

Times nepalnews.com
Weekly Internet Poll # 449

Q. Should Gen Katawal step down as Chief of Army Staff?

Total votes: 8,180

Yes: 29.2%
No: 68.7%
Don't know: 2.1%

Weekly Internet Poll # 450. To vote go to: www.nepaltimes.com
Q. What is your opinion about the federalism?

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After a marathon eight-hour meeting in Baluwatar on Thursday, the Maoist secretariat decided to go ahead with its plan to "take action" against Army Chief Gen Rookmangud Katawal. It couldn't have been otherwise. The Maoists had painted themselves into a corner by making this a make-or-break prestige issue.

Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal was squeezed by pressure from India and political parties on the one hand, and from his hardline rank-and-file on the other. It was becoming clear that the internal pressure was much stronger. In a way, "taking action" could mollify his cadre, and that process could be allowed to drag on to appease Delhi and the parties.

The other compromise worked out by the UML is to start with a clean slate by getting Katawal, the Maoist favourite Gen Kul Bahadur Khadka and Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa to step down. The proposal is still on the cards, although the Maoists reject Thapa's ouster and the NC rejects Katawal's.

But under a "wholesale" deal, the Maoists are trying to woo the NC to join the government in return for agreeing to Katawal's removal. Sujata Koirala appears to be a contender, even though NC leaders Sher Bahadur Deuba and others are said to be strongly against her.

At Thursday's meeting, the Maoists also discussed in detail their plan for a massive show of force on the streets of the capital on May Day to put pressure on anyone opposed to their stance on the army row. The plan is to paralyse the state and bring the capital to a standstill with belligerent crowds in 32 major intersections in the Valley. ●

Subhas Devkota

Mayday, Mayday!



KIRAN PANDAY

SHOW OF FORCE: The Maoists are planning a mammoth May Day rally in the capital on Friday to put pressure on those opposed to their plan to sack the army chief. This was Tuesday's rally, with the army headquarters in the background.

Full story p4

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War by other means

The army has shown it is better at masking its fears than the Maoists

The Maoists didn't emerge victorious from the devastating war against the state, but the security forces lost it the moment the Seven Party Alliance signed the 12-point understanding with Maoists in November 2005 in New Delhi.



STATE OF THE STATE
C K Lal

The little goodwill the army had in urban areas was also squandered when soldiers became Gyanendra storm troopers after the 1 February 2005 takeover. But Girija Prasad Koirala forgot and forgave when he promoted an accused human rights violator to the post of Chief of Army Staff (CoAS). But many in Kathmandu still find it difficult to accept that one of the loudest critics of the democratic parties, who once wrote op-eds under the pseudonym Ajay P Nath, has suddenly become the chief proponent of constitutional supremacy, freedom of the press and parliamentary democracy.

Ambitious individuals are pragmatic in their careers. When the 240-year old Shah dynasty passed into history, an army as old as the kingdom earned its republican spurs by literally doing nothing. Behind the scenes deals were never disclosed, but was security of tenure for the incumbent army chief a part of the bargain? Then the guerrilla chieftain and prime minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, should have nothing to complain about. The trouble is he also has to placate his deputy commander, Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, who needs to be seen to be doing something to bring a former foe under direct control of the party high command.

Behind all the talk of civilian control versus constitutional supremacy, a lingering antipathy between warriors of opposite camps is what lies at the core of the current Maoist-military row. The generals haven't yet recovered from the trauma of their failure, and the Maoists find it hard to accept that power flows out of the ballot box. Both sides in the war of words are caught in the vortex of their own vitriolic rhetoric. Unlike in the past, however, the army has shown that it is better at masking its fears than Maoist

commanders.

"All war is deception," said a great military strategist of 500 BC. The Maoists haven't publicly abandoned what they call 'The People's War'. The Nepal Army still finds it difficult to submit itself unequivocally to civilian control of the Maoist party. The country is still in a state of war for all intents and purposes. The military knows what it's doing, and so do the Maoists. The rest of us are merely guessing or reacting.

Under the pressure of Chinese and Indians, Dahal wants to let the mandate of UNMIN lapse when it comes to an end on 23 July 2009. With that deadline in mind, he recently assured visiting British Under Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans, Kevan Jones, recently that the government's special committee for supervision, integration and rehabilitation of the combatants would complete its work by mid-July. But the prime minister knows that the schedule can't be met when the incumbent army chief is allergic to the very word 'integration'. So the CoAS had to go to make way for a more amenable general.

When the general waiting in the wings realised he may be bypassed by a colleague on the verge of superannuation, news of an impending coup was carefully planted in the friendly media to spur anti-Maoist forces into action. Mission complete, rumours of a 'soft coup' were strongly denied.

It was a publicity coup, meticulously planned and brilliantly executed. Clearly, the army has a better corps of propaganda consultants these days than it did during the war years.

For the Maoists, too, it's a 'heads I win, tails you lose' proposition. If Dahal can manage to sack the CoAS, he will be feted as a brilliant tactician. If the Maoists are forced to backtrack, they can always turn the episode into a publicity stunt: "Look, we tried our best. But other parties are prisoners of the past." The UML too has little to lose, as always, it will be on the side of the winner when the game ends. The victim will be the NC. When a political party has to hold the coat-tails of a military chief to establish its credentials, there is something wrong somewhere. ●



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PRESS FOR FREEDOM

From Angola (Not Free) to Zimbabwe (Not Free), freedom of the press is under attack in many parts of the world. Tagged 'partly free', we in the Nepali media should perhaps be thankful that we are still better off than some other countries. But that's about it.

Press freedom is an absolute. One can't be 'partly free'. It has become fashionable these days for the government to re-invent 'Asian values' of press freedom and democracy: the argument that individual and political rights are somehow less important than social economic and cultural rights. It's the old debate all over again, and the Maoist-led government is resurrecting a class-based definition of rights to justify stifling criticism in the press.

Unfortunately, we find the UN's human rights wallahs and bilaterals, who would never agree to any fetters on the press in their own countries, going along with this. It's like saying: "Sorry about the chains, but you're not fully ready for freedom yet."

Our post-conflict situation is characterised by a collapse of the rule of law and an epidemic of impunity. Things will get worse because the state is not serious about protecting human rights, and the NHRC has limited capacity and commitment. The UN's OHCHR is under pressure to go along because it wants to extend its mandate. In fact, it should remember why Nepal's human rights activists lobbied hard to bring it here in 2005 in the first place: to augment independent monitoring. That is needed more than ever when we have a state actor that is intolerant of dissent.

