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Hand-to-hand

Army row is bad news for constitution-writing and the peace process

PRASHANT JHA

After recent rows over recruitment and the retirement of generals, it was army chief Rookmangud Katawal's decision to partially pull out from the national games last week that seems to have been the last straw for Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The controversy has now become a prestige issue between the two, as the country's ex-guerrilla prime minister and its army chief engage in hand-to-hand fighting.

"The trigger was the national games. The PM was personally furious at Katawal's defiance," a senior Maoist leader told *Nepali Times* on Wednesday. "We have logic and the law on our side, and have been preparing to do this for two weeks."

But non-Maoists, even those who believe in civilian supremacy, feel the Maoists are bent on a strategy to take over total state control. Katawal's dismissal would pave the way for a more pliable chain of command dependent on Maoist patronage, while also enhancing Dahal's popularity within the party.

However, it hasn't quite gone according to the script because of

escalating divisions within the UML. Dahal is learnt to have secured UML chairman Jhalanath Khanal's assent before his departure to China, but after cutting short his visit Khanal and returning Thursday Khanal had changed his tune.

President Ram Baran Yadav's stern advice to Dahal to work for political consensus played a part in the Maoists taking a step back. Yadav is said to have warned of the consequences if an ethnic candidate for the chief's position is bypassed. General Chhatraman Singh Gurung would head the army if Katawal retires on schedule in September. If he is sacked, General Kul Bahadur

Khadka, who is understood to be lobbying hard for the job, would take over.

As expected, there was pressure from India to leave the army alone. Delhi had assured the army that its chain of command, structure and interests would be protected in return for support during the peace process in the last three years. It sees the institution as the last bulwark against the Maoists, and

sent word to Dahal there would be costs if he went ahead.

But the game is not over yet. "If the prime minister pulls back now, he can play the victim card temporarily but his credibility within the party would be dented and the cadre will be demoralised," a Maoist secretariat member admitted.

Dahal will now have to find a face-saving way to appease his cadre, assuage nervous political parties and wary internationals. On Thursday, the prime minister met UNMIN chief Karin Landgren and later summoned a group of ambassadors from India, UK, US and China and told them he was looking for a "third option". The envoys reportedly only listened, and didn't ask any questions.

The row doesn't bode well for the constitution-writing and the peace process, deepening mistrust between political actors. ●



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Give PKD his due

Prachanda had no training when he chose to be Dahal

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

In normal times, the elected prime minister of a country may be entitled to ask his army chief for an explanation on why he is disobeying his government.

But these are not normal times. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal leads a party that still fields an army. He and his comrades have been making open threats to capture state power by coercion. His party has shown disdain for democratic norms and contempt for press freedom and human rights. We have witnessed a collapse in law and order in the past eight months since Dahal became prime minister. His cadre are still murdering people and getting away with it, and there is little to show that the Maoists are making much progress in the transition to open non-violent politics.

In such a situation, tampering with the national army, the institution of last resort, carries an ominous meaning. Whatever the army may have done in its ex-royal avatar, it has played by the rules laid out in the 2006 peace accord and the interim constitution. The army chief has on occasion made statements which could be construed as political, but with no defence minister speaking out for the rank and file during transition, it was his job to safeguard the morale of his troops.

Civilian control of the army is a universal principle and should be applied to Nepal only when the Maoist army has been disbanded, demobilised, rehabilitated or integrated. It only makes sense when the party leading the government stops behaving like it is still underground waging a violent revolution.

It could very well be that this is just a prestige issue for Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa who needs to show his own Maoist rank and file that he can't be pushed around. Maybe the Maoists needed this as a distraction to mask their governance failures. But those would be the charitable explanations. Much more probable is that the Maoists see the army as the last bastion that can stop them from grabbing total power and have decided to undermine it from within.

As Supreme Commander, President Ram Baran Yadav has a role and responsibility in resolving this issue before it derails the peace process. He has the right in grave circumstances to provide advice to the sitting government, and let the government know his concern and dissatisfactions. He can't do more than that, but that much he must do.

After all, he is not a ceremonial president but a constitutional one, with a constitutional function in a parliamentary democracy.

This crisis can be turned into an opportunity to focus attention on the much more urgent matter of integration and rehabilitation of Maoist combatants according to agreements reached before the elections. The issues of downsizing the army, and investigating and punishing excesses during the war remains, and cannot be diluted by any subsequent debate.

There can be no lowering the standards to induct the combatants, because the army as a national institution is meant to protect national sovereignty, and it cannot be weakened by induction of Maoist combatants as a group, even though individual entry can probably be managed.

The Nepal Army's capacity to protect national sovereignty when required should not be weakened. Surely, the Maoists don't want that. At least that is what we hope.

From the media coverage of his incendiary speech about the press and the parties recently, one gets the impression Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal had gone rabid. But this image belied the diplomatic dance Dahal has been performing since he chose the path of multiparty democracy over armed insurgency.



GUEST COLUMN
Pramod Mishra

His deft handling of the ever simmering discontent within his party, his subtle engagement with audiences in New York, his openness in negotiating with the mushrooming ethnic movements, and his persistent transactions with the increasingly cantankerous political parties, all this could not be the result of mere Machiavellianism.

At the time of the peace agreement, the Maoists had little hope that people would give them the confidence of the ballot in return for decade-long terror of

bullets. The Maoists in India still cling to arms. But Prachanda, like a statesman that he appears to be, gave up the expanding insurgency, and his risks have been rewarded by Nepalis.

While Girija Koirala and Madhab Nepal succeeded in bringing Prachanda and his party to negotiation, it is Dahal who was constantly bringing the Congress, insecure UML and volatile ethnic groups into the fold of democracy in order to realise the dream of a truly multi-ethnic decentralised federal democracy.

There are a million mutinies erupting in Nepal right now as a result of long-suppressed people awakening from centuries of humiliation, deprivation and slumber. And, Dahal has the onerous task of juggling these myriad forces while leading the ship of a mapless state without any training in democratic politics that, say, Nehru had when he became India's prime minister. Neither did 'Prachanda' have colleagues or a party seasoned in democratic exercise when he chose to be 'Dahal'.

The UML and Congress, which pursued individual ambition, bickering and petty feuds for posts that harmed them and Nepal from 1990 to 2002 are showing those signs once again. And given the Maoists' growing success in the elections, their behaviour might get even worse. Otherwise, why would they smell conspiracy with regard to PLA integration if that's what they signed on under the peace agreement?

Why are powerful UML and Congress leaders, instead of offering historically informed analysis of the rise of marginalised voices, blaming the Maoists for stirring up the hornet's nest of ethnic politics? The Congress seems to have run out of ideas, originality and critical thinking.

And the UML, despite its internal election, still more or less clings to the outdated track that Madan Bhandari set almost two decades ago.

The culture of impunity, the undemocratic handling of the army generals' retirement, violence against media houses and journalists, the muscle-flexing of its hardliners and, above all, YCL excesses all show that Dahal and his party have ways to go before being called democrats. But the ganging up by the press and the parties against Dahal, smelling conspiracy in everything the Maoists do and exaggerating the danger to Nepal's democracy due to Maoist political decisions equally show that these parties might be acting out of insecurity and old Nepal's conspiratorial mindset.

One might even suspect that they do not want a new Nepal to be born, as Dahal alleges, if it means rebuilding their parties on radically different platforms from the status quo. And the media should ask itself if its class and group bias is not responsible for the overwhelmingly negative tone toward the Maoists. So, save for a couple of intemperate phrases, which the media overplayed, Dahal's speech appears convincing about the behaviour of his opposition.

Many in Nepal thought that the end of kingship would lead to rule by their party or group along post-1990 line. But now that a paradigm shift appears possible, from traditional power bases, classes and groups to the hitherto disempowered, from established parties to emergent forces, many seem uneasy and threatened. The press must give Dahal credit where credit is due and criticise him where and when he and his party deserve it. ●

Pramod Mishra is on research leave from Augustana College, Illinois, USA.



KIRAN PANDAY

LETTERS

DEFICIT

CK Lal's piece ('Leadership deficit,' #446) is an interesting critique of Nepali premiers who have passed through Singha Dabar. It is a good analysis but has a misleading message. Lal himself has noted contradictory statements: '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.' Any evidence-based analyst would not accept an argument whose context is exclusively different. PM Dahal has trained hitherto quiet Nepalis to talk about oppression. His contribution to consolidation of political awareness among Nepalis cannot be disregarded. It is in his premiership, and first time ever in the history of Nepali parliament, that CA members revisited the voters to ask their suggestions on how to write an inclusive constitution.

Nepal is in a fragile state right now and Dahal has the hopes of millions of Nepali people riding on him. The country is going through a new phase and many issues regarding ethnicity and federalism are coming out because there is more freedom across society. Dahal has been a PM for only eight months, whereas people in Nepal have been suffering suppression for centuries. These issues are not new and it is unreasonable for the people to expect Dahal to solve all the problems in such a short time.

