Chand were products of Panchayat, but Sher Bahadur Deuba became prime minister of the country after democracy. During his first term, he had to resort to pork barrel politics to save his government from collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions.

When Deuba went into Baluwatar as the leader of a majority government in 2001, within a few months of the Narayanhiti massacre, vastu experts, feng sui consultants, siddha sanyasis, itinerant yogis, indigenous dhamis and renowned tantriks were engaged

to placate the stars.

Apparently, the heavenly bodies weren't amused. Deuba became the first premier in modern history to be sacked not once but twice by the king. He served his third term as a loyal henchman of the royal CEO and was put under house arrest even before being served with a dismissal order.

But despite his spectacular failures, Deuba isn't considered the weakest prime minister of the country. The choice for the dubious distinction has to be made between Padma Shamsher (1945-1948) and Ranganath Poudel (1837-1838).

Padma's predicaments were real. The Ranas lost their patrons as the British went home from India, leaving native potentates to their own devices. To his credit, Padma did try to modernise statecraft, but had no courage to implement the constitution he promulgated in the face of opposition from his restive cousins. He chose honourable exit and went into self-exile.

Ranganath Poudel was fortunate. He was the guru of Rajendra Bikram Shah and didn't expect to be a mukhtiyar—the job usually went to Chhetri nobles from Gorkha or to Kathmandu's military aristocrats. But in the

conspiracy-ridden politics of 1830s, he was the only person acceptable to everyone in the all-powerful coterie of the Darbar. He put the condition that he would accept mukhtiyari only if Bhimsen Thapa was released. Rajendra complied but harboured the suspicion that Ranganath Guru was probably more loyal to the British Resident Brian Hodgson than to the king.

The shifty monarch once said Rangnath was a man of first-rate talent but second-rate honesty. So the first Bahun premier of the country couldn't do much and had to bow out in disgrace. Rangnath was probably a victim and not a failure, but he is considered to be the weakest prime minister in Nepal's history. It seems now he has some competition.

Just as all competing groups of the palace had accepted Rangnath's nomination 170 years ago, Pushpa Kamal Dahal became prime minister with the support of 25 political parties in the constituent assembly. The NC could have accepted a supportive role in the government had Dahal offered it in a proper manner, but the NC was so demoralised it opted out. Buoyed by the prospect of leftwing unity, the Maoist Supremo forgot that UML would not carry him on its shoulders for nothing. As cost-benefit analysts, the schemers of Balkhu palace are some of the best in the business.

It's understandable that the Maoists want a presidential system of government. Its party chief can then reign, rule, and roll unchallenged all over the domain. But consensus is the hallmark of a parliamentary system. When the prime minister is merely first among equals, he has to be a leader that commands the respect of all his colleagues and competitors alike.

An ideal leader is the one who rules with the consent of the ruled, guides by being at the head of the group, and inspires all others by setting an example. Dahal needs to ask himself: "Am I just a party supremo, or am I the prime minister of this country?"

The soul of Ranganath Guru can now rest in peace. In the lineup of weak prime ministers, the most recent entrant is also perhaps the least efficient, his legendary craftiness notwithstanding. ●

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# Closed minds

The CA's 'Committee to Protect and Preserve the National Interest' has suggested that a passport regime be introduced at the Nepal-India border. Committee Chair Amik Sherchan has said this is necessary to "protect waning Nepali nationalism and to treat both China and India equally". Sherchan claimed that the "majority of the Nepali people share this view".

The demand for passport control on the India border comes from three quarters of the Kathmandu (yes, it is confined to the capital) political spectrum. The first is the nationalists who borrow the Westphalian notion of absolutely sovereign nation states. They argue that one reason the Nepali state has never been totally independent is because it has not controlled the movement of people across its boundaries.

The second is the school of economic protectionists, especially on the left, who believe that Nepal has a 'semi-colonial'

 **PLAIN SPEAKING**  
Prashant Jha

relationship with India because the open border makes the country a cheap source of labour and raw materials and a recipient of finished goods.

The third includes hill chauvinists who oppose the open border. They see the Madhes movement as solely a result of the open border and India's covert attempt to destabilise Nepal. Proponents argue that closing the border will defuse the Madhes unrest and solve the most important challenge to the Nepali state.

Sherchan, a pahadi Maoist, represents the synthesis of all these three views. The nationalists forget that an absolutely sovereign state is a myth. There is also an element of hypocrisy because it is the same people who have at different points used the open border against the Nepali state (like the Maoists did) or do not care about it because they usually fly across to India (the capital elite).

## Introducing passports at the India-Nepal border will hurt us Nepalis more

The left economists forget that the open border, along with disadvantages, also empowers Nepali labour by allowing them to move out in search of opportunities when there is little to offer at home. It helps national capital by giving it an opportunity to piggy-back on India's market economy.

And those who blame the border for the Madhes mess refuse to look within at the internal discrimination that gave rise to it in the first place.

Kathmandu politicians are also mistaken in thinking that the Indian establishment prefers an open border and that India takes advantage from it. Even if it benefits a few petty border traders, Nepal and the open border is the least of priorities for big Indian business like the Tatas and Ambanis who exercise real influence on policy making. For the Delhi security establishment, the open border is a liability given their concerns about fake currency, narcotics, ISI influence and now the possibility of the Chinese getting right into the Tarai. Unlike what our netas think, they will find a fairly receptive audience to such a proposal in Delhi's power corridors.

But while regulating the border and improving administration on both sides is necessary, any attempt to introduce passports or close the border will be deeply unfortunate and politically counter-productive for us Nepalis.

The poorest segments of the population who cross the border to earn their livelihoods will suffer the most. It will deprive the Nepali macroeconomy of a safety valve and prevent our entrepreneurs from making the best of growing opportunities on the other side.

Most importantly, it will devastate the lives of the economically inter-dependent local borderland population on both sides. It will invite a ferocious Madhesi backlash which will see the move as an attempt to kill off their links with their families on the other side. It may even encourage a stronger secessionist movement.

But most of all, it will not work. If fencing on the Indian-Bangladesh border or millions of troops on the India-Pakistan border cannot prevent mobility, there is no way that the governments can control movement across the fields and rivers on the 1,751km India-Nepal border.

Nepali nationalism is not under threat from open borders. It is under threat because politicians are not getting on with their job of writing a constitution. The same insecure bunch is now coming up with wild schemes to block the natural flow across borders. If they do go ahead, they must be prepared for some nasty consequences.

As a pioneer of borders studies, Willem Van Schendel puts it, "No matter how clearly borders are drawn on national maps, how many custom officials are appointed, or how many watchtowers are built, people will ignore borders when it suits them." ●



KIRAN PANDAY

# Giant export

## A Nepali sculptor has been commissioned to build a 113ft statue in Bhutan

PAAVAN MATHEMA

Born into a family of traditional metal artists in Kathmandu, Raj Kumar Shakya says he can't remember a time when he wasn't working with metal, hammering it to create figures of deities.

At an age when other children would be playing, Raj Kumar would be etching designs on copper plates and then hammering them into bass reliefs. "My home was my school," he recalls. Today, Raj Kumar is a specialist in embossing metal sheets, using a method known as repoussé. Unlike the more popular method of lost-wax casting, the repoussé technique involves beating the metal to give it the desired shape.