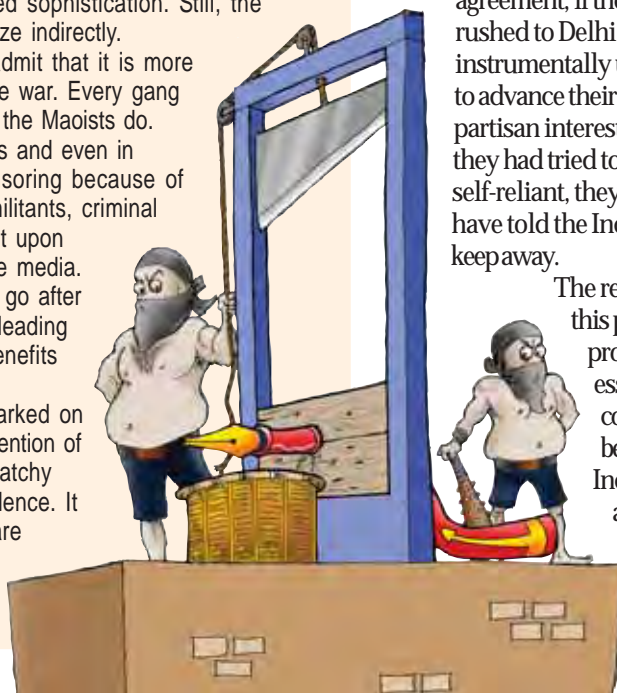
The war may be over, but the behaviour of the Maoists in the avatar of their militant wings are still getting away with violence and intimidation. Murderers walk around in the sanctuary of UNMIN-supervised camps. Not a single killer of journalists in the past three years has been caught and tried.

The Maoist leadership lacks understanding about democracy and press freedom at a philosophical level. Freedom in the Maoist lexicon is the freedom to blindly support the party agenda. Or else. Anyone who doesn't agree is automatically labelled "feudal", "lackey", or "running dog reactionary class enemy".

After using ham-handed methods in the past year to vandalise media offices and attack journalists, the Maoists are getting slightly more sophisticated: that is, if the prime minister publicly calling journalists "smugglers" can be called sophistication. Still, the strategy is now to put on the squeeze indirectly.

Journalists across the country admit that it is more difficult to report now than during the war. Every gang with a gun now feels it can do what the Maoists do. From the eastern hills to the Madhes and even in Kathmandu, journalists are self-censoring because of the fear of retribution from ethnic militants, criminal gangs and the Maoists. Each is bent upon outdoing the other in intimidating the media. The state is unable and unwilling to go after the perpetrators because the party leading the government feels it indirectly benefits from a cowed-down media.

Press Freedom Day is being marked on 3 May in Kathmandu to draw the attention of South Asian governments to their patchy record in protecting media independence. It gives us no satisfaction that there are countries in the region where journalists have it worse than us.



BILASH RAI

Delhi dallying

Maoist opposition to India's role in the army row is hypocritical and futile

The army row gives us a glimpse of India's concerns, its power and limits.

The Maoists have been relatively successful in portraying the opposition to sacking General Katawal as India-inspired. They are convinced Delhi's suggestions and warnings



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

constitute an unacceptable interference in Nepal's internal affairs. The Maoists then tell their support base that they have not been able to effect any change because of the power exercised by "expansionists and feudal collaborationists".

What they forget is that they would still be in the jungles fighting an unwinnable war if not for India's mediation. If Nepal's political class had succeeded in mounting a solely domestic opposition to the royal regime, if the parties and Maoists had not needed India to act as 'facilitator' for the 12-point-agreement, if they had not rushed to Delhi to instrumentally use India to advance their own partisan interests, and if they had tried to be more self-reliant, they could have told the Indians to keep away.

The reality is that this peace process is essentially a compact between India (which acted as a guarantor of the 12-point deal and

later got the army on board), the Maoists (who promised to accept multiparty democracy) and NC (which agreed to dump the monarchy). And now, the Maoists suddenly remember that domestic political decisions are none of India's business.

You cannot be selective about a foreign role. If they used Delhi at some point, when Delhi feels its interests are at stake, it will get involved. All politicians are aware of this reality so whipping up a frenzy about the Indian role without tackling the fundamentals of national politics and economy is hypocritical, futile and opportunistic.

The real question is why did the Indians assert themselves this time around? Since November 2005, India's role has been critical but low-key. There have only been three occasions when Delhi stepped in visibly.

When the Maoists walked out of government in September 2007, Shyam Saran rushed in as the PM's special envoy to push all parties to go for polls. When the second Madhes movement threatened to derail the April polls, a meeting was held at the Indian ambassador's residence between Madhesi leaders and government representatives, preparing the basis for the eight-point deal. This had the unfortunate consequence of reinforcing the image of Madhesi leaders as Indian puppets, but passed a powerful message to the palace (which saw that movement as the last hope to prevent elections) about where India stood.

This is the third time. Delhi feels that the balance of power on which the peace process rests will collapse if the Maoists sack Katawal and appoint a more pliable chief. The institutional

structure would be shaken and the party would dictate terms to the army. They see it as a sub-plot of the larger Maoist plan to back away from the commitment to multiparty democracy.

And there is an underlying China dimension. Beijing is quite happy with the Maoists for having delivered on its promise to stifle Tibetan dissent. China feels that the top echelons of the Nepal Army are dominated by officers close to India and the US. It has already backed the integration process and would be happy to see Maoist commanders occupy strategic positions in the NA.

India wants 'controlled stability' in Nepal to protect its security interests. But not only does lasting stability look elusive, even the control and influence they exert would get steadily diluted if the Maoists take over the army. The aim of co-opting and 'taming' the Maoists would fall flat.

However, Lainchaur did go overboard in passing the message. The nature of the present envoy has not helped either. A senior NC leader, considered to be close to India, said: "Rakesh Sood lacks the patience and clarity of Shyam Saran, or the warmth and empathy of Shiv Mukherjee. His interpersonal skills are weak and no one trusts him."

What is clear is that this episode has harmed ties between India and the Maoist-led government. There will not be an immediate reaction if the Maoists go ahead, but a policy review when a new Indian government comes in is certain. And don't be surprised if sections in the Indian establishment who have criticised the 12-point agreement, and who prefer to play the 90s game of breeding instability as a way to keep Nepali political actors in check, gain ascendance. ●

LETTERS

MIDDLE KINGDOM

As CK Lal points out in his column, the history of Nepali foreign policy consists of an obvious continuity ('From Republic to Middle Kingdom,' # 448). Every party that ever led this state has attempted to balance India against China. Could it be that our politicians mistake Nepal for a great power?

The reality of international politics is this: powerful nations do what they want and smaller nations will not be able to obtain any profit from attempting to manipulate them. Let's look at a recent example: Mikhail Saakashvili's attempt to pit Russia against Europe and the US has only resulted in his becoming a joke and with no change in the status-quo. Russia and NATO are not at loggerheads with each other.

The only way Nepal can change the status-quo within its own region is for it to grow in relative power. Power is fungible and is a function of stability. Therefore, it would be best for the

striving statesmen of Nepal to accept the status quo and work as junior partners with China and India, avoiding any confrontation, all the while focussing on the real task at hand: to build a stable Nepali state.

Nishant Acharya, email

COAS ISSUE

It is sad to see that *Nepali Times* doesn't see how the army chief was directly disobeying the elected government on issues such as new recruits (Editorial, 'Armed and dangerous', #448). The elected government provides the budget for the new personnel but by not obeying the orders Katawal has undermined people power. In addition, Nepal Army Chief Rookmangud Katawal, was appointed when Nepal was not a federal republic. He should have understood that it will be difficult to work with the Maoists. Therefore, the army chief should resign now. Nepal also needs to be united against foreign forces because they have

no business interfering in personal matters of the state.