Puspa Raj Pant, Aberdeen, UK

PASSPORTS

Prashant Jha is right that introducing passports at the India-Nepal border will hurt us Nepalis and that that is the true

representation of the present scenario ('Closed minds,' #446). The so-called nationalists, who are making a hue and cry about this must first understand the reality on the ground. Advocating passport control from the comfort of Kathmandu will weaken our nationalism and make the lives of poor Nepalis difficult. The people of the Tarai, for instance, have a very close relationship with India. And, we will never let myopic leaders meddle with this relationship. It is time to prioritise what is important.

Akesh Jaiswal, Gujarat

HALF-FULL

In your otherwise excellent and balanced editorial ('Half-full', #447) you have let slip your bias in the sentence: 'The Maoists have severely weakened the state, maybe

deliberately...' Why would they do that? Why do you ascribe the most conspiratorial motives to every Maoist move? Wouldn't they be weakening themselves by weakening the state?

KL, email

● Thanks to Prashant Jha for an insightful analysis of army integration ('Biting the bullet', #447). Theoretically, integration shouldn't be such a contentious issue. But, as Jha points out, non-Maoist parties just don't trust the Maoists as long as they have a separate army. They don't trust the Maoists also because of the contradictory statements of their leaders and the move this week to ask the COAS for an explanation. But it's a chicken and egg situation. You can't have trust until the PLA is integrated and rehabilitated, but to do that you first need trust. So what comes first? How does Jha propose to resolve that?

Kumar J Thapa, email



From Republic to Middle Kingdom

The Chinese are spreading their diplomatic eggs in many baskets

In the 19th century, when imperial messengers from Middle Kingdom arrived in Kathmandu, the king would travel to the edge of the town (probably where Tin Kune is now) with a cavalcade of courtiers in ceremonial outfit to receive the missives.

The elaborate ritual involved with the acceptance of a mere letter from the Chinese infuriated the British Resident Brian Houghton Hodgson so much that he wrote: 'But my situation is by no means so agreeable as it might be if these barbarians did but know their own good. Instead of which they are insolent and hostile, and play off on us, as far as they can and dare, the Chinese etiquette and foreign polity.'

Little did Hodgson know that the Chinese were similarly told to remain watchful of British incursions in Tibet. Chandra Shamsher, the strongest and most influential of all hereditary Rana prime ministers, felt so helpless in front of the British resident that he fervently wished for the permanent occupation of Tibet by the Chinese. Once the Chinese PLA overran the Potala in 1950, King Mahendra rejoiced at the prospect of playing Beijing and New Delhi against each other.

Mahendra soon learnt that being at the centre of regional conflict had its costs. When the wily monarch toyed with the idea of threatening India with a land route to Lhasa, Indira Gandhi dared him to approach China and Beijing coerced him into accepting the albatross that connects Kathmandu with nowhere on the Tibetan border.

American historian Leo E Rose was to note later: 'Nepal had paid a high price in economic terms and in its relationship with India for this useless road.' Even though a railway line now connects Lhasa with mainland China, the traffic on the road to Khasa bordering Nepal continues to be sparse.

After his 'Zone of Peace' proposal in 1975 and its prompt endorsement by the Chinese, King Birendra made regular trips to Beijing without much to show for his sincere efforts. In fact, it was the other way round as increased trade. It's a tribute to super-suave Chinese diplomats that they have succeeded in selling their commercial interests as goodwill gestures.

The anti-aircraft guns bought from the Chinese in 1988 proved to be extremely expensive to Nepalis: the resulting economic blockade enforced by Indians crippled the economy.

No one ever learns anything from history. Within a fortnight of his first diplomatic trip to New Delhi, former king Gyanendra went to Beijing with the hopes of engaging the northern neighbour more closely in the counter-insurgency operation against the Maoists. Enthused with the courtesy of his hosts, he gushed that China was a "trustworthy" friend.

Whether he was manipulated to make Afghanistan's entry into SAARC conditional upon securing an observer

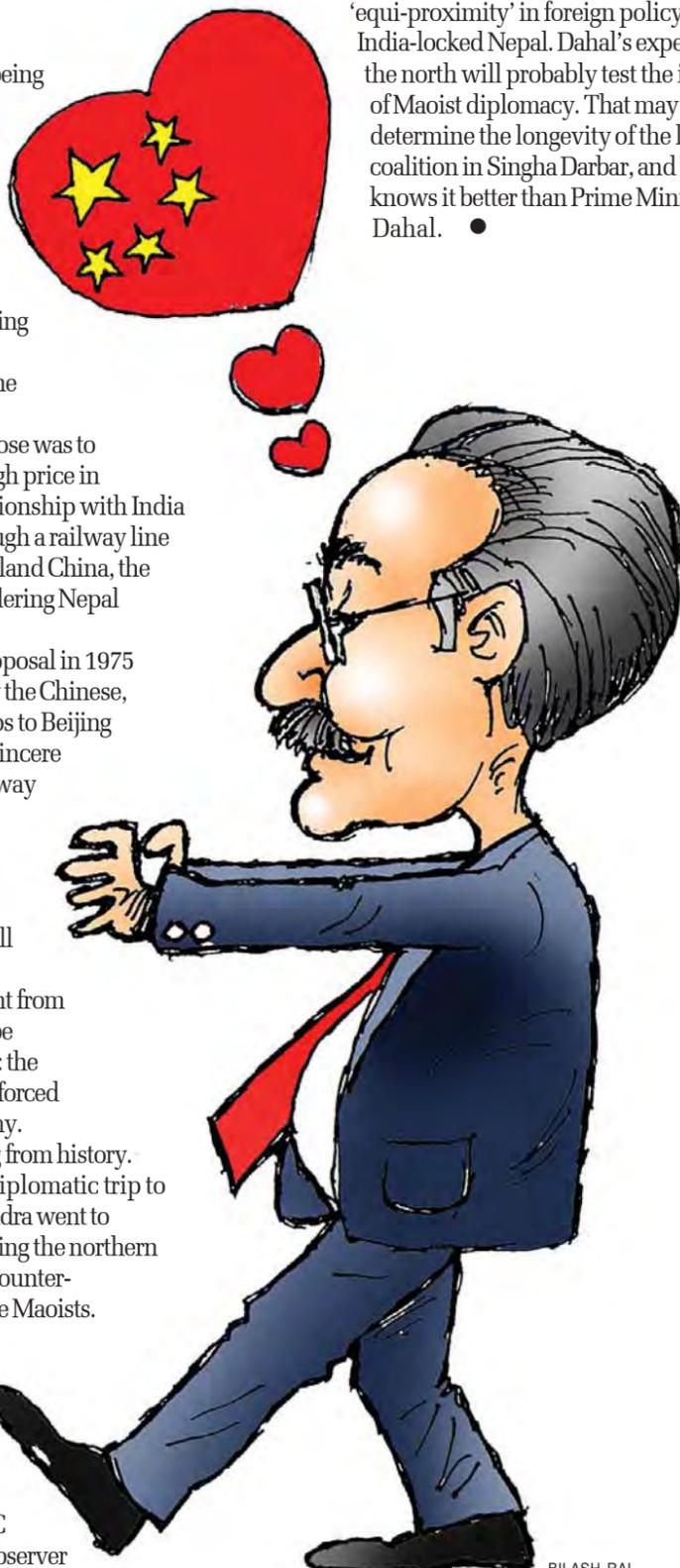
status for the Chinese in the South Asian club is not sure, but the countdown of the end of Shah monarchy probably began with Gyanendra's defiant posturing at the 13th Summit at Dhaka. The king was to regret later that the northerners turned out to be fair-weather friends.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal wanted to show that he was making history by visiting Beijing before going on the ritual pilgrimage to New Delhi. But conciliatory gestures from a leader who repeatedly branded the regime in Beijing 'reformist' from his safe houses in the Indo-Gangetic plains have failed to impress the inheritors of Great Helmsman's mantle. Unsure of the prospect of any one political player, the Chinese have decided to spread their diplomatic eggs in many baskets.

From Koirala heir-apparent Sujata to maverick Matrika, promising politicians of all persuasions are being welcomed in Beijing with open arms. Within days of Upendra Yadav's return, Chairman Jhalnath Khanal went with a jumbo UML team to the land of market-Maoism. Now it's the turn of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal to make his first 'formal' visit.

Perhaps it's too early to tell, but Dahal's communist predecessor at Baluwatar failed miserably with rhetorical innovations of 'equi-proximity' in foreign policy for India-locked Nepal. Dahal's expedition to the north will probably test the integrity of Maoist diplomacy. That may also determine the longevity of the leftist coalition in Singha Darbar, and nobody knows it better than Prime Minister Dahal. ●

STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal



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Caste aside

It's worth pondering if we want to copy Bihar's identity-based elections

NORTH BIHAR—Anyone here who tells you who will win the Indian general elections is lying. To sample the complexities of electoral dynamics and the lessons it holds for us in Nepal, take a look at a constituency right across the border.