"Even as a child I was fascinated with large repoussé statues and dreamt of creating larger-than-life designs," says Raj Kumar.

Raj Kumar's work has come to the notice of monasteries in Japan, Korea and most recently

in Bhutan. He has been invited to Bhutan to build a 113ft tall statue of Guru Rimpoche, or Padmasambhav. Next month, Raj Kumar will lead a team of 14 of his craftsmen to Bhutan to construct the statue atop Takela Hill, situated in Lhuentse of eastern Bhutan.

The concrete base for the statue and the steel frame are now almost complete. Although the ground-work of sketching and designing the statue was completed three years ago, the work could not start because the Bhutanis were waiting for an auspicious time.

"The statue will be one of the largest in South Asia, possibly the biggest made from the repoussé technique," says Raj Kumar. The metal alone will weigh 80 tonnes with the gold-plated face and hands, and the entire structure will take three years to complete.

Ram Kumar runs his family workshop, On Metal, in Kathmandu with a team of 30 skilled artists. Using traditional methods they produce copper figures, masks, stupas, mandalas,

preserving the ancient artistic techniques of the Newar people. Ram Kumar's works have decorated various monasteries in Nepal and Tibet and have also reached Japan, Australia, Germany and the US.

"This work needs a lot of patience and concentration," explains Ram Kumar, "it is important to give attention to the smallest details and get the correct expression on the face."

Although the demand for Nepali artwork has increased, Ram Kumar, who is also a teacher of metal art, is a bit worried that the next generation is not as interested in learning this valuable skill and in preserving the heritage. "However, the positive aspect is that this occupation is not caste bound anymore. Traditionally only Shakya families were involved in it," he adds.

When asked about his future plans, Shakya replies: "I want to construct a gigantic statue of Buddha in Nepal, possibly atop one of the hills that surround Kathmandu. After all, what people remember you for eventually is what you leave behind." ●



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Samsung is marking Nepali New Year with a prize draw that gives those who buy a Samsung TV or fridge the chance of winning an apartment at Suncity Apartment, Manohara or a microwave oven. The lucky draw is aired daily on the *Music of Your Choice* show on Image Channel.

### Socially responsible

NMB Bank has launched a social responsibility campaign which includes helping renovate and maintain temples. The bank recently put marble flooring in the Hanuman Mandir and has introduced a scheme to clean it frequently. The bank is also providing schools, such as one at Balkumari, with computers.



INDIAN MODEL: Just four months after their launch in India, car dealer Agni Incorporated is to distribute Indian –made Mahindra XYLO cars in Nepal. Two models are available – a luxury seven seater priced at Rs 3.39 million and an eight seater which costs Rs 2.85 million.

# Banda business

## Everybody loves a good hartal

Last Monday morning everyone I spoke with asked the same two questions. One: was it a banda that day or not. And two: who was calling it.

It seems no one really knew, but everyone loves a good nationwide strike and one more



**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
**Artha Beed**

day off. Students are happy to have no class and to have exams postponed. It's a good excuse to go to the office an hour late and leave an hour early, citing the need to walk there and back. And for those who love big bonfires, it is another great chance to burn a vehicle.

In Dharan and other parts of eastern Nepal, the general discussion is about who will organise the next banda. The standard operating procedure is simple: choose a date, outsource activists, do something that will attract media attention and then wait for your turn to organise the next one.

Observers point out that the people who stage the demos, participate in the masal julus,

torch vehicles, deflate or burn tyres are all one and the same. On a course titled Nepali Management 101, perhaps this would be a good example of outsourcing.

Why should we complain if all political parties outsource the services of the same people to broker their business deals? Isn't it good to have the same set of people honing their expertise and offering their services to a variety of clients? Perhaps Nepal could become the world's greatest source of outsourced protestor talent.

Nepalis have accepted bandas as a way of life when they should be rallying against them. The business of bandas is getting out of hand. Soon entrepreneurs running tanker business will be calling a banda to change laws so they can vandalize vehicles belonging to their competitors and parents will block traffic to protest against their children not being allowed to cheat in examinations or because they want job guarantees for graduates with poor degrees. (Wait, that's already happening.) Why should

business organizations feel it acceptable to threaten shut down rather than debate a policy issue with the government?

This Beed always refers to Kathmandu as a sister city of Kolkata because if someone visits either city and returns without encountering a political showdown in the streets he or she will feel something is missing.

Surely this is not the kind of experience we are packaging for Visit Nepal Year 2011. Something serious needs to be done.

Perhaps, a citizen's campaign, in which we resist and not co-operate with the banda organizers, can only bring this to an end. Any donor willing to sponsor such a program or should we get some parachute consultants in first to assess and write a report? ●

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# Replicating Dhulikhel

Debendra Bhattarai in Kantipur, 5 April

कान्तिपुर

Last week, the news that the prime minister's son Prakash Dahal got drunk and passed out at Dhulikhel Resort made the headlines, overshadowing what PM Puspha Kamal Dahal and Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai were really doing there. They were visiting Dhulikhel to find out about how that town has become a model for education and health. For three hours, the leaders discussed the exemplary Kathmandu University and Dhulikhel Hospital with the people who run them.

Kathmandu University's Vice-chancellor Suresh Raj Sharma was there, and says: "We offered suggestions about education and health. One shouldn't separate private and public. Kathmandu University and Dhulikhel Hospital may be private but they are non-profit public service oriented. The government shouldn't dismiss private organisations just because they are private. We should work together to move ahead."

Dhulikhel hospital's Ram Makaju and Rajendra Koju noted that the leaders hadn't, until then, grasped the concept of community-based

activities. Koju said: "The hospital is neither private nor government run. We are community-run and we work for them." He pointed out how a 13-year-old hospital and a 17-year-old university in Dhulikhel have contributed to nation-building.

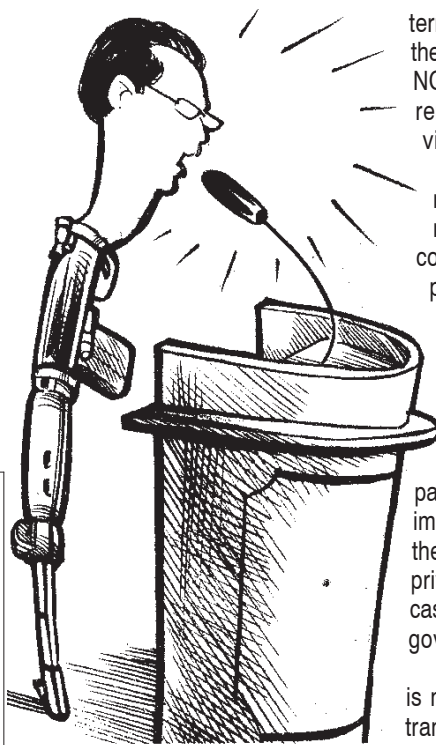
When the PM questioned which activities the government should give priority to, Sharma advised improving agriculture and setting up polytechnics. "We can't just generate employment," Sharma recalls telling the prime minister, "it needs to be effective and tailored to the needs of the market."

The leaders also heard how Dhulikhel hospital has been treating patients at a minimal cost while students at Kathmandu University also pay a lot less than they would at other colleges.

Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai then asked how Dhulikhel's exemplary community-based education and health system could be replicated. Koju replied that government-run hospitals don't function well and private ones are expensive. "So, we have to implement the concept of community-managed health and education."

Sharma said it made him happy and optimistic to see the leaders in Dhulikhel.

# Demagouery and the psychology of fear



Khem Bhandary in Kantipur, 6 April

कान्तिपुर

term peace the people will give them the vote, while the UML and NC will submit to the Maoists remaining in power to prevent violence and anarchy.

The oft-repeated threats of revolt are but one way of reminding the public continuously of its yearning for peace, and to force the other political parties to buckle. The people are made to believe that the right to revolt and to destroy the peace is a birthright of the Maoists, while it is the job of the other parties to work for peace. The impression being created is that the Maoists have the right and privilege to create anarchy, in case they are made to leave government.

The existing state of impunity is not the residue of the transitional phase we are in, nor is it the result of governmental ineffectiveness. It is a deliberate weapon being used by the Maoists to spread fear.

Attacks on the press, businesses, schools, interference with the civil service, the military, demonstrations against the judiciary, the behaviour towards NGOs, and the vicious response to anyone who criticises are all proofs of the planned Maoist exercise to extend command over all the facets of society.

This sort of fear-mongering on the part of a party which has already accepted the system of periodic elections is nothing but a corrupt output of wartime hubris. Regardless of what they may know of conflict and social progress, the Maoists say they abandoned the 'people's war' and embraced multiparty democracy because of geopolitics. They are myopic: they underestimate the people's rejection of violence as the real reason.

The Maoists also seem too quick to ridicule the support among the people for the UML and NC. They have not even been able to understand why they got the votes they did in the elections. The people wanted not only a republic and a new constitution, they also voted for peace. The Maoists are showing extreme reluctance to accept this reading.

Even though they have had control of state power for a full year, there is no evidence of concern among the Maoist leadership as to how their attitude is being perceived. There is disenchantment, sloganeering and attacks against the Maoists are on the rise.

With this loss of trust, participation in Maoist rallies and marches is thinning. With its reluctance to read the meaning of the recent student elections, the Maoist party seems unwilling to confront the need to reform its ways. If it remains stubborn in its worldview and indisciplined in its activities, it is certain they will not experience much tranquility in the days ahead.

Following the murder of Youth Force activist Prachanda Thaiba in Butwal, the UML threatened to quit the coalition. The thundering response of Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai was: "If there is an attempt to topple the government, the Maoists will once again resort to a revolt." Even though he has made such threats before, the meaning and intent of the latest pronouncement point to grave danger.

It would be wrong to term this threat of 'revolt' from a top leader of the party in government as based on momentary emotion. Bhattarai is in fact giving us the indication of an extremely well thought-out plan, and there is an intent to blackmail the other political parties as well as the people. It reflects the presence of a totalitarian mindset within the Maoist party.

The Maoists are today using only slightly modified version of the psychological methods of influence and control that they perfected during their armed insurgency. The goal is to progressively extend full control over the state and the society.

While the widely-held impression is that Bhattarai is the moderate and the democrat among the Maoists, when he does open his mouth there is the clear odour of extremism. He was the first Maoist leader to threaten revolt if there was an attempt to topple the government, and he is the only one who continuously repeats that warning.

The Maoists seem to be utilising one of the psychological tools of military science, of directing one's fire at where the opponent is most vulnerable. The public seeks peace before all else, the NC and UML seek to proceed through sustainable, peaceful politics, and so the Maoists use 'peace' as a bargaining chip. In return for long-



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# Who's afraid of ethnicity?

## Federalism is about ethnic autonomy and ending years of discrimination by the central administration

Instead of debating about ethnicity on the basis of demography, majority and minority, it is important that we understand whether the state has created an environment for groups to participate, be represented and provided equal opportunities.

There's an ongoing debate over whether the country should follow a unitary-centralised, decentralised structure, or whether the power should be distributed



**COMMENT**  
**Balkrishna Mabuhang**

among federal provinces. However, if we continue to believe that power comes from the central state, it makes no difference whether or not Nepal becomes a federal republic. The group that believes that power comes from the barrel of a gun is also eyeing to capture state power. They don't understand that they are just caretakers of state power and that the real power lies with the people. And there are those from the old regime who still see social diversity and its management as an obstacle.

Instead of trying to change the identity groups are born with, it is useful to recognise them and develop them as a part of the state structure. It is indeed scientific to classify the provinces on the basis of language, ethnicity, or region.

Federalism is when sovereignty and power are divided between central and federal units. In a federal state there is autonomy at the regional level while cooperation must exist at the federal level. Federalism supports decentralisation and celebrates and protects the diversity of the country.

According to the 2001 census of the 100 Janajatis in Nepal (which make up 37 per cent of the total population) there are 18 ethnicities that each make up more than one per cent of the total population. 81 per cent of the Janajatis are comprised of the 18 groups while the remaining 19 per cent

consists of 82 different castes and ethnicities. 11 ethnicities have majorities in more than 30 VDCs.

In the west and far west there is a dominance of Chettris, Magars are in the mid-west and west, southern Tarai and northern hills. Similarly, Gurungs are dominant in the northern hills and high mountainous regions. Kathmandu is dominated by Newars and Tamangs are in northern hills, southern Tarai, Chure region, Budi Gandaki in the west and Dudh Kosi in the east. The region between Dudh Kosi and Arun River is called the Khambu region and north of that region is dominated by the Limbus.

Tharus dominate Kanchanpur to Nawalparasi. Those who speak Maithili are spread between Saptari to Sarlahi. Maithili language is considered the mother tongue of more than three dozen ethnicities but there's still dispute regarding the name.

Those who speak Bhojpuri are found in Bara, Parsa and Rautahat. Awadi language populations dominate Kapilabastu and southern Banke. Rajbansis, Taajpuria, Majhi and Gangai are in the northern Tarai, but there's a dispute there also on what the common language should be. Sunsari, Morang and Jhapa may be claimed by Tharuhat, Limbuwan, Kochila, Morangiya and Birat but historically they are in the Limbuwan area. It is clear that language and ethnicity are the simplest basis for classification of regions. Autonomy can be arranged for the 82 remaining ethnicities via the federal unit or at the local level. Integration of other ethnicities around the country can be arranged via reservations or non-provincial organisations.

Making a federal unit according to ethnicity doesn't mean that the other ethnicities are forcefully driven away. For instance, Tharus are the original inhabitants of the Tarai, but many other ethnicities also live there. MJF has also been positive towards the Tharuhat's proposal.