Pashupati Neupane, email

● Thank you for Pramod Mishra's excellent analysis of the bind that Pushpa Kamal Dahal finds himself in (Guest Column, 'Give PKD his due', #448). The media, your paper included, should cut him a bit of slack. Let's give credit where it's due.

Keshav Sharma, email

● From his lofty perch in the US, Pramod Mishra seems to be seeing Nepal through rose-tinted glasses. Come home, Mr Mishra, and see for yourself how your guru PKD is taking this country down the path to totalitarianism.

Soni Shrestha, email

● Three cheers for your editorial 'Armed and dangerous', #448). You have gone to the heart of the matter, which is that as long as the Maoists continue their practice of

threats, intimidation and extortion and until they prove that they are no longer a force that is going to take over the state by violent means they don't deserve to be tampering with the national army.

Jagat Jung, email

● I want to salute you for your courageous columns for giving positive and well directed suggestions. The country is run by a new naked emperor, supported by his sycophant cronies. He is pretending to be fully-clothed but he is there in all his naked glory for all of us to see. If somebody says something the YCL will come after them and threaten them until they say that the emperor is clothed. These are desperate times but the media shouldn't keep quiet. We are tired of stories that are one-sided. We want to read positive stories that are constructive and bold.

Bishwesh Shrestha, email

Baffling donors

The Nepal Development Forum (NDF) meeting scheduled for 12-14 May in Kathmandu has been overshadowed by political wrangling over the army. The meeting that used to be held every two years is taking place after five years. And it may still be cancelled at the last minute if donors decide not to participate because of continued political volatility.

As it is, this NDF is geared up to focus more on Nepal's political than economic development. As a pre-requisite to support,



COMMENT
Achyut Wagle

donors want a commitment from the Maoist government on its respect for democracy, an open market and right to private property. UNMIN's

role, army integration and impunity also figure as conditions for aid.

The government is going ahead with the preparations of the meeting where a consortium of 40 of Nepal's donors will sit and discuss development assistance. The NDF this year has been tagged 'Peace and Socio-Economic Transformation: A Basis for New Nepal' and besides donors, six specially invited import-export banks, mainly from India and China, will also be attending.

Four main policy papers will constitute the basis for deliberations. The first is Nepal's national development strategy for the transitional period rather clandestinely put together by Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai's small group of trusted aides. Second is a paper on the economic restructuring package for achieving economic transformation in the short term and creating policy bases for state restructuring in the long run.

The NDF meeting will have a political rather than economic agenda

The third policy paper looks at 'revising' foreign aid policy to 'increase understanding between the government and donors'. The effectiveness of aid and Nepal's absorption capacity for it will be discussed. The fourth is a trade and investment policy that aims to develop Nepal as a preferred destination for foreign direct investment, and aspires to replace foreign aid by foreign trade, encourage investment, both foreign and domestic, mainly under public-private-partnership.

All these issues are not new, and merely rearrange old priorities under different categories. The Maoist-led government which also holds the finance ministry has already infuriated donors by breaking the tradition and not involving them in pre-consultative preparatory meetings. Minister Bhattarai's public remarks labeling them, particularly Bretton Woods institutions, as agents of global imperialism has appalled many of them.

This time, the donors, including the World Bank that coordinated with all other donors, co-hosted and co-chaired the last NDF, will only be asked to support the policies and programs put forth by the government. Further, Minister Bhattarai has predicted that Nepal will not need foreign assistance from 2025 onwards because by then the economy will be self-reliant. The ground reality doesn't support such optimism. To bring down our dependence on foreign assistance of about 47 per cent at present to 5 per cent in 15 years, we must achieve an annual GDP growth rate of at least 11 per cent throughout. For this, the non-agricultural sector should up to 19 per cent, which requires at least 9,000 MW of power supply and environment conducive to rapid industrialisation. It is impossible for all these miracles to transpire in 15 years, which is the normal gestation period of a medium-scale power project.

The donor community is clueless as to what is prompting Bhattarai to make such impossible claims. In one of her NDF-related public remarks, World Bank country director Susan Goldmark warned the government diplomatically to refrain from over-statements. Bhattarai himself may have realised by now that you can't ridicule donors and still ask for donations for controversial projects like his youth self-employment scheme.

For budgetary support, the minister should have first included it as a budgeted program incorporating public accountability. This is one reason the program hangs in limbo.

This NDF is taking place in the midst of global financial meltdown, and this will have significant bearing on the scale of donor commitment for the near future. Back home, the Maoists' name itself is still anathema to many in the international community.

The economic policies of the Maoist-led government, announced in bits and pieces, are conceptually vague and at times contradictory. Minister Bhattarai should be first trying to win the confidence of Nepal's development partners. His harsh tone and isolationist methods, even in the run up to the NDF, have made the donor community not only apprehensive but perplexed and exasperated.

Again, the real question is whether we need to be so reclusive about our aid policy, especially when the country is in such a precarious transition. And why pick on donors, as if they alone were to blame for our under-development? ●



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

Numbers game

The Maoists plan a massive show of force on May Day to put pressure on the army

ANALYSIS by
SUBHAS DEVKOTA

The Maoists have so often threatened to take over state power by force like Lenin did during the October Revolution in 1917, that people had stopped taking it seriously. But now, under pressure to back down from its attempt to sack the army chief, the Maoists seem to be reactivating that plan.

As far back as 2000, the Maoists had concluded that the way to victory was a fusion between insurgency and an armed urban uprising. Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal had concluded that the army could only be defeated if his party could divide up the generals. They had been working on it, and the result was the 19 April move to ask the army chief for clarification.

The timing, they think, is now right. The Maoists have brought in tens of thousands of cadres and PLA to the capital. Many are from UNMIN monitored cantonments, even though under the peace accord that is not allowed. Security sources say they have information that the Maoists have also brought weapons stashes that were never locked up in UNMIN containers. Internally, the party has told the cadre to be prepared for a "final battle".

The Maoists have stepped back from decisions before, and they may conclude again that the international and domestic conditions are not right to do so. But the very fact that they haven't bothered to hide the preparation means they want to use the mass mobilisation in the capital itself as a deterrent against anyone who dares oppose them.

Until late Thursday, the Maoist secretariat was deep in

meetings and leaders were tight-lipped. Their conclusion seems to be that the only obstacle to total state capture now is the integration of 19,000 PLA into the Nepal Army. Army Chief Katawal was the only remaining obstacle, which is why they have sought to remove him at the present time.

UML leader KP Oli has been warning about Maoist totalitarian motives for more than two years. He says: "The action against Katawal was the excuse they needed to control the army and implement their strategy to capture complete state power." Oli cites the three reasons on which the Maoists sought clarification from the army chief are all legally spurious.

Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai, for his part, has been uncharacteristically tough, and says Katawal defied a government order and should be prosecuted to maintain the civil supremacy. He and Defence Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa Badal have been taking the hardline while Prime Minister Dahal fields pressure from other parties as well as the international community, especially India.

"There is no question of the government surrendering to any foreign pressure," Bhattarai has said.