The contest in western Champaran is filled with ironies. Hard-hitting film-maker Prakash Jha, a Maithil Brahmin candidate, is fighting on a ticket of a Dalit party headed by Ram Vilas Paswan, who recently attended a convention of our own Dalit Janjati Party in

Birganj. Jha's films exposed the politics-crime nexus during Laloo Yadav's 15 year reign. Today, Laloo is in alliance with the Dalit party and figures prominently on



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

Jha's posters. So Jha relies on a votebank comprising of Brahmins (because of his own caste), Muslims and Yadavs (courtesy of Laloo support), and Paswans (due to the party he belongs to).

And if you thought that was complicated, here is more: the villain in Jha's famous film *Gangajal* was Sadhu Yadav, a not-so-subtle dig at Laloo Yadav's notorious brother in law with the same name. Today, Sadhu Yadav has fallen out with Laloo and is Jha's opponent in the constituency as a candidate of the Congress party. Mind you, Congress, Laloo and Paswan all share power in Delhi. Sadhu is slicing away a part of the Muslim and Yadav vote from Jha.

This split in the 'secular vote' will benefit the local BJP candidate Sanjay Jaiswal who is a part of the alliance headed by chief minister Nitish Kumar, a man seen to have restored a sense of governance in the state. He may win not because of any development dividend, but because Nitish Kumar has embarked on a new process of social engineering. His party's support base rests on non-Yadav intermediate castes, backward Muslims (called Pasmada Muslims) and the poorest Dalit communities (Mahadalits). Their alliance with BJP fetches them upper caste votes. This broad social alliance of the Nitish-BJP combine essentially opposes Yadav hegemony.

Still, there is a method to the madness in Bihari politics. And this is bound to be replicated across the border on our side in Tarai politics. Identities are fragmenting to an extent one did not know existed. And those castes that benefited from political power and economic patronage in the 80s and 90s in north India are facing a backlash from those above and below them, the so-called 'post-Mandal churning'.

On our side, the primary beneficiaries of the Madhes movement have been the Yadavs, who wield the real political power, and the upper castes, who have

found space at top echelons of professions because of the slogan of inclusiveness. As democracy deepens, the other communities in Tarai have started feeling cheated.

The assertion among Tharus and Muslims is an indication of the growing grievances. Non-Yadav intermediate castes have imported the OBC terminology from India and have already formed the Nepal Federation of Backward Classes. The real contradiction on the ground is between the land-holding Yadavs and the landless labourer Dalits. The upper castes are numerically insignificant, but hold a deep grudge against Yadav dominance.

So there is a possibility of a Brahmin-Dalit alliance against Yadavs like in Uttar Pradesh, or an upper caste, non-Yadav backwards alliance like in Bihar.

If Nepal succeeds in writing a constitution and if we do go through a cycle of elections, we may take the political path already visible in Bihar and UP in Tarai. When identities are the basis of discrimination and developing bonds of solidarity, politics around identity is inevitable.

But it is worth thinking whether we want to emulate the same kind of political culture, where issues of livelihood and class have little resonance and identities keep breaking up in small parcels.

Besides kinship, caste and religion, there are other factors in the Indian elections. With the increase in urban seats, education, and mobility, aspirations have increased. Electricity, water and roads are important issues and performance counts as seen in recent state elections like Delhi and Madhya Pradesh. The ruling Congress government has made issues like employment schemes key campaign slogans.

As India conducts its 15th Lok Sabha elections, it provides a remarkable example to the rest of us South Asians on how to manage diverse aspirations within a democratic political framework. ●



AL JAZEERA ENGLISH

Elections in a time of Maoism

If only India's wonderful ability to hold elections could be applied to ending poverty that fuels the Naxalite violence

India's long suffering, largely-rural electorate is doing it again: braving the searing heat of late spring, the dust of the cattle tracks that pass for roads, the wrath of Naxalite or separatist guerrillas to vote for a new government. Yet another



HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

unwieldy coalition administration has survived to full term: no mean feat in these fissiparous days. Led by the venerable Indian National Congress, the United Progressive Alliance government survived scandal, terror attacks galore, the wrath of the Left over a flash-in-the-pan nuclear deal and global economic turmoil's onset last year.

The newspaper columns and television channels seethe with insults, accusations and bitterness. The Election Commission, perhaps the most respected institution in the country, tries in vain to urge civility upon the politicians but ends up scolding dozens for their nasty words and bad behavior. Old warhorses like Jaswant Singh of the BJP get caught handing out money while a Sikh journalist's shoe brings down the mighty and blood-tainted Congress power broker Jagdish Tytler in Delhi.

A firestorm of argument and capricious commentary passes for debate over issues. One scion of the Nehru Gandhi dynasty keeps everyone guessing on his intentions for matrimony and the prime minister's office. Another, the execrable Varun Gandhi, utters perhaps the vilest words of all, aimed at Muslims and Sikhs,

exposing his Hindutva-obsessed party to ever-closer scrutiny.

Number crunchers and commentators update their state-by-state tallies every hour of every day trying to augur a result. The big national parties claim confidently that they're pulling ahead and the days of fractured mandates are fading. An emboldened Communist Party of India (Marxist) says it's efforts to create a non-Congress, BJP-free 'Third Front' will bear fruit. Thus may India have its first Dalit prime minister, it's claimed by supporters of an apparently resurgent Uttar Pradesh chief minister.

The prospect makes a pampered middle class shudder in fear of the unknown. The idea that casteism has been banished from public life is given the lie every time you mention Mayawati's name in what passes for polite company.

More than statues of Babu Saheb Ambedkar in every comfortable colony in Delhi, it's the hammer and sickle of India's jungle fighting Maoists that really sets the cat among the pigeons. For proof, just take a look at the surging sighs of relief that greeted the news that the battling sons and daughters of Naxalbari only managed to kill a couple of dozen people on the first day of voting earlier this month.

For the Maoists of Chhatisgarh and surrounding states are India's greatest fear at the moment: however much the media, officialdom and other political parties play them down. As we know in Nepal, the followers of China's Great Helmsman are willing to take their time as power flows their way from the barrel of a gun. They don't call it a

long march for nothing. What's truly remarkable is how little the insurgency figures in this campaign. It's a dark, no-go area of fear and loathing where candidates dare not take on the men and women of violence. Nor do we hear much creative musing from those who would govern about their plans for the guerrilla-ridden enclave that arcs from south of the Vindhyas to north Bihar.

At most, the challenge of the Maoist uprising is seen as a security problem, needing more tribal militias, more security forces, more fighting fire with fire. There's little or no talk of development, ending discrimination, bringing jobs and reclaiming lost territory with positive policies. Or rather, that's what they say they'll do. But little is offered in the way of specifics. It's not the only issue in this election, just the one that candidates, commentators and the public seem least comfortable contemplating.

And yet it's hard not to be fascinated and thrilled by the panoramic exercise of balloting in this vast, unwieldy land. Only an utter cynic would fail to see the hopes for renewal that many of the downtrodden bring to the ballot box. India does the mechanics of elections rather well, as good as any country. To students and devotees of democracy, it's a transcendent moment.

There's no doubting India's wonderful ability to stage elections. If only there were a way to apply that extraordinary tenacity and commitment to ending the poverty that fuels Maoism...wonder what the Election Commission is doing after May 16th? ●

People's budget

The Finance Minister is now accepting direct suggestions from the public for this year's budget via his email address [bhattaraibaburam\(at\)gmail.com](mailto:bhattaraibaburam(at)gmail.com) or website www.baburambhattarai.com. The Ministry is planning to come up with the budget before June.

Web access

whl.travel Nepal now has a travel-booking portal www.kathmanduhotel-link.com, through a partnership between Outdoor Himalayan Treks and whl.travel Global Grassroots. The portal, which is the first of two currently planned for Nepal, will launch smaller tourism operators into the global e-marketplace.

The real one

Real Fruit Juice is hosting a weekly lucky draw, with an all expense paid trip to eight destinations in Malaysia and Thailand and a Sony Bravia 32" LCD featuring among the top prizes.



Soap up

Mahashakti Soap is launching an improved version of Puja washing soap, manufactured with an added ingredient that increases foaming. The company is also upping the size of the packet and offering a free sachet of Dabur Vatika Shampoo with each purchase.



Brand Nepali

Nepalis in India should discard the Gorkha badge and seek an integrated identity

KALIMPONG—The emergence of Bimal Gurung as the new messiah for the Nepali people in search of their own homeland—in the form of Gorkhaland—has brought back the characters from Kiran Desai's

rumour about whether the former Nepali King actually brokered the deal with the BJP. As the 13th and last King of the Gorkha dynasty, he may be the only person set on keeping the Gorkha identity alive.

government of Nepal is unable to figure out its economic agenda when it meets the donor community. We need to move from asking who we are to asking what we can do. The millions of



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, set during the first political movement in the Darjeeling hills in 1986, back to life.