If any particular ethnic groups are the original inhabitants of the

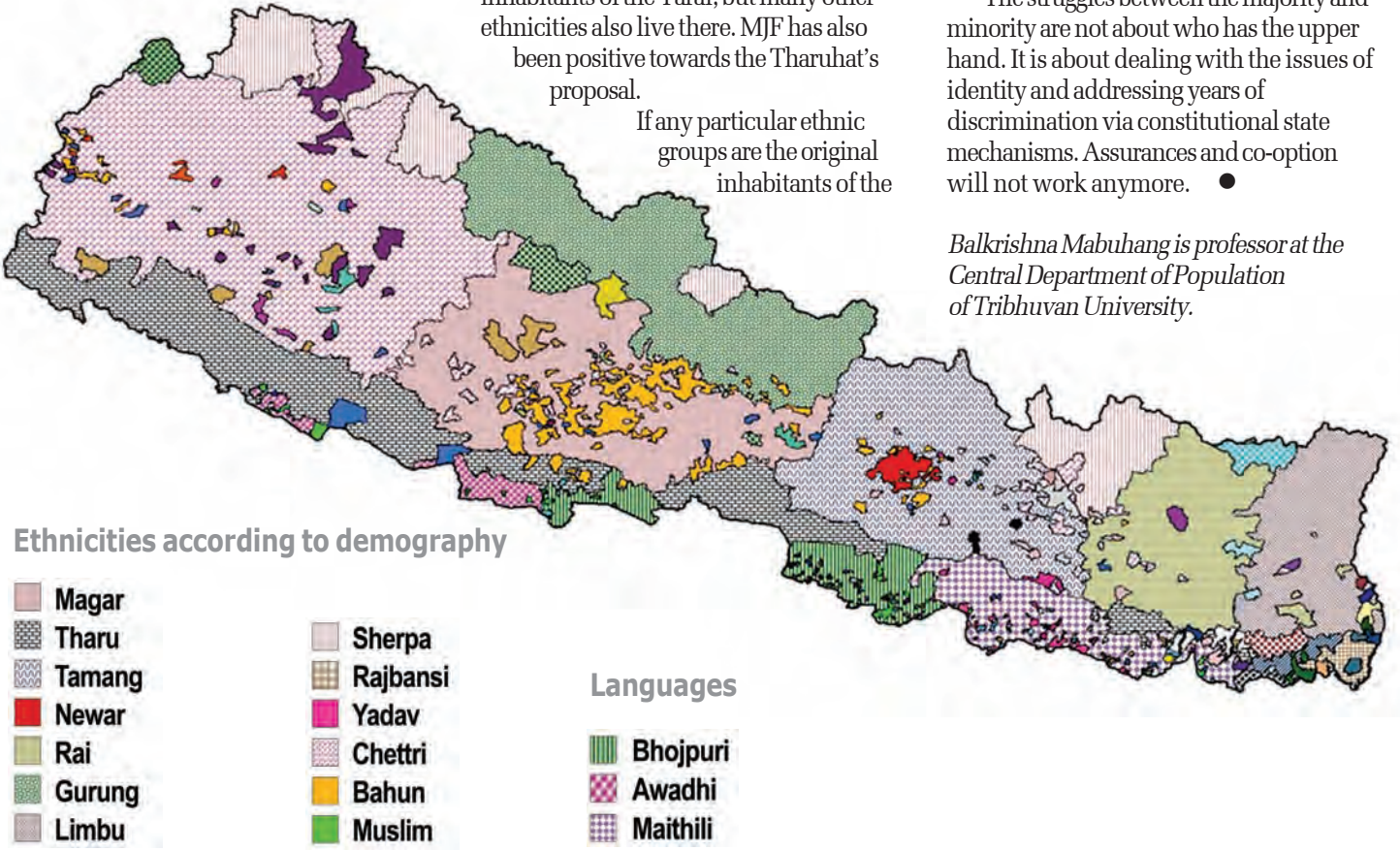
region and have a majority, it is in the spirit of democracy to name the province according to their name. Similarly, if there are certain ethnicities that are on the verge of extinction, it is acceptable to name that province after them.

The demands of Tharuhat, Limbuwan, Tamuwana have been denied by other ethnicities in the areas that respect the Panchayat regime. It is not because the Limbus didn't struggle enough for their rights that their names were not included but because of the Hindu royalist regime that didn't consider the grievances of the Limbuwans to begin with.

The Limbuwan province will not tolerate discrimination. However, the Limbuwans should welcome other discriminated ethnicities under their umbrella and provide them with social, economic, political and educational reservations.

The struggles between the majority and minority are not about who has the upper hand. It is about dealing with the issues of identity and addressing years of discrimination via constitutional state mechanisms. Assurances and co-option will not work anymore. ●

*Balkrishna Mabuhang is professor at the Central Department of Population of Tribhuvan University.*



# Federalisation is not a panacea

## But it's historically inaccurate to argue that it causes separatism

**NANCY BOROME**

Since 1945, ethnic violence has played a major role in half of all wars, turned more than 12 million people into refugees, and caused at least 11 million deaths. Precisely because today's wars are so often between peoples rather than states, civilian casualties have risen dramatically. Fewer than half of the casualties in World War II were non-combatants, while today some three-quarters of all war casualties are civilian.

Is adopting federalism the best way to cope with territorially based diversity? A surprising and expanding range of politics seem to be leaning in a federal direction.

As an increasing number of

poorer countries debate the merits of federalism, other countries that have long been federal have expanded the number of subunits within their boundaries. India has created nine new states since the 1970s, three of which came into being as recently as November 2000. The case against federalism has been made most eloquently by those studying post-communist regimes.

Federal systems provide more layers of government and thus more settings for peaceful bargaining. They also give at least some regional elites a greater stake in existing political institutions.

With these incentives we would expect fewer armed rebellions in federal states. In

fact, the mean armed-rebellion score for federal states is less than half that for unitary states. When federal and unitary dictatorships are compared, federal systems look even better: The incidence of minority rebellion is more than four times greater in unitary dictatorships than in federal dictatorships.

Although elites at the centre often fear that granting even partial autonomy will encourage violence and secession, such fears are rarely justified. Historically, when central leaders grant increased autonomy to disaffected regions, they are usually rewarded with peace rather than instability. When Tamil nationalists in India mobilised in the early 1950s, many political actors in New Delhi feared separatism and

argued for repression. When Jawaharlal Nehru gave the Tamils a separate state instead, the drive for separatism died down.

In the Punjab, a Sikh separatist rebellion dragged on for years as Indira Gandhi refused concessions and tried to triumph through armed force. When a new central government allowed a series of elections, the major Sikh political party came to power, and Sikh separatism was forced "off-stage."

Hard-liners should remember that separatist movements are more often the stepchildren of threats than of concessions. The forced imposition of a single state language boosted separatist movements in Sri Lanka. Often, it is the refusal to federalise,

rather than federalism itself that stimulates secession. In Pakistan, it was federal borders rather than federal institutions that were imposed.

Federalisation is not a panacea and federalism is no guarantee of peace or of anything else. There are undoubtedly situations in which such options should be spurned. Yet it is important not to reject federalism for spurious reasons, and it is historically inaccurate to argue that it brings on separatism. ●

*Nancy Bermeo is the professor of politics at Princeton University. This article is excerpted from The Import Of Institutions, which appeared in the Journal of Democracy (Volume 13, Number 2, April 2002).*



**S**unita Bujhel wakes up before dawn every other day to join the queue up at the public tap in Satdobato. After waiting all day she (*pictured*) returns home at around 3.30 PM carrying two jerrycans of water to last her family for the next two days.

"It's difficult," sighs Sunita, "even



ROMA ARYAL

Buying water is expensive. One 5,000 litre tanker costs up to Rs 2,000. Families load up on small plastic jars, costing Rs 300 initially, and Rs 60 per refill. An average four-member family usually consumes up to 15 jars a month. The owner of a gas cylinder shop has recently diversified into selling water jars. "People are getting frantic," says the shopkeeper, "most families use the jars for almost everything: washing dishes, bathing, drinking water."