The Indian establishment, reacting to the strong pressure from the Indian military, has directly intervened to put pressure on the Maoists to leave the army alone. Indian ambassador Rakesh Sood has met Dahal three times this week and strongly urged a consensus among political parties.

The NC has been protesting the move, but has also been talking to the Maoists and the UML about a "wholesale deal" under a package that would

include defusing the army row and bringing the NC into government. UML leader Madhab Kumar Nepal has tried to mediate not just between parties, but also between factions within his own party for and against the Maoist move against the army.

Nepal himself belongs to the side that wants the Maoists to back off. He says: "During the war, Pushpa Kamal Dahal was the leader of a party fighting the army, now he is the leader of two armies. Meddling in the army now could have grave consequences."

Meanwhile, the debate has strengthened the constitutional role of President Ram Baran Yadav, as supreme commander of the army. He has remained within his remit to send a memo to the prime minister warning him not to take any action against the army chief as it would break the institutional structure and chain of command and might affect the peace process and constitution writing. When a pro-establishment civil society delegation tried to put pressure on him this week, he bluntly told them he wasn't a "ceremonial" president but a "constitutional" one.

It now looks like the geopolitical situation and domestic opposition to the move to sack the army chief has made the situation untenable for the Maoists. They can either try to go ahead with it and stage a massive show of force on May Day, or they can back down. Either way, the Maoists will not have dropped their plan to capture state power, they will only be waiting for the opportune moment.

Many are now convinced that the Maoists are just not ideologically prepared to share power with anyone, and that they aren't really serious about the peace process and the constitution writing process over which they have no control. ●

Shop 'til you drop

Laxmi Bank and Bhat-Bhateni supermarket have launched a loyalty points card that customers can obtain when they open a savings account at the bank. The store card can be used at both the Maharajgunj and Bhat Bhateni stores.



Standardised

Himalayan Distillery, a domestic liquor producer, has received four ISO accreditations on international health and safety standards. The certification covers environment and management systems, health and safety and food safety.



Customer draw

LG Electronics is aiming to up sales of its mobile phones by offering scratch cards with each purchase. Prizes include cash, an LG wrist watch and 160cc TVS Apache bike for the winner of the final a lucky draw.



Sales drive

Microwave ovens, deep freezers, watches and cash are among the prizes Chaudhary Group is offering in order to encourage sales of its home appliances. CG also recently introduced a 48-month warranty and interest free financing on televisions.



Phone access

Registered customers of Nawakantipur Cooperative Society can now check their balance via SMS for free. Type 'BE' along with last five digits of the transaction ST to 2122.

Labour pangs

How to save your company and save jobs

These days, one comes across many executives who worry about escalating problems with labour unions. Listening to them, it's clear that their company's labour union is not a problem in and of itself. But it becomes a problem when the



STRICTLY BUSINESS Ashutosh Tiwari

union's ambitious leaders, in an effort to show that they are 'doing something to teach the management a lesson' seek support from political parties, who are only too happy to collect dues from additional members.

Soon, strangers call your mobile at all hours, asking for appointments at seedy venues. Militant strangers descend upon your office. They start pounding the table and speaking rudely. You realize that they are not interested in listening to your reasons. And when you say no to their requests, you start getting threats.

As members of Nepal's various labour unions celebrate the dignity of labour on the occasion of May Day today, it's worth examining how corporate executives can hold their own against excessive demands from militant labour.

Fulfill the legal minimums

It's no secret that most Nepali companies are notorious for cutting corners when it comes to treating employees fairly as per what's in the law books. Most militant unions, with lawyers who specialise on personnel issues, take advantage of this straightforward fact to grab a company by its jugular.

This produces two effects.

First, when criticised about its labour practices, a company gets defensive. When it gets defensive, its language becomes incoherent. When the company's unclear about what it says, that makes it more vulnerable to saying yes to further demands. The other side is often very good at twisting the company's words to extract more concessions.

Second, once the other side succeeds in painting the company as a renegade, it starts winning the

to do everything by itself. This means, most companies outsource their non-core tasks to other firms.

But one sad little secret of outsourcing in Nepal is that most local companies are not up to the task, despite their owners' enthusiasm. Besides, all outsourcing tasks are fraught with risks. Often, these companies do not pay their workers well. They also do not treat their workers well. All the while, their



KONG YEN LIN

public relations battle. Suddenly, in the public mind and in press reports, the story is split into two neat categories: good employees versus the evil management. It's not hard to see which side the public roots for.

The best remedy is to memorise the relevant sections of the Labour Law, and follow them to the hilt. True, many of those sections, such as the ones on hiring and firing, are not particularly friendly to the management. But it's only by fulfilling the legal minimums, and then publicizing the actions widely inside and outside the company, that the management can expect to maintain its confidence when dealing with external union reps.

Due diligence on outsourcing

In these times of rising costs, it doesn't make sense for a company

employees see that their counterparts at the client companies are doing well. Soon, they want to register themselves as employees of the client. And the surest way to do that is to seek help from a political party to register a union at the client's site. Many well-run companies have thus gotten tangled up in the personnel and the political mess of their outsource partners.

The solution here is to do a thorough due diligence on the outsource partners. True, doing this takes time, and the one you end up with may be more expensive. But the grief this saves you is often worth the high fees.

Dealing with labour unions is not something that is taught at fancy business schools. But for Nepali corporate executives, mastering this skill may be the way to save their jobs and their companies. ●

Czech mate



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

The premium car market in Nepal may have been dominated by Japanese or Indian made cars, but Skoda, which has Czech roots, European design and uses German technology, has fared quite well even before its official launch.

Axel Andreas Oberdiek, the regional manager of Skoda Auto, is positive that the response will be even better now with the demand for cars in Nepal increasing. Oberdiek has worked for Skoda parent company Volkswagen for three decades and has been involved with Skoda for over five years.

"After Skoda became a part of Volkswagen Group, the third largest automobile company in the world, we made a special effort to refine its image," says Oberediek, "and now Skoda competes with our other models because it is cheaper than its VW or Audi equivalents."

Nepal is the 105th market where Skoda has been launched. "We came into India about a decade ago, explains Oberdiek, and now we are spreading out in the region." Morang Auto Works (MAW) showroom in Thapathali has been displaying the two models while its workshop in Dhobighat has been fully fitted to service the cars by specially trained Skoda staff.

Asked if the high-performance, stylish Laura and Octavia sedans, are too refined for Nepal's bumpy, pot-holed roads, Oberediek replies that the robustly designed cars are fitted with a rough road package: up rated shocks, underbody protection and very high clearance. MAW had brought in the cars only after an extensive testing process.

The Skoda fleet is soon to be joined by the compact Fabia and even an SUV named Yeti. The economic downturn has made the business risky but Oberediek asserts that Skoda's commitment to quality, safety and style has kept things afloat comfortably. ●

Paavan Mathema

Sri Lanka's golfing triumph

Sri Lankan golfer Anura Rohana won the Surya Nepal Masters 2009 title on 25 April with a finishing eagle two, two shots ahead of fellow Sri Lankan, Mithun Perera.

Anura was awarded the top prize money of Rs 405,000 by President Ram Baran Yadav at a ceremony at the Gokarna Forest Golf Resort on the same day.