This time, the movement has been kept generally non-violent but the fear of violence remains. Supporting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and choosing former Minister Jaswant Singh as the candidate for the forthcoming federal elections in India has become a hotly debated move.

People are asking whether a district that is nearly 20 per cent Christian should vote for a party that blatantly talks of creating a Hindu nation and has a poor record of accepting other minorities, especially after the attack on Christians in Orissa and Karnataka.

People are also asking that if it's about Nepali identity, why not field a Nepali candidate?

There is further speculation and

While Nepal's identity war has fostered breaking away from the Gorkha badge, it is very strange to see Nepalis in India eager to be associated with a brand that has been banished from Nepal.

Identity is all about your brand, be it a Gujarati or a Jew identified as a merchant or banker, a Keralite women identified with nursing and office administration, the youth from Karnataka identified with IT or a Philipino identified with music. Do Nepalis really want to be identified as the brave Gorkha soldier fighting guns with a Khukuri knife when wars today are fought with the help of satellite guided missiles and sophisticated technology driven weapons?

When the Indian administration asked those demanding a Gorkhaland about their plans for economic growth were the area given a state, the answers were never articulated. This is reminiscent of the way the



DAMBER K SHRESTHA

Nepalis in India cannot just hang their fate based on what will happen to the demand for a separate state. It's more important for them to be integrated in the economic growth of India and carve out the identity of Nepalis in India. Perhaps having a separate state will give them direct control over resources but they need to build competencies and capacities too. Otherwise, the opportunity would be squandered in the same way that Gorkhaland leader Subhas Ghising, played for 20 years on the hopes and aspirations of Nepalis in India. ●

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Uniting People...

Not scared

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 14-28 April

"All of Nepal's big media houses are in the hands of smugglers." Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's accusation against the press on 7 April has been one of the most dangerous yet. While the statement dented the self respect of everyone working in the media, it also served to justify all attacks on free press. Journalists are already working in an insecure environment and the PM's comment added to that insecurity.

Until now the national and international communities have given the Maoists the benefit of the doubt, but the PM's anti-press stance is sure to shake that belief to the core. Many chose to turn a blind eye to the undemocratic and violent behavior of the Maoists in the name of peaceful transformation. But it seems the Maoists are out to take advantage of everyone.

It is no secret that the Maoists joined in the peace process thanks to the support of other political parties, the Indian establishment and the press. Dahal, who 'picked up guns for the people' needed the support of the big media houses to appeal to the people. Nepal's *Kantipur Daily*, India's *The Hindu* and the UK's BBC were all used to build his public persona at a national, regional and international level. Even though the Maoists had brutally murdered many journalists, the press supported them to join mainstream politics for the sake of long term peace.



KIRAN PANDAY

During the eight months, that the Maoists have led the government, Nepalis have experienced anarchy and lack of development. The Maoists still blame the other parties and the media for "not letting the Maoists do their work". Maybe they feel that if they can put a lid on the press, they will be able to control other societal factors. Or Dahal wants to divert attention from the conflicts within his party by pointing fingers at others. It could also be that their ideals do not let the Maoists accept a free press.

Being in the government gives a political force the highest power, which can be easily misused. Thus, it is the duty of the press to keep an eye on the leading party, to investigate and to expose the truth. The media has played this critical role before and continues to do

so now. It is ironic that in the past the Maoists appreciated the media's observations about the government, but now that the tables have turned they are resentful. We are no longer in the conflict years or the interim period—Dahal's shortsightedness will not work. During the decade of conflict Dahal lived in hiding for eight years in Delhi. But now his each and every action is made public.

The media's role of watchdog is even more important in a situation where the leading party has a history of violence. Press freedom has become a liability for the PM. But he has to remember that the press will never back down.

Messy gamble

Editorial in *Kantipur*, 20 April

कान्तिपुर

How ironic that an off-shoot of a party in the coalition government should pose a threat to law enforcement.

Deputy Prime Minister Bamdeb Gautam has said that the Maoist-affiliated trade unions' refusal to cooperate and obey the law is thwarting the government's latest drive to enforce order in casinos.



There are eight casinos in Nepal, targeted at tourists and they employ more than 7,000 Maoist affiliated workers. They argue that without Nepali customers, their jobs would be threatened. But this argument is only a façade. There is reason to believe that corruption and nepotism are other motivating factors since most trade union and YCL leaders have their own relatives enrolled as members at the casinos. In the past, they bribed the police to let Nepalis in—now government officials are taking their share of the pie.

Although they were built for tourists, more Nepalis than visitors frequent casinos. At least 200 Nepalis visit each casino every day. And, the numbers are increasing. If the government wants to enforce the law, it must

be determined.

In total, casinos rake in around Rs 5 billion a year with each taking about Rs 1 million a day. Their collective turnover is up, even though tourism is down. Moreover, since most of them are run by foreigners, their profits are not contributing to the Nepali economy.

Besides revealing the lack of power of the executive in Nepal, failure to enforce the law also reflects on the social, economic and cultural instability of the country. The government should not acquiesce to the demands of a single group; instead, it should bring those guilty of disobeying the law to justice.

Closed

Nepal, 26 April

नेपाल

According to the Police Headquarters, there were an average of three bandas and three road blockades each day in Nepal in 2065. The total number of bandas and road blockades in the five development regions were:

Region	Bandas	Road blockades
Eastern	273	106
Central	195	160
Mid-western	122	156
Western	91	149
Far-western	27	86
Capital	11	114

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Constitutional deviation

Having the best constitution in the world doesn't mean a thing if no one is going to follow it

Nepal's geopolitical location, sandwiched between China and India, has proved to be both a boon and bane advantageous and disadvantageous from the viewpoint of political stability.

The year 1951 marked a significant change in Nepal's politics, and India played a major role in that change. Although the royal proclamation got legitimacy in the country, it was designed and drafted in Delhi on December 1950 and became known as the 'Delhi agreement'.



COMMENT
Ganesh Raj Sharma

The deadline for writing the constitution in the 1951 movement was not met, creating a political vacuum, uncertainty and instability. There were high spirited politicians who lacked experience in state affairs, so the king and other external political forces were able to meddle in Nepali politics.

As the country gradually embraced democratic values, India tried to mould the hanging political situation in its favour. It imposed an economic blockade, which ultimately resulted in the 1990 Constitution, which its writers claimed was the best in the world. Despite a few inconsistencies in the 1990 constitution, it has generally been hailed as a broad document of consensus under which three general elections were conducted and a lasting solution for national integration and development was forged.

The constitution remained uncontested and no amendments were proposed in parliament. But the political parties that had drafted the constitution of 1990, criticised it and ultimately promulgated the Interim Constitution in 2006. The

influence of regional politics was there for all to see. There have been six amendments to the interim constitution since it was passed two years ago.

The main highlights of the 1990 constitution were the prime ministerial parliamentary system and universal adult franchise. Under the prime ministerial parliament, the PM inherits the right to dissolve parliament and call for a fresh mandate from the people any time he deems it necessary.

Unlike in India, there has never been consistency in the court verdicts on the PM's prerogative rights in Nepal. The court has given contradictory verdict at times. The house was dissolved in 1994 in which the court upheld the newly elected government. Man Mohan Adhikari's decision was scrapped by the court.

Ignoring the spirit of parliamentary democracy, this verdict established the power of parliament to remove the PM and infringing the prerogative of the PM.

Consequently, the PM kept on changing and MPs became pawns to make and break the government. The irony is that those who had drafted the constitution and those who had set the precedence made decision against their own decision. In this process, politics prevailed on legal knowledge and expertise. Before this verdict of the Supreme Court, the PM had stayed in power for more than three years but after the verdict the PMs lasted less than two years. It would cost him dearly if he wanted to stay in power—the parliamentary members could bargain for their price.

It was a turning point in Nepali constitutional practice and a deviation in the prime ministerial parliamentary system. The position of the PM remained constantly unstable while MPs had greater bargaining power.

In 2001, after the royal massacre, the ambitious King Gyanendra sacked Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and announced the date for the election. He

introduced direct rule, another major setback in the constitutional practice.

The third major deviation in the constitutional process is the proclamation made by the reinstated parliament in 2006, which had no constitutional base. The constitution which reinstated the parliament was annulled by the reinstated parliament. This parliament then went on to promulgate the interim constitution before the constituent assembly drafted it.

Political parties and individuals are busy fighting for power. They don't seem to be concerned about the new constitutional framework, and they hold intractable views on what it should be like. It is unlikely that we will be able to finalise the constitution but we will rather end up endorsing the draft of a constitution prepared elsewhere. The problems associated with the constitution writing process are beyond the control of Nepali people and politicians. ●

Ganesh Raj Sharma is a legal expert.