In Mangal Bajar, though, the community has got together to manage water. In Kumbeswor, local committees regulate water queues and store well water and mains supply in 10,000 litre tanks. At the public spout in Imukhel there are rules on water use. At Patan Darbar Square, committee members raise money to maintain the sunken spouts.

Another solution is rainwater harvesting, but most rain storage has gone dry because of the prolonged drought. A system to store rainwater for four months after the monsoon costs Rs 30,000 for a 7,500 litre system. But for that, households would still have to wait for the monsoon, and that is three months away. ●


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**Result**  
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JOKE DOC  
JOKE BLOND  
JOKE OFFICE


**Result**  
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Silly jokes  
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meaning of LIVE



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# WATER!

## the capital's water emergency



### Melamchi mirage

For the parched and thirsty capital, the only hope on the horizon is the Melamchi project that aims to bring glacier melt from the Langtang National Park to Sundarijal via a 16km tunnel. The project has been planned for 15 years, but it still seems like a mirage.

The project was delayed by political instability and the conflict, but things started moving two years ago. It is now slated for completion by 2013 after the signing of a Rs 4.28 billion contract with a joint venture between a Chinese company and a local company.

There are still critics who say there are cheaper alternatives to Melamchi, but their voices have gone hoarse. Experts say just fixing the capital's Rana-era water mains would increase water supply by 40 per cent because that is the proportion that is lost to leaky pipes. Another alternative to Melamchi would be to build a series of reservoirs on the Valley rim to store water from the Bagmati's tributaries.



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# "Ama ko iskul"

KONG YEN LIN in DANG

Being illiterate, seamstress Khima Nepali used to memorise all her customers' orders by heart. But when business started to pick up, the 37-year-old realised she couldn't remember it all. Khima felt the urge to learn to read even more when she attended a training program and found her literate classmates having a head start.

So, with support from her family, the feisty mother enrolled in Grade 1 of a local school in Karjahi in Dang, where she studies in the same classroom as her seven-year-old daughter.

Khima's pioneering efforts to hit the books have been an inspiration to other illiterate women in Karjahi, and 30 other women have enrolled in Grade 1 and 2. They share a common desire to be empowered by education. "My parents are dead but now my own children are like my parents- they educate me," says Khima.

Three years after the end of the People's War, Dang is seeing an increase in female enrolment in schools. Educators attribute this to a rising awareness about the importance of education among parents.

"Before the restoration of multiparty democracy, most women were confined within their homes and hesitant to speak in public," says English teacher Ram Hari Rijal, "now they are more outspoken and expressive of their rights, especially in education. To them, this is like opening up a third eye."

This is the case for Asharami Chaudhari whose parents were brought up as illiterate kamaiyas and kamalaris. For the mother of five, literacy holds the promise of a brighter future. Most spouses have also been supportive of their wives' decision.

"My husband and I came to a consensus that he would earn money while I go to school," says Krishni Chaudhari, "and he wants me to teach him what I've learnt at home!"

Headmaster Hokum Subedi is enthusiastic about his 32 new adult students who sit with their children in the same classes. He says: "Their participation has been a positive example for the community, motivating and encouraging more women to seek formal education."

Despite being adults, all school rules apply for the

mothers as well. They can't be absent, they have to finish their homework, and they sit for the same tests as their children. Subedi says the mothers are doing well, with more than 60 per cent attaining first division passes in the term exams.

However, the presence of parents in the classroom can be a double-edged sword. On one hand, the parent-teacher partnership can be strengthened with mothers working together with teachers in solving problems. But classroom dynamics become challenging for teachers as the pace of learning is so different.

"It's hard to manage a classroom where age gaps and natures are so different," says teacher Sita Sharma, "some mothers felt it was hard to concentrate and wanted to be in a separate room."

Despite the enrolment of mothers picking up, Subedi says there just isn't space to have a separate classroom for them. Most mothers have below-subsistence income, so can't afford stationery and school material.

Says Subedi: "It's a pity, we just don't have the resources. There is so much enthusiasm that more mothers want to join schools." ●



KONG YEN LIN

## Fire hazard



KIRAN PANDAY

PAAVAN MATHEMA

Sixteen-year old Ermy Prajapati had been preparing conscientiously for her SLC exams last month. One day, while trying to light candles at home during a power cut she got severely burnt. The 16-year-old was rushed to hospital with serious burns below her waist. There was only a month to go for the exam and Ermy was worried.

But last week at the Burns Unit of Bir Hospital, there was Ermy her legs bandaged and in considerable pain, taking

### Hospitals register rise in patients burnt during power cuts

her SLC accounts paper in the wards with an invigilator and security official in attendance (pictured left). Always someone to look at the bright side, Ermy says it was easier to study in the hospital because there was no load-shedding.

She thinks she'd have performed better if it hadn't been for the accident, but adds she has done well in all her papers. "I hope to get above 70 per cent," she says confidently.

Megh Raj Bajagai, Ermy's science

teacher said: "Ermy is among our most diligent students, we were hoping she'd get a distinction, so we couldn't let the accident discourage her."

Bir Hospital has registered an increase in the number of burn cases after the 16-hour daily power cuts went into effect this winter. Says the Burns Unit in-charge Nara Devi Bariya: "There is a burn case very other day, and although not all the cases are because of load shedding, it has certainly increased the risk factor."

Bariya recalls the case of a young man last month who died of 90 per cent burns over his body. He had stored petrol in his house because of the fuel shortage. With no electricity, he had been checking up on his fuel stash with a candle. The Kathmandu Fire Brigade also says that fire incidents have significantly increased since load shedding started.

For most families who can't afford invertors and generators, candles and oil lamps are the only alternative. Combined with the exams, this increased the risk of burns as many students fell asleep while studying at night. ●

See also: 'A burning issue', #382

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# “We are committed to multiparty democracy, freedom of press and rule of law..”



## “Taistelemine oli helpompaa”

**NEPAL** Maailman ainoa vaaleilla valittu maalaisjohtaja, Nepalin pääministeri Dahal kävi Suomessa tutkimassa, mikä kuuluu demokratiaan ja mikä ei.

**H**elsingissä Kämp-hotellin loisteesta istuu tummassa liitraitapuvussa mies, joka tuntee paremmin taiste-  
lajanimeä Prachanda, Hurja. Vain muutama vuosi sitten hän piileskeli viidakossa ja komensi 19 000 maalaisissain armeijaa.

Kun epätoivotusta henkilöstä piti päästä eroon, Prachanda kehotti ampumaan luodin ohimoon. Viellä 2000-luvun alussa moni arveli, ettei koko Prachandaa ollut edes olemassa, että hän oli vain propaganda-tarkeutusta varten luotu fiktiivinen hahmo.

mo. Niin visusti hän pysyi maan alla.

2006 hän tuli kuitenkin ulos viidakosta. Paljastui että sissi-johtajan oikea nimi oli Pushpa Kamal Dahal ja että hän oli koulutukseltaan maataloustieteiden kandidaatti.