Kunal Bhasin, from Australia, finished third place, just managing to pass last year's winner Shamim Khan from India. Deepak Thapa Magar who was the highest scoring Nepali on the field, tied in sixth place.

At the start it didn't look promising for Rohana, who scored a double-bogey at the opening hole while amateur golfer Perera hit his second shot close to the pin. However, by the time Perera reached his fifth, he already had more bogeys on his card than he had in his first

three rounds.

After an impressive first round Nepali Shiva Ram Shrestha, who won five tournaments last year, spiralled downwards by the second day's

match at Gokarna.

But he still retained an outside chance of taking the title being just five off the lead on the second day. Another local pro, Ramesh Nagarkoti, also fell back by the second day.

At other events of the Surya Nepal Golf Tour, Perera easily won the international amateur country

championship, while Jamal Hossain Mollah from Bangladesh came in second place and Nepal's Rupak Acharya, third.

Former Indian Open winner Vijay Kumar's team won the Standard Chartered Pro-Am on 21 April. Teams were formed by a draw from the ten best professional cards and thirty best amateur cards. Shiva Ram Shrestha's team came in second. ●





MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

The Maoist strategy

Nagarik, 29 April

नागरिक

- 1996-2000**
Launch an attack on the police only and accuse the army of being a nationalist force to eliminate any possible threat.
- 2000**
Second national assembly—make preparations to fight possible attacks by the army, but agree not to launch attacks on the offensive.
- 2002/ 2003**
After the state of emergency—use tactics of threat and fear on people and force them to leave jobs. Create a division within the army.
- 2004**
Funtibang talks—attempt to create nationalist unity with the king and army to jointly launch a guerilla war against India.
- 2005**
Chunwang talks—unite with army and anti monarchy political parties that for a joint revolt.
- 2006**
After the peace agreement—demand that the army headquarters make the status of those disappeared by armed forces public.
- 2007**
Buddhanagar talks—spread rumors that the actual state is run not through Singha Darbar but from the Nepal Army headquarters. At the same time, extensively meet with army generals.
- Namobudha talks—conclude create obstacles during the constitutional assembly elections. Assure the people that the Maoists will nevertheless ahead with the election and launch a revolt with the people against the army if plans don't work out.
- 2008**
Demand that the PLA be integrated into NA even though other parties and the army itself are not ready for this change. Use this slogan to create upheaval amongst the people.

Anti-state

Editorial in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 29 April-14 May

हिमाल

Even though the Maoist-led government has failed to secure the economic, social and political rights of Nepalis, they choose to capitalise on the term 'people's supremacy'. There is no debate that people's supremacy is the main ideology of democracy. But in the name of the people the Maoists are trying to enforce their own supremacy.

After years of struggle it was 2006 April Uprising that finally established popular command over the army. We are yet to investigate the cases of brutality that the army has been responsible for during the conflict years. But the establishment of Nepal as a republic means the army is loyal to the people—a philosophy that has been seen in practice for the past two years.

The Maoist-initiated activities to remove the army chief have threatened national security. It seems that in the name of people's supremacy the Maoists want to establish their dominance not only on the VDCs and DDCs but on all bodies including the media, army, judiciary and civil service. The Maoists probably understand that their violence and threats are diminishing popular trust in them but they don't act as if they know it.



We suspect that a feudalistic attitude has taken hold within the Maoists and they want total control. The national army is responsible for national security. Aren't actions to weaken the army by forcibly integrating all of its force anti-nationalist?

We have to remind Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal to be sensitive to the people when addressing this issue of sacking the army chief. Then his party will not have to deal with

pressure from the Indian embassy or from New Delhi. Regardless of the issue, the intervention of a foreign hand to solve the problem only damages national sovereignty.

Civil supremacy

Editorial in *Janadesh* 28 April

जनादेश

Civil supremacy has been snatched from the people time and again in the 60 year history of the people's movement. The violent incidents to quash the people's movement—which was launched to reinstate civil rights and establish civil rules—are still fresh in people's minds.

The feudal rulers have always used military force to sustain autocratic rule in the history of



Nepal. High officials of Nepal Army have remained loyal to feudal rulers and have betrayed people and lost their trust. Army chief Rookmangud Katawal is the adopted son of the monarchy.

Following the directions of despotic Gyanendra, anti-people and criminal generals like Katawal massacred hundreds of Nepali people to sustain the centralised feudal monarchy, which can never be forgotten. Over the 10 year insurgency, Katawal proved to be a criminal devoid of sensibility, humanity, fraternity and nationality. He wanted to prolong the war so that he would earn huge commissions from arms deals. He has already been declared a criminal by the Rayamajhi commission.

The Maoist government is the people's elected government. This government is determined to establish people's supremacy in government, army, police, administration, judiciary and other government authorities, which is also the mandate of people.

Unless criminals are punished the state of impunity cannot end and the peace process cannot be completed. This is an honest move by the government to establish civil supremacy, complete the peace process and draft the people's constitution.

Game over

Interview with UML central committee member KP Oli in *Nepal*, 3 May

नेपाल

There seems to be strong disagreement within the UML about the army case. Where is the disagreement? How can it be called disagreement when someone goes against a party's ideology and then sits with an inflated ego and self pride in the name of authority? The party hasn't discussed this issue officially. Also, when one individual makes decisions by himself what is the point of a standing or a central committee?

After the Mahakali treaty, is the issue regarding the army the second biggest conflict within the party? Without sitting for a formal committee, we cannot say this is such a big conflict. However, with such a sensitive issue like the army we cannot treat it like a game. Those who treat it as such are foolish.

Why do you support Army chief

Katawal?
This is not a stance for one person. The army is an institution. You cannot interfere with it. There are three ways in which we need to move ahead: by following the rule of law, democratic behaviour and far-sightedness.

How does an army that is under the government defy the government?
It was the army's responsibility to fill a vacant position. It is not defiance of the order when Katawal asked to extend the term of eight capable generals. Is it defiance when you say that the PLA should not be included in the national games because of pressure from cadres?



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Watered down

Federalism will hinder optimal exploitation of water resources

The People's Movement of 2006 paved the way for a new constitution through the election of a constituent assembly. But the overzealous members of the interim constitution writing committee went ahead and declared Nepal a federal state by themselves, pre-empting the people's representatives in the assembly from arriving at a well thought through decision.