KIRAN PANDAY

Ten reasons why ethnic federalism is a bad idea

Ethnicity-based federalism has been on the agenda of many ethno-political groups in Nepal. There are 10 problems associated with it:



COMMENT
B P Giri

1. Ethnic federalism links each ethno-cultural group with an exclusive territorial homeland. Since there are many dozens castes and ethnicities living in Nepal, to be fair to each group, we will need to create an exact number of homeland provinces. This is impractical.

2. A few bigger ethnic groups have demanded an ethno-federal setup. If we let only these groups have ethnicity-based federal provinces, other groups will feel cheated and an agitation for more provinces will follow.

3. Ethnic federalism is based on the belief that people of specific ethnic origin are concentrated in separate regions of the country. But no region has more than 35 per cent of the dominant group, most areas have an even lesser ethnic concentration. What is the justification for letting a few larger minorities become political majorities in their regions?

4. Ethnic federalism is based on the primacy of ethnic identity over other sorts of collective identities. Such thinking puts our newborn democracy at risk as it reduces acts of citizenship to biological inheritance.

5. Democracy is first and foremost about empowering citizens by ensuring the free exercise of natural rights. An ethnic group's understanding of itself as a genetically bounded entity, whose membership is fixed in advance, imposes a type of rigidity over citizenship rights quite

opposed to the democratic spirit. Its basis in tribal thinking cannot be the source of democratic politics.

6. Ethnic federalism romanticises the ideas of race and culture. But cultural practices cannot be wholly group-specific. In fact, we need the openness of democracy to fight many shared cultural evils, including castism, sexism, racism, child marriage, and dowry system. When the unitary state is presented as the sole source of injustice, culture and society are left off the hook.

7. Ethnic federalism is driven by elite self-interest. Many among ethnic elites have been complicit in the unjust political practices of the past. Now they are eager to re-invent themselves as custodians of future ethnic provinces. Their ethnocentric politics of race, culture and identity is often at odds with the

egalitarian agenda of mass political parties.

8. Ethnicity-based federalism is unacceptable for the same reason that an upper-caste dominated hill-centric state is unacceptable. A multicultural arrangement, one that accepts the principle of diversity as its formative principle, is desirable at both central and provincial levels to discourage the nativist tendency ("my tribe, right or wrong") that constitutes the bottom-line of ethno-national politics.

9. Ethnic federalism is geopolitically dangerous. What happens if one or more ethno-federal territories, constitutionally autonomous and possibly self-determinate, declare independence with or without any foreign support? The ongoing rivalry between India and China for regional influence indicates that Nepal is sitting on the fault-line of two hugely incompatible

regional ambitions.

10. Ethnic federalism is a wrong medicine to the problem of caste and ethnicity-based exclusion for which it is prescribed as a cure. The problem of exclusion is real, but we need to find better solutions to it, like: legal protection of minorities, full citizenship and cultural rights, bureaucratic-political inclusion and greater economic opportunity. A substantive inclusion of previously marginalised groups into state organs is already underway. As a result, the state is changing rapidly from its hill-centric ethnic character to a far more inclusive civic entity. We should design our federal units in such a way that they complement these goals, not contradict them. ●

B P Giri is currently on research leave from Dartmouth College, USA, where he teaches postcolonial literature and theory.



CHONG ZI LIANG

Lele

Lele is a small village in southern Lalitpur, perfect for a picnic or country walk and only a 45 minute bus ride from Lagankhel. On the way, you pass through Chapagaon, a cluster of quaint Newari houses with a bajar and temples, where it's also worth stopping for a wander. You can also mountain bike to Lele: but be warned that in the dry seasons the road after Chapagaon is incredibly bumpy and dusty. But as quickly as the dust rises, the lush basin of Lele arrives. There are sprawling rice fields, small local eateries on the roadside and mules carrying bricks from the factory. Just above the Tileswar Mahadeb temple is a small patch of green where you can set up your picnic. But if you want more isolation, walk upwards to the sparsely occupied hills that overlook the fields. Lele's U-shaped valley may mean that you can't view snow mountains from here but what you get are lush green hills.

Godavari and Phulchowki

To scale Pulchoki you start at Godavari. There are some verdant botanical gardens, as well as an outdoor fresh water pool for swimming and boating, a Tibetan monastery and a smattering of little eateries. Pulchoki is even richer in birdlife than Shivapuri. On the way you'll see the Shanti Ban Buddha—a huge golden statue of the Buddha which is said to look better from a distance than close-up. Start early, ideally by 7.30 AM, and be armed with plenty of water, snacks and lunch, although if you reach the summit by lunchtime the soldiers guarding the telecom tower are pretty hospitable and will reward you with a bowl of noodles as you marvel at the spectacular views.

The mountain is lushly vegetated and the footpath pretty untrodden—though there is also a steep and slippery track that snakes its way up to the summit. Pulchoki is home to 570 species of flowering plants, including magnificent red and white rhododendrons in March and April and a third of Nepal's bird species.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Head for

Escaping the chaos of
mean you have to



Nagarjun

Towering above Balaju in the north-west of Kathmandu, Nagarjun offers an excellent day-long retreat. Nagarjun's lush green forest greets you after just a 15-minute drive from Kathmandu. Head up for a three-hour hike through the forest to the top of the 7000ft hill and visit the Jamacho stupa atop the hill.

No worries if you don't enjoy walking. You won't miss the breathtaking view of the mountains and the valley below for there is a motorable road that leads up as well. Famous for its low limestone cliffs, these hills are ideal for rock climbers. Stock up on food and essentials before you set out. Recent incidents of crime means you shouldn't walk alone.

Kakani

With a spectacular view of mountain landscape, Kakani is a great one day get-away. It is easily accessible and there are a handful of small restaurants to eat at. Located about 29-km northwest of Kathmandu, it is at least an hour away by bicycle. However, you can also get a microbus from Machapokhari bus stop, Balaju to Trisuli. Leave early in the morning so that you can spend the day exploring, even walking back via Shivapuri. Kakani is the place where you can eat some of the most delicious rainbow trout and sukuti.



KIRAN PANDAY

the hills

of Kathmandu doesn't
go on a long trek



KIRAN PANDAY



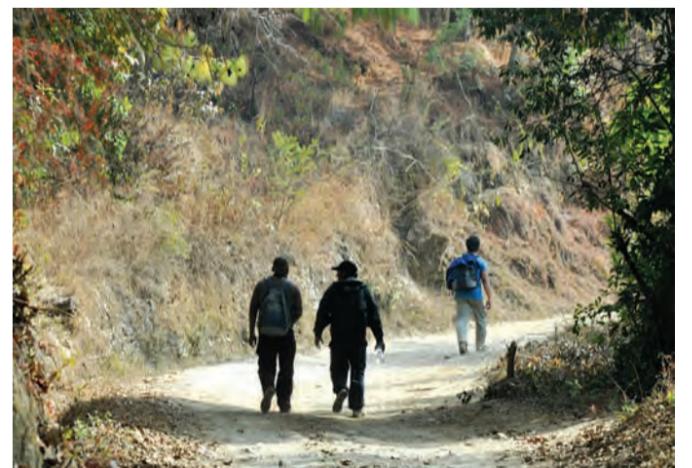
DEWAN RAI

Chobar

For a taste of Nepali folklore, head to Chobar. Easily accessible by bus and within walking distance of Satobato, this is the site where Lord Manjushri supposedly drained the water out of Kathmandu Valley by slicing through the limestone hill with one mighty swipe of his sword.

Indeed, a deep chasm with jagged rocky edges runs through the hills around Chobar. The Bagmati River flows through it, suggesting it was geographical and not mythical forces at work here. Chobar is also perfect for cavers who like squeezing through the maze of underground caves. Guides are on hand to take you through different routes lasting 15-45 minutes. Be prepared for lots of crawling and squeezing. Not for the claustrophobic.

The village itself is picturesque with the 15th century Adinath Lokeshwar Temple dedicated to Rato Machhendranath with an astounding array of metal pots, pans and water containers hanging from its roofs—kitchen utensils donated by newlyweds to ensure a happy marriage.



CHONG ZI LIANG

Shivapuri

National parks are aplenty in Nepal, but only one is within Kathmandu Valley itself. Shivapuri lies on the northern fringe and microbuses go all the way to its gates. Nepalis pay a mere Rs10 for entry but foreigners will need to fork out Rs 250. The park, which is the valley's main water source, offers various hiking routes but the route to Sundarjal is the best for a day trip. Stock up on water and food before setting off from the park entrance as there are no shops inside. And binoculars: Shivapuri is a haven for birdwatchers from all over the world.

Roma Aryal, Shradha Basnyat, Katy Elliott, Chong Zi Liang and Paavan Mathema

A shape of things to come

The demand for Limbuwan autonomy takes on a militant edge



KUNDA DIXIT

KUNDA DIXIT in PANCHTHAR

Amidst the idyllic beauty of Nepal's easternmost districts, its thickly-forested mountains and hills draped with tea, there is a sense of foreboding.

The meal-stop highway settlement of Ranke looked placid enough this week, with passengers waiting for buses or buying fruits from sidewalk vendors.