Jo samana vuonna Dahal teki rauhan maan johdon kanssa, ja vuosi sitten nepalilaiset äänestivät maalaisille 40 prosenttia parlamentin paikoista – puolueen suureksi hämmästykseksi.

Viime viikolla maalainen pääministeri tapasi Pohjoismaiden johtajia, sukukoloi sulavasti esi-meriksi kapitalistifirma-Nor-  
kian käytävillä ja vitsoilla Norjan

■ Pääministeri Pushpa Kamal Dahal, taisteilijanimeltään Prachanda, johti maalaisissien sodan-  
käyntiä toistakymmentä vuotta Nepalin vuorilla.

kuninkaalle, kuinka hän juuri kotimaassa lopetti ikiaikaisen monarkian.

**Anarkia uhkaa**  
Nostettuaan maalaiset valtaan sotaan väsyneet nepalilaiset odottivat pikaista muutosta parempaan. Arki on kuitenkin ollut entistä ankeampaa: pääkaupun-

In this interview with Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal printed in the Wednesday edition of the Finnish newsmagazine, *Suomen Kuvalehti*, Katri Merikallio asks him about his commitment to democracy, the free press and the future of the peace process. Excerpts:

commitment to multiparty democracy, freedom of press and rule of law. During the insurgency, I have praised the media and spoken out against the feudal autocracy trying to suppress the media.

**But the Committee to Protect Journalists says Nepal is still one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists and no one has been arrested.**

It is unfortunate that even during the peace process a number of journalists have been killed, but it is not correct that no one has been arrested or punished. In some cases I, myself, took the initiative to capture some people to be handed over to police custody, and the case is going in the court. In one case, in the Tarai of Birendra Sah the killing was not related to our party. Recently, there was the case of Uma Singh, and here also the accused are in jail or some are underground, they were not related to any party. It was proved that this was related to property, a family dispute. It is wrong to say that nothing has been done. It is an exaggeration. The government is fully committed to end impunity.

**Yourself, how Maoist are you?**

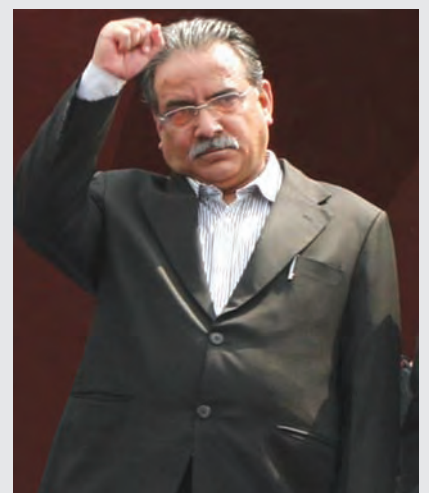
(Laughs) Very interesting question. I always understood Marxism, Leninism, Maoism as a social struggle, and that conflict analysis is the soul of social science. All the great leaders of the proletariat, Marx, Engels, Lenin and Mao said that nothing should be mechanically copied from one revolution or one country. We have to analyse the situation and understand the dynamics of change. If you mechanically copy what Mao did in China then you're not a real Maoist. There are some who want to dogmatically apply what Mao did, but China itself has changed.

**How about the Maoist movement in India?**

Revolutions can't be exported or imported. What they do in India is solely their responsibility. There are some communist parties in India – some are extremely left and some extremely right. When I took the path of multiparty democracy and embarked on the peace process there was serious debate within the Maoists in India about whether they should follow the Maoists in Nepal or not. There are some people in the Maoist movement in India who oppose us and say we have abandoned revolution, but there are those who say that what Prachanda is doing is correct and that we should learn from his experience.

**What are your expectations with the visit to Finland?**

I am fully satisfied with the trend of cooperation. There is tremendous and big change going on in Nepal and the people have high expectations. I hope that cooperation can be enhanced particularly in education and forestry, not just in conservation but also the commercial use of forests. We also expect more help and cooperation in the constitution drafting process. We would also like to encourage investment in the IT sector.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

## Meanwhile, back in Kathmandu

After returning from his visit to Norway and Finland, Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal lashed out at political parties, the judiciary and the media. Some sound bites from the past week:

- “Those trying to obstruct the peace process under the Maoist Government are criminals and murderers...they must be chased away like *bhyakur*.”
- “The media are under the control of feudalists, capitalists and reactionary forces.”
- “Big media houses are run by smugglers...they are misleading the majority of the country's population with wrong information. Since smugglers and capitalists are very active in the media sector, it will be very tough to win the war over the control of the country's media but if we move ahead with a pro-people media that fight can easily be won.”

**Suomen Kuvalehti: How would you describe your past seven months in power?**

**Pushpa Kamal Dahal:** Everybody knows that we are going through a very delicate and sensitive transition period. We have many challenges, but altogether I can conclude that things are going ahead step by step, facing many twists and turns, in the process of drafting a new democratic constitution.

**What would be your three main challenges?**

Peace, until and unless this unique and homegrown peace process is not concluded there is always the danger of instability and anarchy. We need to take this historic peace process to its logical conclusion. The second challenge is to build a consensus between all the political parties. We have broad areas of agreement on the form of democracy, human rights, rule of law, independent judiciary and freedom of press, but there are some issues where we still need to agree: what kind of federalism we need, how power will be shared between autonomous regions, differences on the issue of form of governance. The third challenge is that the people have very high expectations from the change and we have to meet them.

In some aspects fighting the war was easier than handling the democratic governance process. But both have their own characteristics, and you can't really compare. I am fully confident that we will take the peace process forward and draft the constitution in the stipulated timeframe.

**There are reports of continued intimidation, and violence is on the increase. Some of**

**this is being blamed on your party.**

I cannot agree with this statement. This is highly exaggerated. It is correct that we are having a very delicate transition period – there are so many remnants from the previous conflict and we cannot eradicate it overnight. If you look at peace processes elsewhere in the world our peace process is much smoother. There are some unwanted activities and we are committed to punish the guilty and end impunity. In some media problems have been highly exaggerated.

**What about the tensions within your own party?**

To lead the revolution into a peaceful process and to hold elections and then to lead the government within a very short span of time is miraculous. But we have transformed not just our party but the whole society. Naturally there are different tendencies within my party extreme left, extreme right, vacillation tendency but overall the pragmatic more dialectic and realistic tendency is now dominant. The extremist tendency has been defeated.

**If you look at the future which kind of governance model would you prefer: Korea, China or India?**

I don't want to compare ourselves with anyone, but we have to learn from the negative and positive aspects of other revolutions during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is our conclusion that without multiparty democracy we can't serve the people and humanity. For now we have to cooperate that with other parliamentary parties. There should be no serious doubt about out



**तपाईंको दिनको सुरुवात  
रोबियस एलोमेरा जूसबाट गर्नुहोस् ।**

सम्पूर्ण जैविक तत्वहरू: भिटामिन, मिनरल्स, एमिनो एसिड, इन्ज्याइम आदिको ग्यारेन्टी भएको, पूर्ण प्राङ्गरीक साथै IASC लगायतका प्रतिष्ठित अन्तराष्ट्रिय संस्थाहरूद्वारा प्रमाणित वैज्ञानिक तथा अत्याधुनिक प्रविधिबाट उत्पादन गरीएको, ताजापन र प्रभावकारिताको ग्यारेन्टी भएको प्राकृतिक रोबियस एलोमेरा जूसको सेवन गरि पर्याप्त स्वास्थ्य लाभ उठाउनुहोस् ।



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चितवन: ०५६-५२११६८, बुटवल: ०७९-६२१०६६

साधारण रुपमा प्रशोधन गरीएको एलो मेरा जूसले कलेजो, निगौला आदिमा हानिकारक असर गर्न सक्ने भएकोले पूर्ण रुपमा वैज्ञानिक प्रविधिबाट प्रशोधन गरीएको रोबियस एलो मेरा जूस नै प्रयोग गरी ।

यस जूसको विक्री वितरण गर्ने अवसर प्राप्त गरी पार्ट टाइम या फुल टाइम आय गर्नुहोस् !