COMMENT
Ratna Sansar Shrestha

Now it is a contentious issue as to whether splitting Nepal into an indeterminate number of provinces is really a good idea. And how will federalism affect the use of water resources? Optimal exploitation of most natural resources can be done locally, by cultivating land, harvesting it, collecting herbs, living off forest or extracting minerals. But water is a unique natural resource. Local inhabitants can benefit, for example, by building micro hydropower or

from rafting tourism. But exploitation on a larger scale is a national endeavour which may have local cost. Construction of a hydroelectric dam deprives an upper riparian populace from using the river water for consumptive uses like irrigation. Any reduction in the quantum of water will decrease electricity generation and thereby reduce revenue. Similarly, a patch of the river will become dewatered as water will be diverted from the river into the powerhouse. If the users of electricity come from a different province, those adversely impacted will never agree to construction of a hydropower plant in their province. Building a reservoir project is even more intrusive because it submerges large tracts of fertile agricultural land, forests, infrastructure and displacement of inhabitants. People of the province set to lose their land and to get displaced will not be too eager to build a project if the electricity is to be used in another province. Moreover, a storage project regulates river flow benefiting the lower riparian. So, an upstream province will

have no reason to agree to build such a project, thus scuttling the prospect of the implementation of a multipurpose project. Resettlement of people displaced by a multipurpose project will become problematic as there is scarcity of good land in the hills where such projects could be sited while the resettlement in the area where necessary land is available will not be allowed for reasons of disturbing ethnic balance. Tharus in the western Tarai are already against the resettlement plan for people to be displaced by the West Seti project. Nepal has 3.97 million hectares of cultivated land (mostly in the Tarai) and only 0.5 million hectares (12.6 per cent) has some irrigation (mostly during the rainy season). Cultivation of multiple crops in a year, imperative to ensure food security, requires massive irrigation during the dry season that is possible only by building a reservoir in the hills that will store water during the rainy season. Building reservoirs will also control floods on the plains downstream. But planning such schemes will be extremely difficult under a federal structure. Suppose it is decided to have five provinces along the lines of current development regions, then western development region will be generating maximum hydropower (over 329MW) and using only about half of it. The eastern region will be consuming a lot more than what it generates (under 14MW). The central region will consume a little more

than it generates (275MW). Under a federal structure such happy sharing will not be possible. Simple issues like pricing can spin out of control and provinces with more generation capacity can shut off power if the price is not right. Water disputes between Indian states should be eye-openers for us. Punjab and Haryana are in a dispute over the Yamuna-Sutlej Link canal. A clutch of states are fighting over the Narmada and Tamil Nadu and Karnataka do not see eye to eye on the Cauvery. Nepal got a raw deal on the Kosi, Gandaki, Tanakpur and Mahakali treaties, but these took place before Nepal went federal. After federalism each province will be squabbling with other provinces and Nepal's negotiation capacity with its neighbour will be further weakened. Implementing water resource projects in a federal structure will become a daunting task due to competing demands over water and clashing aspirations of each province. The complications will get compounded due to the convention of demarcating provinces by using rivers as the boundary. This will result in diametrically opposed aspirations of one province to that on the other side of the river. As far as water resources are concerned, splitting the country in haste will provide us ample opportunity to repent at leisure. ● *Ratna Sansar Shrestha is a water resource analyst.*

Three bases of federalism

Tagging federal provinces by ethnicity is a bad idea

NANDA GOPAL RANJITKAR

While opting for a federal state system, it is important to honour the ethnicity, language, religion, culture and history so that such a system does not disturb the unity, well-being, integrity and sovereignty of the nation. There should be a feeling of Nepaliness, the understanding that Nepal is one. The ownership should be of the nation as a whole and not of just one province. In the structures proposed by political parties and intellectuals,

there's already disagreement and discord. The parties that are asking for federalism based on ethnicity fail to understand that it is virtually impossible to create provinces including all 103 ethnicities. Even if we only include the 59 major ethnicities, Dalits and other minority ethnicities will suffer the dominance. Federalism based on ethnicity encourages separatism and communal violence. Who will guarantee that the Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists will not ask for separate provinces if the 'One Madhes, one Province' proposal passes through? The best way to draw the

map of federal Nepal is to divide it according to geography, natural resources, population, and availability of services, ethnicity, religion, language, culture and historical identity. We are so rich in natural and physical diversity, which is why it is important to make this the priority. Geographical location, physical structure, shape and area are the most important points to remember while creating provinces on the basis of physical structure. Natural resources should be the second most important aspect and demography is important to mobilise natural resources, which makes it very important. Forty seven per cent of the total population lives in the 55 per cent arable land of the Tarai. Similarly, 44 per cent of the total population lives in the 27 per cent of the

arable land of the area and 7 per cent of the total population lives in the 10 per cent arable land in the mountains. Because of so much discrepancy between these three regions according to demography and resources, it will not be wise to create three provinces-the Tarai, hills and mountains. While some experts have only proposed three provinces, others have proposed as many as 14. But these are just numbers. The important thing to understand is that for a developing country like Nepal, too many provinces may turn out to be a disaster. Nepali geographers have proposed five or six provinces and further little provinces under them. I propose eight provinces so that there isn't a big discrepancy according to demography and resources. For this, we have to first establish a central geographical location. Thus, we have to draw a central boundary axis to divide the country in the north and south, which will have four provinces each. Such a creation will ensure that 55

per cent of the population will lie on the south and 45 per cent will be in the north. Southern Nepal is broader than the areas in the north. Therefore, the provinces to be formed should stretch north-south. Two provinces that include the hills and the mountains, and two more that includes the hills and the Tarai can be formed. This will ensure free flowing route, and include physical diversity and demography. It is important to include entire districts, which would mean 8-10 districts will make one province. If the provinces are named according to ethnicity, religion and culture, it will invite communalism. It will also be neutral to name the provinces according to the natural heritage of that region. Not only will there be less discrepancy according to economic resources, area, shape and demography, it will also discourage ethnic competition and strife. ●

Ranjitkar is professor of Geography at Tribhuban University.





The old road to Kathmandu

Chitlang reinvents itself after losing its crowd to new highways

Till 1957, this forested trail from Bhimphedi to Kathmandu was the only way in or out of Nepal's capital. Invaders from the East India Company, pilgrims, traders and Nepal's royalty had to walk this road to Kathmandu.

Even the cars Kathmandu's aristocracy rode in the valley were dismantled, and hauled on porters' backs over this trail to be re-assembled in Thankot. "There used to be hardly any space to walk, there were always people coming and going," recalls 85-year old Bhaira Bahadur Basnyat, who's lived in Chitlang all his life. Today, the trail is a deserted dirt path. The pati where travelers rested are crumbling, and villages



PICS: CHONG ZI LIANG

along the trail wear a desolate look. Even a shop where King Birendra reportedly stopped for tea is gone.

But a few still make the trek from Bhimphe down to Kulekhani up to Chitlang and down again to Thankot. Part of the historic trail along with the suspension bridge built by Chandra Sumashere in 1911 are now all submerged under the Kulekhani reservoir.

The road may seem lifeless, but it has reinvented itself as alternative forms of livelihoods have popped up. Even in mid-afternoon, when the sun's rays are harsh, villagers work hard on their flourishing vegetable patches. Chitlang valley is a major source of potatoes,

cauliflower, cabbage and even strawberries for the Kathmandu market. The reservoir provides fish for the city and investors have built a trout farm, a goat cheese factory, a sericulture farm and even an olive plantation. Although there has been a mass exodus of young men to Kathmandu, there are plenty of jobs in the farms here. Bikash Chand Shrestha set up his trout farm in Chitlang because the area has 24-hour power and for its proximity to the Kathmandu market.

Along the way, signboards propped up on houses reflect a community that is committed and integrated. There are environment protection notices printed on walls, and a board

that specifies cleaning tasks to every house in the village.