The calm was suddenly shattered by a brawl between rival Limbuwan activists who came to blows over a turf war concerning highway taxes. "Things look peaceful, but beneath the surface the tension can snap at any moment," says a Phidim-based civil servant.

The epicentre of the struggle by Limbu activists for self-determination and autonomy is in the Panchthar capital of Phidim. The gate of the town is painted over with a 'Welcome to Limbuwan' sign and 'Panthar' and 'Phenden', the original Limbu names for Panchthar and Phidim. There is graffiti along the highway warning 'long noses' to keep off.

Dozens of Limbu groups demanding everything from autonomy to separatism have taken up the flag of identity politics. No one dare be left behind.

Some, like the Sanghiya Limbuwan Rajya Parisad led by Kumar Lingden and ex-airline pilot D K Buddhist want a federal autonomous Limbuwan province within the borders of Nepal. Then there are groups like Pallo Kirat led by ex-RPP Dambar Lawoti and Samjuhang Palungwa's Federal Limbuwan State Council who say they will wage a separatist war for a free Limbuwan state if their demands for self-determination are not met.

Lingden's gripe is that the government had not kept its promise to put the autonomy demands of the Limbuwan and other ethnic groups in the CA agenda.

"We have a one-point demand, which is the Limbuwan autonomous state," he told *Nepali Times*. He denied federalism would lead to separatism, and said the new federal unit would respect the rights of non-Limbus.

The independent Limbu nation is said to cover nine present



LAXMI GAUTAM

GATE TO AUTONOMY: The gate to Phidim welcoming visitors to Limbuwan (left) and Limbuwan militia guard their leaders at the national convention of the Federal Limbuwan State Council in Phidim.

districts to before Prithvi Narayan Shah's "Gorkha war of expansion". Activists here refuse to call it "unification", and one argument is that because the Limbu nation had submitted to the Gorkha king, the understanding is now off since the monarchy is no more. The separatist rhetoric is now staple fare in speeches and workshops here, and in broadcasts of Sumhatlung FM, inaugurated last week by CA chairman Subhas Nembang.

What worries non-Limbus in Phidim is that Limbuwan activists, many of them ex-Maoists, are using the same tactics as the Maoists did during the conflict: threats, extortion and public punishments. So pervasive is the fear that no one we spoke to in Panchthar this week wanted to be quoted by name, and most lowered their voices and looked over their shoulders.

"Is this the way to right historical wrongs?" asked one school teacher here who believes in correcting marginalisation, but not in self-determination. "Do the Kathmandu intelligentsia and donors understand where things are going?"

Journalists here admit they

self-censor dispatches because of the fear of retribution. The *Kantipur* correspondent here had his motorbike set on fire by Limbuwan activists last month, and the police refused to register his complaint. The police have learnt the hard way to lie low. When they confiscated a khukuri from a Limbuwan militant in Phidim recently, agitators surrounded the station and forced police to not just return the knife but to apologise.

Civil servants, civil society and non-Limbus are worried that a spark could set off tit-for-tat ethnic violence. Everyone remembers the last turmoil in this region in the 1950s after the fall of the Ranas, when there was an exodus of hill Parbate and others down to Jhapa. With groups competing to lead the movement by being more hardline, a solution looks difficult. When a five-point agreement was signed last year between Palungwa's group and the government, a copy of the accord was set on fire the next day in Phidim by his student supporters.

Human rights activists have been surprised by how fast things have deteriorated here. Some

blame the Maoists for promoting ethnic state councils and then using them during last year's elections as vote banks. "What should have been political representation within the state structure was given a colonial flavour," explains human rights activist Sushil Pyakurel. "It's only a small step from calling yourself a liberation front to having a separatist agenda."

Indeed, many analysts believe the Maoists are now finding it difficult to put the ethnic genie they unleashed back into the bottle, even as activists have begun to point out that the top three Maoist leaders are Bahuns. Ethnic militias that have erupted in the past three years are all Maoist splinter groups.

Eastern Nepal today could also be an indication of what lies in store if the debate over federalism in the new constitution cannot be contained within the CA. Ethnic Limbus in the mainstream parties can't afford to be anti-Limbuwan, and the dilemma is that most moderate intellectuals are non-Limbu.

Clashes broke out recently in Phidim between supporters of the Limbuwan Rajya and the Kirat Rajya of the Rais, whose territorial claims overlap. There is also muted opposition from some Lepcha (Rong) and Bhotiya people who live in the north.

Says a Rai teacher here: "It's not just the Bahun and Chhetris who are feeling insecure, it's getting dangerous even for us Rais and for Magars and Newars."

And no one is even talking about what would be India's take on all this, as some militants say the Limbuwan state should even include Sikkim and Darjeeling, where the Limbu are known as Tsong.

Additional reporting by Dewan Rai in Kathmandu

See also: 'Rebel rebellion', # 438 by JB Pun

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Explosive legacy

There's no peace without addressing the past

GULMI—On an unusually hot early morning 18 army deminers are sweating in their protective jackets and helmets. They have been doing the dangerous job of excavating mines for hours. It is the seventh day of work. They have already found over 30 mines in Wami Taksar here in the hills of central Nepal and are about to destroy the explosive remnants of war.

Mornings are very crucial for deminers as they have to do as much as they can before it gets too hot to work. They take breaks and work slowly from one mine to another. There's no room for error.



INTERESTING TIMES
Mallika Aryal

During the war the army laid mines to protect its base perimeter in 53 sites across the country. In addition it had 270 places where they had command detonated

explosives. Only 10 minefields and 60 explosive-planted areas have been cleared so far.

Under the terms of the 2006 peace accord, the Nepal Army and the Maoists had to clear the minefields they laid during the war and also destroy unstable IEDs within 60 days of signing the agreement. Besides the army's landmines there are stray improvised explosive devices (IEDs) of the Maoists strewn across the country. Villagers, especially children, are still being killed by them. The Maoist IEDs are uncharted, so the only current solution is to educate the people.



MALLIKA ARYAL

The Nepal Army and UN's Mine Action Team are trying to make up for lost time. In the next few years cleared minefields will be handed back to the community so that children can play safely again.

Addressing what happened in the past is vital to the peace and reconciliation process. Demining is an important part of Nepal's healing process. It has restored confidence in the people of Wami Taksar area that the government is concerned for their safety.

Just like landmines, the other legacy of war is impunity. While the demining process may be moving steadily, the same cannot be said about steps taken to address the atrocities of the past. Too many victims of war have waited too long for the government to take this clause in the peace accord seriously.

Most victims have no trust in the system because their wounds are still fresh. There are families of those who were killed during the war who don't even know how their loved ones spent their last days. The families of the disappeared have waited for a very long time to hear news about the missing. Like mines, this is an explosive inheritance of conflict and if it's not addressed there won't be true peace.

The victims of war in Bardiya called for a banda last week demanding justice for what happened to them and their families during the war. The internally displaced regularly stage sit-ins demanding that the government ensure their safety when they go back to the homes they had to flee during the conflict. Those who suffered injury and torture want reparation and prosecution. And there are those who simply want the responsible to come out and acknowledge that they did wrong, so that they can forgive and move on.

The running feud between the Maoists and the army just distracts attention from the excesses they committed against the Nepali people during the war. The truth is usually delayed or shoved under the rug with the hope that no one will probe. There are people taking advantage of the lack of accountability and impunity, which is why there is no rule of law and crime is rampant.

We are running out of time. Bardiya rose up today because they were tired of the government dilly-dallying. There are thousands of victims who are organising because they are running out of patience. They need assurance that their struggle for justice matter, that the horrible things that happened during the war will never be repeated again. ●

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Please submit CV to operations@chemonics-nepal.com and write the position you are applying for in the subject. Applicants will be reviewed on a rolling basis until all positions are filled. Only short listed applicants will be contacted.

“Nepal and China have win-win ties”

Chinese ambassador to Nepal, Qiu Guohong, spoke to *Nepali Times* ahead of Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal's visit to China next month, covering the gamut of issues between Nepal and China.

Nepali Times: How would you characterise the state of China-Nepal relations at present?

Qiu Guohong: China and Nepal are friendly neighbors since ancient times, and the friendship between China and Nepal is passed on from generation to generation. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations more than 50 years ago, no matter what changes occurred in the international situation and national conditions of both China and Nepal, the relations between the two countries have developed in a healthy and smooth way. China and Nepal always strictly abide by the five principles of peaceful coexistence, respect and trust each other, treat each other as equals and sincerely provide assistance. The relationship is indeed a good example of harmonious coexistence and beneficial cooperation between big and small countries.

There have been a slew of high-level visits by Chinese officials in the past year, does this indicate closer economic, cultural and political ties?

Since the formation of the current coalition government, high-level officials from both countries have made frequent exchanges. Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' attended the closing ceremony of Beijing Olympic Games. Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and special envoy of the Chinese Government Hu Zhengyue paid visits to Nepal one after the other. Foreign Minister Upendra Yadav has just concluded his visit to China.