CHONG ZI LIANG

# The long march

CHONG ZI LIANG

Forget trekking in the majestic Himalaya. There are great hiking routes in this country that thus far have been neglected by tourists: Nepal's highways. And I chanced upon this discovery quite serendipitously on a recent reporting assignment.

I was trying to get from Chinchu to Kohalpur by bus, but as luck would have it there was a chukka jam called because of the death of a UML cadre 300 km to the west from Kathmandu in Butwal. I had managed to catch a micro willing to break the banda, but after a lunch stop the driver decided he was going to respect the strike after all and disgorged us all together with our luggage.

Now there's nothing like being abandoned in the middle of nowhere along a mountain highway to forge solidarity among complete strangers. A discussion promptly took place and it was quickly decided we would walk the remainder of the way to Kohalpur: all 25 km of it. The trouble was we all had baggage and I had two packs weighing 15 kg.

After walking for a bit, I realised just how beautiful Nepal

is, the bus is simply too fast and all the scenery zips by the window before registering in the retina. An immediate uphill route (pictured, above) of eight km right at the start virtually ensured we were going so slow every plant could be admired in its entirety.

But if I thought the uphill walk was tough, going down was a nightmare. The Nepalis I was hiking with decided to take a shortcut through a steep downhill stretch. My clumsy city feet were slipping on every pebble, root or stretch of dirt.

A highway hike also reveals the legendary Nepali hospitality. Sensing I was in trouble, two Nepalis slowed down during my downhill tumble and walked with me as the rest of them disappeared out of sight. One of them even carried one of my bags. A long march along Nepal's highways is the only way to bond with the locals and get up close and personal with Nepalis.

By mid-afternoon, we had come off the hilly portion of our forced march. The final 10km stretch of straight road to Kohalpur now was a gentle descent through forest. I have heard that on the established mountain hiking circuits, food and other essentials are sold at an

unusually high price. In this aspect, the highway route will not disappoint. Shops along the last 10km stretch were nice enough to provide us with an authentic hiking experience as well by jacking up their prices. It's all demand and supply—how much you pay in Nepal depends entirely on how desperate you are to buy what is on offer.

By the time we stumbled into Kohalpur, we probably looked like a posse of hombres walking into a wild west town after being lost in the desert. My legs had stopped feeling any pain and had been on autopilot during the final five km.

So, to all you tourists out there: why pay for a hiking permit that is obviously overpriced because you are a foreigner? Why shell out for that down jacket and waterproof boots? If 'Naturally Nepal' is what you seek, just board any bus out of Kathmandu and pray for a banda. Experience the trek of a lifetime. ●

# Pedal power

Nirjala Tamrakar, 28, started bicycling out of necessity when she used to go to AVM School in her native Patan. Then, bicycling became a hobby. Now it is a passion.

Especially after she came a commendable second in the gruelling 405km Kanchenjunga Mountain Bike Expedition held in Sikkim last month, Tamrakar is determined to do better in international bicycling tournaments. Nepal's most noted woman mountain biker has been taking part in championships since 2001 coming either first or second in most. "It was a great feeling, I became someone in place of no one," says Nirjala, describing the moment when she received her prize in Sikkim. Despite her motivation, it hasn't been easy for Nirjala. A proper mountain bike can cost up to Rs 300,000 and the bike suit can be expensive. A coach, specialised diet and lots of time to train are also needed.

"The male bikers are very supportive because I am the only woman," says Nirjala, who has worked as a medical transcriptionist and even taught yoga to earn money.

Nirjala takes encouragement not just from her successes, but also her failures. She says coming last in the Annapurna Mountain Bike race in 2006 goaded her work harder. "It was snowing and the bike was 18kg and I just ran out of stamina," she recalls, "but after that I decided I was going to practise and improve my endurance."

She went on to complete the 1,150km Lhasa-Kathmandu Mountain Bike race in 17 days and hopes now to take part in international tournaments. Nirjala sometimes regrets not having time for studies, family and friends. Yet, she feels proud of being able to represent Nepal in many national and international races as the only female participant.

Nirjala's other hobby is painting and she has won the first prize in the Mandala Art Competition two years in a row in 2003-4. She hopes to have a solo art exhibition soon. ●

Binita Dahal



MICHEL HUNEULT

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## ABOUT TOWN

## EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Unexpressed Expressions** by Sangee Shrestha, 20 April, 11AM-6PM, Siddhartha Art gallery. 4218048
- ❖ **Birds, Butterflies & Wildlife of Nepal**, a solo photo exhibition, 14-20 April in NAFA art gallery Bal Mandir, Naxal.
- ❖ **In Plain View** by Kelly Stacey, 10-17 April at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe at 11AM.
- ❖ **Silent Witnesses**, stencil artwork by Aymeric Hamon, till 24 April, 6 PM, The Bakery Café, Pulchowk.
- ❖ **Caravan art show 2009** by Narayan Shrestha at Hotel Summit till 30 April. 9851000519

## EVENTS

- ❖ **Rachel Getting Married**, movie starring Anne Hathaway, 11 April, 5.30 PM, Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4428549
- ❖ **Lecture Series XXXI** by Mark Turin, 5 pm, 14 April, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka.
- ❖ **36<sup>th</sup> Yala Maya Kendra**, a classical music series, 15 April, 5PM, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 5553767
- ❖ **Call for entries for Film South Asia** till 31 May, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5552141

## MUSIC

- ❖ **Kathmandu International Music Society**, 18 April, 2.15-4.10 PM, British School hall. 9803680509
- ❖ **Rock Classics** by return of Bob Manes along Desmond O'Flattery and Anthony Correll, 5.30- 8 PM. Lazimpat 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 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

- ❖ **Easter celebration**, 12 April at Kilroy, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Dhaba**, Indian food festival, till 11 April, Garden terrace, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 7-11.45 PM, Rs 1200
- ❖ **Australian Food Promotion**, till 12 April, from 6PM onwards. 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, Baluwatar. 4429903
- ❖ **Fusion** of Marcela Ragan's new menu and Mannie's new bar at Dhokaima Café. 5522113
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Pasta pesto passion** at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4700612
- ❖ **Home made pasta** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs** at the Asahi Lounge, opening hours 1-10PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999

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

## Quest Entertainment



Vin Diesel and Paul Walker re-team for the ultimate chapter of *Fast & Furious* where they head back to the streets where it all began. When a crime brings them back to LA, fugitive ex-con Dom Toretto (Diesel) reignites his feud with agent Brian O'Conner (Walker). But as they are forced to confront a shared enemy, Dom and Brian must give into an uncertain new trust if they hope to outmaneuver him. And, from convoy heists to precision tunnel crawls across international lines, the two men will find the best way to get revenge: push the limits of what's possible behind the wheel.