The area is also culturally vibrant: although predominantly Newari and Tamang, there is a large community of Chhetris and Bahuns and they all seem to get along well. Most here were unaware of the call by the Tamsaling activist for a banda on the day we passed through.

Says 40-year-old Sano Maiya Moktan (*pictured right*): "Why would we want an individual state when so many of us here from different ethnic groups are living and working together peacefully?" ●

Roma Aryal and Shradha Basnyat, Chong Zi Liang in Chitlang



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Himal Khabarpatrika
29 April – 14 May

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Fraud certificates
Death greatly exaggerated

Constitution Supplement:
Collating people's views on the new constitution
Three important factors for federalism

The voice of Nepal

Matihili FM's are a model for cross-border cultural exchange

KUNDA DIXIT in JANAKPUR

Near the border here most movement of goods is from India into Nepal. The only commodity going in the opposite direction used to be sand and boulders to feed India's infrastructure boom. Not any more. Nepal has a new export item: radio programs.

Janakpur's seven FM stations all have programs in Maithili language which is spoken on both sides of the border. Since there is no radio in Maithili in Bihar, Nepal's FM's have 30 million listeners in India. This is much bigger than the Maithili listenership within Nepal of only 2.5 million.

"Nepal's biggest export to India is our FM broadcast," says Gopal Jha of Janakpur's Mithila FM which has strong Maithili content designed for listeners in both India and Nepal. "This is a model for using radio to foster cultural links between South Asian countries."

Similar radio sharing could be planned between Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu in Tamil, India and Pakistan in Kashmir and West Bengal and Bangladesh in Bengali. Says Upendra Bhagat Nayabansi of the Maithili daily, *Simanchal*: "We have helped the revival of Maithili culture in India as well."

The growing popularity of Nepal's Maithili FM radios in India has also made Janakpur's radio stations economically viable. Last week's Indian elections brought stations here an estimated Rs 2.5 million windfall in political commercials for Janakpur's FM's as candidates campaigned in northern Bihar constituencies. Some, like Indian state minister Shakhil Ahmed, even made sure he was interviewed on Janakpur's FM stations.

"If we had to depend on only the Nepali market, I don't think Janakpur could sustain more than two FM's," says Jha. Nepali FM's have also become an important source of news and information on issues relevant to both sides, such as cross border crime, Maoist activities and even notices about polio vaccination campaigns.

Janakpur's FM stations carry regular news about India and field dozens of reporters in Bihari towns like Madhubani, Darbhanga, Sitamarhi and Jayanagar. Two radio stations here also relay the BBC Hindi service which is very popular in Bihar.

Janakpur's FM stations all started within two months of the Madhes uprising in January 2007, and many here agree that they had a decisive effect on galvanising support. At times, the stations overdid it and the broadcasts were chauvinistic and ethnocentric.

But in the past year after Nepal got a Madhesi president and vice-president and the MJF held key ministries in the Maoist-led coalition there is a perceptible reduction in tension. This is also reflected in studio discussions and news on FM's: non-Madhesi reporters are back and the coverage of the recent Tharu protests, for instance, is balanced.

The brutal murder of Janakpur Today FM journalist Uma Singh in January that shocked the country. Her garlanded photo hangs outside the studio from where she used to broadcast her programs (pictured). Three months on, it is clear that the motive for Uma Singh's murder was her muck-raking journalism, and that the suspects who have been detained were probably not involved.

The state has tried to muddy the waters and painted the crime as a family property dispute. Uma's sister-in-law Lalita Devi, local Maoist leader Shrabana Yadav and three others have been detained. Locals believe the three are known gangsters arrested were probably framed.

They say the real culprits are supporters of former Maoist minister Matrika Yadav who were involved in the murder of Uma's father and brother in 2007. Uma Singh wrote consistently about them in her columns. One suspect, Dilip Sah, is Yadav's son-in-law and is now in Patna. Another ex-Maoist involved, Umesh Yadav, has defected to Jwala Singh's militant group and is in Bihar. Most locals believe police are under political pressure not to arrest them, and want the case to just fade away. ●

See also: 'The wild east', #444 by Dambar Krishna Shrestha
'Flames of truth', #434 by Kanak Mani Dixit
'Press post-mortem', #443
'Life after Uma', #444



Women on air



PICS: KONG YEN LIN

Durga Adhikari breaks the sound barrier

When Durga Adhikari of Radio Taranga FM in Pokhara was promoted to station manager six months ago, her responsibilities increased dramatically. From 5AM to 7PM every day, she is busy juggling program editing, broadcasting and staff management duties. "I have to be ready anytime, 24 hours a day," says the willowy 21-year-old.

The demanding workload might seem daunting but Durga feels that being in a leadership position is the most satisfying moment of her career in journalism.

She now heads a team of 17 staff, more than half of them women. Durga's achievement is even more remarkable considering how few female journalists there are and it's even rarer to find them in decision-making positions. A management graduate, she took a 180 degree switch to pursue her passion in journalism five years ago. "It was a challenge in the beginning and I had to learn everything from scratch," Durga says.

She feels women reporters have an edge over male colleagues because of their commitment and meticulousness. They are also less interested in politics and more focused on gender rights and child welfare.

Durga's family was initially not supportive of her career choice as they felt there were no fixed hours in her job and salary was low. But they were won over when she made her mark as a station chief.

Durga currently hosts a weekend program *Sunaulo Bhabishya*, which airs stories about positive change and activism initiated by ordinary people. In addition, she hosts *Hamro Nepal*, *Ramro Nepal*, a weekly evening talkshow discussing social issues like the new constitution writing.

"These days the media is considered as one of the most powerful platforms in the world, and it is the same for Nepal, which is undergoing a watershed period of political transition," says Durga, "I hope to be able to continue spreading awareness and disseminating information about society to improve the status of women and children."

Kong Yen Lin in Pokhara

Women become radio active

Across Nepal the proportion of women journalists joining radio stations is growing, and the female voice is

no longer a rarity. The other trend is for journalists to get together and launch radio stations staffed entirely by women.

Radio Mukti in Butwal, launched by committed women journalists was so bold in its coverage that it was recently attacked by local Maoists who vandalised the station.

Here in Biratnagar, Radio Purbanchal is another all-female station which is trying to address the pressing problems of gender discrimination in the eastern Tarai. At Purbanchal, the only man is the security guard.

Station manager Kamala Kadel (*second from right*) is a 55-year-old mother who used to be a

social worker before starting the radio to empower women through grassroots communications.

The station's reach has grown in the past two years, reaching 75 per cent of households in Sunsari and Morang with close to one million regular listeners. There are around 40 community level organisations affiliated to the station and 2,000 households contributed funds and start-up capital. The station employs 18 journalists and studio technicians, all 20-30 year olds from disadvantaged communities.

Some are students like Lalima Ragbanshi who divides her time between her studies and working as a radio technician. "I'm excited to be in this environment where there's so much room for growth," says the 21-year-old.

Others are housewives like Uma Thapa who finds satisfaction and freedom working beyond the domestic domain and Gita Biswas, the co-host of the news and agricultural program *Kakram Hama Samacht* (Our Society) whose husband has now taken over the housework.