The visits show that the Chinese side attaches great importance to the development of China-Nepal relations. We are ready to work with the Nepali side to consistently enhance the friendly cooperation between the two sides, achieve mutual benefit, benefit the people of both countries and contribute to the peace and stability of this region. In my opinion, China and Nepal can strengthen cooperation in the following aspects. First, accommodate each other's political concern. China respects Nepal's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and respects her choice on the social system and development path in light of its national conditions. Second, enhance the economic cooperation on the basis of mutual benefit.

The Chinese side will continue to provide assistance to Nepal to the best of its capacity. We will also positively consider increasing aid to Nepal, and put the limited assistance into the most needed projects that can improve the economy and the livelihood of Nepali people. China supports competent and well-established Chinese companies to invest in Nepal and encourages Chinese tourists to visit Nepal. Third, boost people-to-people and cultural exchanges. We will try to expand the cooperation in personnel and cultural sectors through human resource training, exchanges of youth delegations and holding of a 'China Festival' so as to have the China-Nepal friendship deeply rooted in the hearts of two peoples and passed on from generation to generation. Fourth, strengthen the coordination and cooperation in international and regional affairs. Both China and Nepal are developing countries, and share broad common interests on international and regional issues. It's necessary for the two sides to further enhance cooperation.

What would be the priority issues that the Chinese side would raise during Prime Minister Dahal's visit to China?

The upcoming visit of Prime Minister Prachanda to China is one of the most important events in China-Nepal relations this year. Chinese leaders attach great importance to it and concerned authorities are doing necessary homework to ensure the success of the visit. During the PM's visit, the Chinese side will make some proposals to further expand

bilateral relations from a long-term perspective so as to strengthen the comprehensive cooperation and benefit the people of both countries.

The major topics include how to promote bilateral political relations, strengthen economic cooperation and trade, boost people-to-people and cultural exchanges and push forward existing traditional and friendly bilateral relations to a new height.

Are there any concrete plans to extend the Beijing-Lhasa railway to Nepal?

It has been listed in the Medium and Long-term Railway Network Planning of China to extend the Qinghai-Tibet railway from Lhasa to Shigatze, and from Shigatze to Nyalam. I believe that the extension of Qinghai-Tibet railway to the China-Nepal border will have a positive influence on establishing new China-Nepal road links and promoting economic cooperation and trade between China and Nepal and between China and South Asia. As Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, I'd like to play an active role in that.

But how exactly could Nepal benefit as a transit region for trade between China and India?

Nepal is situated between China and India, and shares long border lines with both of them, enjoying an advantageous geographic position. China and India, as two major developing countries in the world, have maintained stable yet fast economic growth in recent years, and effectively boosted the economic development in the region. Nepal could make full use of the geographic advantage and traditional friendship with both countries to create a conducive economic atmosphere, take trade facilitation measures and cultivate professionals so as to benefit from the fast economic development of China and India and stimulate its domestic economic growth.

The Chinese side is willing to conduct economic cooperation and trade with Nepal and India on the basis of mutual benefit, and make consultations on how to facilitate trade and economic development.

Nepal's remote northern districts need better connectivity. How could China help?

The 15 districts of the northern part of Nepal share common borders with China's Tibet Autonomous Region. The Chinese side attaches great importance to border trade between China and Nepal. The China-Nepal border trade has been developed vigorously since 1962. Currently, there are five major border trading points. There has

already been a road linkage between Zhangmu and Kodari. Now the Chinese side is upgrading the infrastructure in Zhangmu Pass and the surrounding road, and is positively considering initiating construction of the dry port near Tatopani in the Nepali side as early as possible. The Syabrubesi-Rasuwagadi road is now under construction under a Chinese grant. After the completion of this road, the Chinese side will push for the establishment of Kyerong Pass, which will mark the inception of the second trade corridor between China and Nepal.

I'm convinced that these measures will further enhance the border trade between two countries and benefit their people.

Any chance of China lifting visa requirements for Nepalis visiting Hong Kong?

Hong Kong is a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China. The Chinese Government deals with Hong Kong affairs in accordance with the principles of "one country, two systems" and the Basic Law of the Hong Kong SAR. Therefore, only the Government of the Hong Kong SAR has the power to decide on whether to grant Nepali citizens free visa treatment and when to grant this treatment. As the Chinese Ambassador to Nepal, I am willing to convey this aspiration to the Government of Hong Kong SAR through an appropriate channel and at a suitable time.

How do you assess the measures taken by the Nepali government vis-à-vis Tibet-related issues?

In 1959, the Chinese Government started carrying out democratic reform and abolished the theocratic feudal serfdom, through which millions of serfs got liberation and personal freedom. For the past 50 years, tremendous changes have taken place in Tibet: the Tibetan people enjoy and exercise all rights endowed by the Constitution and Ethnic Region Autonomy law of the People's Republic of China, live much better lives with the comprehensive progress of social welfare, harmony in religion, prosperity in culture protection and development, and have been the real owner of Tibet. Here I want to emphasise that the democratic reform in Tibet is an important milestone of the serfdom abolition campaign in the whole world, the important progress of international human rights cause, and an important contribution to the democracy, freedom and human rights of the world made by the Chinese people including Tibetan compatriots.

Tibet has been an inalienable part of China since ancient times. The Tibet issue concerns the unification and core interest of China. The abolition of feudal serfdom and an ethnic autonomous region system can benefit the Tibetan people, which has been proven by the big development and changes of Tibet in the past 50 years. Any force or any person who tries to deny the above-mentioned facts, is holding ulterior motives. The intentions to restore the feudal serfdom and separate Tibet from China by the Dalai clique will incur strong objection from all Chinese including Tibetans, and is doomed to failure.

The Nepali Government and people always pursue a one-China policy, and firmly support the Chinese side on Tibet-related issues, which is highly appreciated by the Chinese Government and people. Especially in March 2009, the sensitive period for Tibet-related issues, the Nepali Government has taken strong and effective measures to successively foil the attempts of so-called 'Tibet independence' activists to conduct all kinds of sabotage and disruptive activities targeted at the Chinese Embassy in Nepal and other establishments on China's territory, and ensured the security and proper order of the Chinese Embassy. We highly appreciate that.



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Forgotten

BBC doc *The Forgotten Refugees*, is an admirably succinct summary of the Bhutanese refugee situation in Nepal and captures the complex human calculations of the resettlement solution.

BBC correspondent and director Amanda Burrell begins by following Chandra, a refugee and midwife, whose narrative describing camp life intersects nicely with a sequence of the impressively efficient food operations, representative of the humanitarian aid work honed over the 20 years of the camps' existence. More importantly, it allows us to appreciate the trauma of Chandra's and her elderly parents' expulsion from Bhutan and their current plight, illustrative of the



CRITICAL CINEMA
A Angelo D'Silva

experience of many of her peers.

For the middle portion of the film Burrell shifts to Bhutan, where the crew is allowed a brief day visit to that gorgeous and

tightly restricted country. It is here that she garners some of the most intriguing interviews, interspersed as it is with weak *Lonely Planet*-esque cultural relativisms. There are chilling comments by Michael Rutland, an apologist for the Bhutanese position, that gives a frightening double-edge to the response to human rights activists protesting the citizenships act of 1988: "Because harmony was so much part of the way of life... it was very difficult to know how to deal with this *sudden promotion of disharmony*... I think measures were taken to try to promote harmony."

It is followed by denials from a government official of any wrongdoing and denials that most of the refugees were ever actually Bhutanese citizens. But upon her return to Nepal Burrell chooses to provide a platform to negate the Bhutanese version of events. The footage of an aged Bhutanese man with his battered folder of worn documents of taxes, marriage certificates and yes, an unmistakable citizenship identity card provides a striking illustration of the

A reminder of the still unresolved and evolving predicament of Nepal's Bhutanese refugees

frustration and lunacy of the situation of the refugees.

By minimizing any indications that many Bhutanese refugees have forayed outside the camps for work and education, *Forgotten Refugees* fails to underscore the one other option for the remaining Bhutanese refugees—some kind of compromise that affords the Bhutanese refugees the right to lawfully work and live outside the camp in Nepal either as citizens or withholding their political rights for repatriation.

In the final portion of the documentary Burrell focuses on the resettlement program to third-countries. Her treatment of the subjects who have chosen third-country repatriation captures both the sense of uncertainty and the tantalizing promise of a more prosperous life. But it also underscores another often missed aspect—the path to the conclusion of the stateless status of its participants. For a Nepali audience, *The Forgotten Refugees* might be a misnomer, but Burrell does a very important service in reminding us that the current third country solution that will take an estimated five years to implement accommodates presently only half of the 100,000-plus refugees, that the camps will continue to require international aid, and that the promise of prosperity in the developed world is only a substitute for the aspirations of the displaced refugees for whom a political solution has not yet been forthcoming.