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नेपाल सरकार  
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय  
सूचना विभाग

Sotai & Kai-Therapy Centre are trying to organise the free seminar for the blind people to learn the massage by the specialist from Japan. It is the great tradition in Japan that people with sight problem does the Acupuncture and the massage from Edo period till now. Blind people has the very sensitive fingers that they are able to feel the bad places in the clients body than others. There are few criterias for those people and they should contact the Sotai & Kai-Therapy Centre.

The free seminar will be held in Jazz Conservatory, Jhamshikhel.  
To know the location please contact at 5013554  
**It's time starts at 9AM till 11AM. 28th of April, Tuesday.**

If your friends or family who are blind, but physically strong and has the will power to learn something new then you are more than welcome.

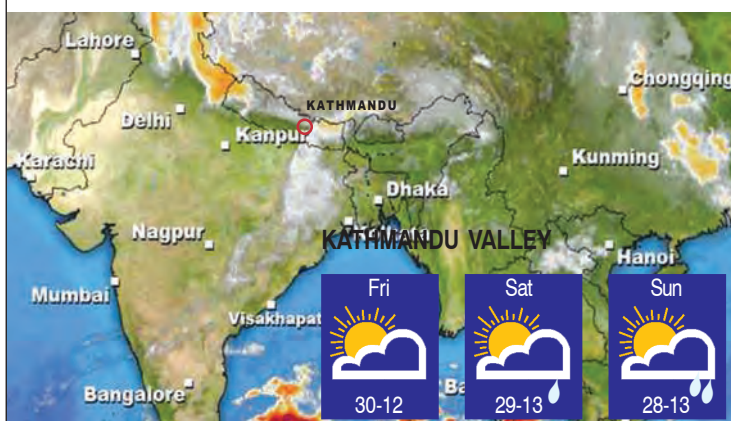
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## WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

There is good news for those praying for rains. This satellite picture taken on Thursday at noon shows a cloud front stretching from the Persian Gulf right up to western Nepal. A low pressure area hanging over northern India is favourable to bringing rain along the midhills. There is some doubt about how much moisture this system contains, but it could revive the afternoon showers that stopped after some intermittent showers last week. The sunny intervals this weekend will be hot, and summer-like temperatures with the minimum temperatures crossing into the double digits.



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KIRAN PANDAY

**POLITICAL GAMES:** Following an 11-year lapse, the Fifth National Games opened on Monday. PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal directed the Sports Council to include the PLA team, prompting the Nepal Army Club to withdraw from the games.



KIRAN PANDAY

**PUMP UP THE POWER:** Judges at the body building contest of the Fifth National Games resort to battery-powered lamps during loadshedding on Tuesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**LITTLE VOICES:** UNICEF executive board members, representing the Bahamas, China, Ethiopia, Germany, Russia and Switzerland, visit the Vishwakarma Community Organisation at the early childhood development centre in Kalika VDC, Kaski.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**DIGGING A DREAM:** Caterpillar trucks flatten a five hectare site in Kabhresthali, near Nagarjun, in preparation for the construction of an apartment complex.



**SAYING GRACE:** Australian Ambassador Susan Grace inaugurates the Australian Food Promotion at the Hyatt Regency on 3 April. The festival will go on till 12 April.

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# The answer is blowing in the wind

It was bound to happen sooner or later: RIM and CCOMPOSA have finally said they want to have nothing to do with our **Buddies** and have started divorce proceedings. This can only mean one of two things: that our own Revolutionary Left Wing and its youth vanguard (called 'Red Guards', for old times sake) will be seen by international commies as the genu-wine article.

Or, being unshackled from the doctrinaire comrades at the Revolutionary International Movement will allow the UCPN-M to turn into Euro-communists. Either way, it just goes to prove that one can always be much more fashionably hardline about someone else's revolution than one's own.

✂

Another RIM and CCOMPOSA member is the Communists Party of Afghanistan-Maoists (yes, even there), and it has just fired a salvo at our own Maobaddies for not stopping Gurkha recruitment. Shola Jawid, the mouth organ of **Afghan Maoists**, reported in a recent issue that Gurkha mercenaries are working under direct command of US Special Forces in Shindand Airport and with the Canadian NATO contingent in Kandahar and the Polish unit in Ghazni.

The Afghan comrades have

written a snarling letter to our comrades warning: "The new government of Nepal including its leading body the CPN-M not only have not opposed the presence of **Nepalese armed lackeys** in Afghanistan but they have ... allowed it to happen."

✂

Why did Bhusan Dahal have to go all the way to Oslo to interview Comrade Stupendific? Dahal began with the icebreaker: "What a coincidence that we should meet here in Oslo." Whereupon Dahal replied: "It's not a coincidence, haven't we been together here for three days already?" Oops.

Then Dahal tired to corner Dahal by asking him how it felt to come from a country of darkness to a country of light to meet a king. After praising **His Majesty Harald V's** grasp of climate change, Dahal went on to disclose that he actually tried "till the last moment" in 2006 to convince Kingji to be a constitutional monarch. Wait a minute, wasn't Awesome supposed to be batting for a republic then?

✂

Two days after waxing eloquent in Helsinki about his commitment to the free press, Awesome returned to Kathmandu to come

out guns blazing again against "feudal owners of media houses" and this time accused them of being "smugglers". Whoa.

Then he went on to add: "If the media doesn't behave itself and provide correct information, the people will deal with them." We can understand why he's angry: the media had splashed across the front pages the candid camera shot of sonny boy in a drunken stupor in Dhulikhel. And then evening news on tv broadcast over and over again his speech in Khula Much where he thundered against just about every politician in this country, and then promptly broke down and cried.

✂

Things have got bad enough for a radio station to call in two experts to the studio this week to psychoanalyse the **primordial minister**. Their conclusion: delusions of grandeur, megalomania, paranoia and an attempt to mask failures. The latest criticism concerns his junket. After spending ten days abroad, Terrifico told the press on arrival his main achievements were:

- Figuring out that windmills are too heavy to lug up mountains
- Getting the Norwegians to gift a polytechnic
- Getting the Finns to repair the

multi-fuel plant in Duhabi that they donated 15 years ago

✂

Fittingly symbolic, whoever had the brainwave to make the nearly-extinct **Habray** the mascot of the Fifth National Games. It appears the prez attended the opening ceremony only because he had been assured the People's Liberationists would not be taking part, and listened to the prime minister promising a stadium in every development zone and to "give sports a top priority in the new constitution" (wrestling, boxing, martial arts, sharp-shooting, etc).

But the Ass thinks it was

mistake for the army to give the Maoists a walk over. The better trained soldiers could have easily clobbered the ex-guerrillas.

✂

Remember the Singapore policeman who was kidnapped in broad daylight last week by six Maobuddies who wanted **Rs 60 million** and were arrested while taking possession of a suitcase full of make-believe currency notes?

Well, guess what the name of their hideout in Thamel was? Naya Nepal Guest House.

ass(at)nepalitimes.com









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