Minister of Information Lyonpo Khandku Wangchuk, when confronted with the allegations that people were tortured, countered, "We are a peace loving Buddhist country. One of the major problems in our cities today is stray dogs. We don't have the heart to get rid of them. How do we do this to fellow human beings, fellow citizens?" With Bhutan unable to accommodate the cultural expression of a minority in its definition of citizen, the international community has given it a pass on this transgression of rights as it absorbs the displaced victims of Bhutan's radical ethnic policing. Perhaps the world and Nepal will have to deal next with displaced dogs, who are not native to Bhutan. ●

The Forgotten Refugees airs on the BBC World News channel on 25 April at 6.55 PM; 26 April 6.55 AM, 1.55 PM and 9.55 PM local time.

Golfers in the valley

By the second day of the 16th Surya Nepal Masters Golf Tournament at the Gokarna Forest Resort on Wednesday, Nepali golfer Shiva Ram Shrestha and Sri Lankan Mithun Perera were in the lead.

Professional players from Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India, Malaysia and Australia are competing on the course.

A separate game for amateurs, with players from India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal was won by the team led by former Indian Open winner Vijay Kumar. Vijay carded a round of five-under par in the Standard Chartered Pro-

Am on Tuesday, which kicked off the event.

Nepali players will be hoping to emulate the 2007 victory of Deepak Thapa Magar, who is also taking part this year as is last year's winner - Indian golfer Shamim Khan. Other players

to watch include Nepali golfer Deepak Acharya, Siddikur Rahman from Bangladesh, Anura Rohana from Sri Lanka, Sasidaran from Malaysia and Ashok Kumar and Jamal Hossain Mollah from India among many others.

Broadcaster Ten Sports will cover the tournament in a 60-minute program. The event goes on until 25 April. ●



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ABOUT TOWN

EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **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

- ❖ **Tai chi & chi kung**, 25 April, 9-11 AM at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel. 4410402
- ❖ **Buddhism in a Nutshell**, one day course, 26 April, 8AM-6PM at Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel. 4410402
- ❖ **Seminar** by Sotai & Kai therapy centre at Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, 9-11AM, 28 April. 5013554
- ❖ **Call for entries for Film South Asia** till 31 May, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5552141

MUSIC

- ❖ **An evening with Manose Singh**, 25 April, Yala Maya Kendra, 5PM, Patan Dhoka
- ❖ **Roots**, a musical performance by Bob Manes along Desmond O'Flattery and Anthony Correll, 5.30- 8 PM. Lazimpat Gallery Cafe. 4428549
- ❖ **Kathmandu express**, performance by International Acts, 7.30 PM onwards free entry at Moksh
- ❖ **Live band** every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Durbar Marg. 4227288
- ❖ **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 Gis 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 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

- ❖ **European BBQ** at Fusion bar, Dwarika Hotel, Rs 1499/- 24 April, 7PM onwards. 4479448
- ❖ **Weekend Brunch** by the Poolside every Saturday and Sunday, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu, 11AM-3PM. 4273999
- ❖ **Pizza & Pasta** at the Rox Restaurant every Monday & Tuesday, starts from 13 April, Hyatt Regency. 4489362
- ❖ **New York Cafe**, Singha Mahal, Thapathali
- ❖ **Home made pasta** at Alfresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- ❖ **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 culinary delights** every Friday from Greece, Italy The Café, Hyatt Regency, 6.30PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Nhuchhe goes Thai** at Nhuchhe's Thai Kitchen, Baluwatar. 4429903
- ❖ **Fusion** of Marcela Raganis new menu and Mannie's new bar at Dhokaima Café. 5522113
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **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

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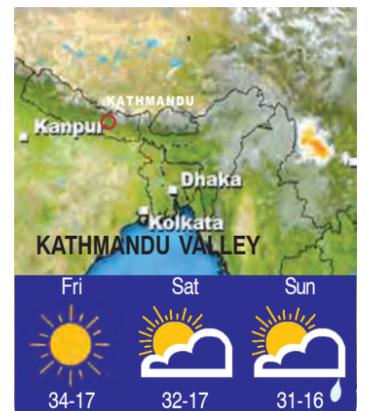
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WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The brief shower of Tuesday afternoon brought relief to the Valley residents who have been experiencing unexpectedly hot days in April which they used to see only in late May or June. Though such showers are the usual characteristics of spring throughout the midhills, they have been too rare and short this time following the six month long drought. Three hundred families from a village in Sindhuli District reportedly abandoned their traditional homes after their local spring source dried up. Satellite images of Thursday noon indicate the same pattern for the weekend. It means hot days with sunny intervals, passing clouds and smog with a good chance of brief showers towards the afternoon.




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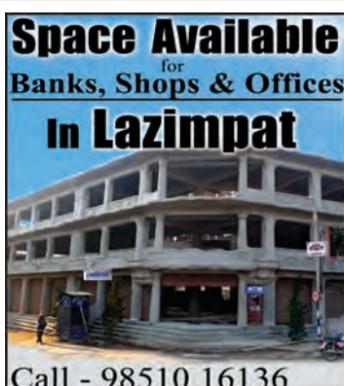
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MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

ONE TRACK: National Janamorcha Party stages a 10-day protest against federalism at Maitighar Mandala on Monday.



KIRAN PANDAY

FACE LIFT: A painter at work at the premises of Shital Nibas, the office of President Ram Baran Yadav.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

BALLAD DAYS: Pandit Vinod Kumar performs at a gajal night at Rastriya Nach Ghar on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

MODEL STUDENTS: Winners of VOW Magazine's Top 10 College Women collect their awards at Everest Hotel on Sunday.



LEE

AMERICAN ACE: The Commonwealth and US tennis teams celebrate after the US won the Quetta Cup double's tournament at Phora Darbar on Saturday.

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Asian Asstrologers' Convention

Nepal's not a failed state, it's the world's most fatalistic state. Why else would Kathmandu be chosen to host the Asian Astrologer's Convention in June? If you are planning to get married, launch a new education consultancy, or stage a coup d'etat then it would be wise to time it for the dates that Asian astrologers will be here. You can be sure the soothsayers have ensured that it's an extremely auspicious day during which there will be no bunds, no chukka jams, no afternoon hurricane and all present and future enemies will be vanquished. **Asstrologers** from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Japan, Malaysia, Burma and Sri Lanka will be attending, although strangely absent are the DPRK. Our country's foremost jyotisis will host the conf. But Nepal's comrades have a lot to learn from other countries, for example numerologists in Burma determined that the most auspicious day to crack down on pro-democracy demonstrators in Rangoon was on 8 August 1988, the infamous 8-8-88.



All the gossip this week concerns the army. Was this move

prompted by the COAS politely declining PKD's offer of ambassadorship because he already has lucrative UN appointments lined up in Baghdad or Kabul? Is his vociferous opposition to integration becoming an irritant to neighbours who want UNMIN **outahere**? Whatever the case, Badal and his Baddies thought they had the timing right to sack the Chief because the Indians are distracted by elections and JNK was on a China junket. What they didn't bargain for was the complete rejection by the Indian security establishment of any meddling with the Nepal army and the fact that the Indian army chief is Gen Cutwall's buddy from the academy. And the Indian elections had something to do with it because Indian Baddies went on an offensive in Jharkhand, reminding Delhi there is no way they'll tolerate Nepali Maoists calling the shots in the army. It was serious enough for Ms Patil to have a prez-to-prez chat on Wednesday with our very own Ram Baran guru.



Even generals not particularly fond of Gen Cutwall have rallied

behind the chief, and now back Gen Chatra Man. And in this entire sordid episode the guy who's come out as #1 Opportunist is Cool Jarsap who has been cosying up to the comrades in conduct unbecoming of an officer and a gentleman. Nauseating, seeing the general behaving like a party apartchik on **chakari mode**. The comreds have now succeeded in doing to the army what the kangresis and eh-malays did to the police. Earlier, ambitious generals knocked at the doors of royal relatives to get a proper hearing. These days they route their complaints through Baddie ministers, high-profile conflict beads and friendly dips.



The only saving grace is that there

is someone even **less kewl** than Gen Cool: Bum Deb. The fellow lost the election, and has been the most spectacular failure in his inability to control the deteriorating law and order situation, but he has managed to wiggle his way to become the seniormost Eh-malay in the government. He gave the nod to PKD sending the spastikarran letter without even consulting his party and conveniently when his party boss was away. His action has led the UML now to the verge of collapse. Wait a minute is that what the Maoists are really trying to do by taking on the army? There are now enough grounds to believe that by making Leftist God their home minister, the Maaobaddies were using him as a fifth column. He'd

conveniently stay at home when the time came for them to take over the state.



Comrade Baidya has more faith in private enterprise than in institutions of the government, it seems. The ideologue chose a private nursing for treatment while President Ram Baran Yadav had himself operated upon at the much-maligned Bir Hospital sometime back.



These figures just came in: the total number of bund days in 2065: 768. Total number of highway blockades last year: 1,211.



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