Daily news bulletins are aired in four languages: Nepali, Tharu, Urab and Santhali. "Most radio stations broadcast news in Nepali and this is problematic for other ethnic communities who don't

understand the language," says Urab news presenter Mahamaya Urab.

Other programs include children's education, labour and employment forums, with the most popular, *The Voice of Labour*, reaching out to 400 businesses in the district.

"What keeps us going is our desire to spread greater awareness about the rights and situation of Tarai women, who are restrained by social deprivation in education, economic and health care aspects," says radio journalist Durga Sapkota, "community radio can be a powerful agent of change."

Asked about how the murder of radio journalist Uma Singh in Janakpur affected women reporters, Kamala says it highlights the critical working conditions that women journalists face.

She added: "We're saddened but unbeaten. There's nothing to fear if we're united."

Kong Yen Lin in Biratnagar

See also: 'Gaining Ground', #373

Spreading network

Most FM radio stations in Nepal are now linked to satellite networks that connect them to sister radios in Kathmandu and around the country.

The largest among them is Communication Corner's Ujjalo Network which celebrated its 11th anniversary on Wednesday. Some 75 Ujjalo affiliates exchange up to two hours of programming each day among themselves via satellite. Their collective signal now covers nearly 80 per cent of

Nepal's land area and is also available on streaming audio online.

With programs like *Hamro Nepal* *Ramro Nepal* and other syndicated interactive content, Ujjalo and other networks have become the real voice of Nepal: giving citizens a say and developing a sense of nationhood.

"I think what we have managed to show is that for press freedom to be really effective in defending democracy, we need to give a voice to the voiceless and hear out people who would otherwise not be heard," says Gopal Guragain of Communication Corner.

However, not all is rosy. Nepal's FM radios are facing the twin problems of journalist security and station survival. Radio reporters have been the most vulnerable to attacks by militant groups, gangsters, criminals and state forces. In the past three weeks alone, FM radios in Khotang, Tanahu and Parbat have been physically attacked.

"Journalists are having to self-censor because to write about certain issues or to dig deep is to invite threats and even attacks," says Guragain.

Radio stations are also struggling to survive because of falling revenues from an advertising slump caused by political instability and crippling power cuts. Many are having difficulty even paying staff.

Community radio organisations have been lobbying the government to treat them like a public service and reduce the royalty, taxes and renewal fees. They say that in the absence of clear policy on FM radio the government is granting licences to political groups and the FM spectrum is getting crowded in many regions.

Kunda Dixit

See also: '10 years on air', #339



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Subcontinental drift

A co-mingling of multiple genocides still resonate across South Asia

Contemporary India and Pakistan were born amid the bloodbath of Partition nearly 62 years ago, a co-mingling of multiple genocides that still resonate through the lives and deaths of more than a billion South Asians.



HERE AND THERE
Daniel Lak

The massive trauma of dividing British India's Muslims from its other communities has not been assuaged. This is a subcontinent with post-traumatic stress syndrome and worse. And yes, it effects Nepal too.

For 20 years now, I've been taking stock of efforts to end hostilities between India and Pakistan, the wonderful efforts of so many fine people at all levels to bring their countries together. Now, I'm watching a thinly disguised attempt at American mediation in the name of securing their troops in Afghanistan. The most senior US diplomat, Richard Holbrooke, tries to assuage Indian sensibilities by insisting his brief is restricted to "Af-Pak" but he clearly is hoping to encourage an

active peace process between New Delhi and Islamabad.

Only then, Washington reckons, will Pakistan be able to turn its attention to the existential threat within their country: the Taliban, rather than Indian forces along the frontiers.

India and Pakistan each maintain a vast standing army and spend inordinate sums on military budgets that might otherwise help build schools, roads and water lines. India maintains, rightly, that it is a regional and global player that also needs to worry about the ambitions of China. But the main focus of the Indian armed forces is Pakistan.

In Rawalpindi, the headquarters of the Pakistan Army since independence, military planners plot endless scenarios of a collapsing India that needs just another little push from a terror group here, or a militant separatist attack there. The two countries have had each other in their sights for the better part of seven decades now and the paranoia, anger and angst of Partition drives everything.

The rawness of Pakistan's wounds were on prominent display all this month, thanks to



a letter written by a retired Indian colonel, Harish Puri, and published as an Op-Ed article in the liberal English daily, *The News*.

Pakistani soldiers, Puri maintains, are thoroughly professional and the sight of well trained, proud men laying down arms to the Taliban in Swat is suspicious and telling. He indicts politicians and a venal, corrupt officer corps for the army's failure to subdue the Pashtun hills of Northwest Pakistan. Puri wonders if the army's top brass and its spymasters aren't themselves implicit in Taliban advances. It's something that certainly occurred

to the brave, and now somewhat embattled, editor who published Puri's piece.

The outpouring of wounded, faux-patriotic drivel that has followed the letter has been something to behold. Blogs, as ever, lead the way, mostly anonymous sources of cowardly, unaccountable comment. They resound with racist anti-Hindu ranting that almost certainly came from Pakistani military sources. Letters to *The News* question the newspaper's nationalism and make vaguely threatening references to boycotts and worse.

Meanwhile, in civil society and human rights groups, there

is a troubled sense that while Puri has got it right, Pakistanis themselves need to lead the way on taming their army, muting its deadly truck with Islamic fundamentalism and bringing it under civilian control.


The interventions of India and America do more harm than good, or so it's believed. Officially, India feels much the same about US ambitions for regional peace. For now, Washington isn't buying that.

Holbrooke travels East at least twice each month, and when he's not here, his senior colleagues from the Pentagon are doing the rounds. America is trying as hard as it ever has to heal Partition's wounds in South Asia, and is faced with barely concealed reluctance, even overt hostility, on both sides of the sub-continental divide.

History will recount only Holbrooke's success or failure, not the myriad objections and split hairs of bloggers, diplomats, letter-writers and commentators. ●

Daniel Lak's latest book is India Express, The Future of a New Superpower published by Penguin.





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EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **Caravan art show 2009** by Narayan Shrestha at Hotel Summit till 30 April. 9851000519
- ❖ **Prayer for Humanity**, a painting exhibition by Gaurav Shrestha till 30 April, 10AM-6PM at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoka. 9841341810
- ❖ **A Homage to Heritage**, an exhibition by Birendra Pratap Singh at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited from till 13 May, 11AM- 6PM. 4218048

EVENTS

- ❖ **Inauguration program** of mobile expo 2009, fun park, bhrikuti mandap, 10AM, 30 April
- ❖ **The Horn of Shame**, artistic performance by Salil Subedi Kanika & Karl Knapop, 8 May, 6.30 PM, Alliance Francaise.
- ❖ **Waiting for godot**, a play by Samuel Beckett, Hotel Vajra, 8-24 May at 7.15 PM. 4271545
- ❖ **IPL 2009**, watch IPL 2009 live matches at Rox Bar Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Call for entries for Film South Asia** till 31 May, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5552141



MUSIC

- ❖ **'PRANA'** a performance by a Korean rock band in 30 April-4 May, 4PM, Lecture hall, Nepal Tourism board
- ❖ **1974 AD** concert featuring Deep Shrestha, 8 May, Patan Museum, 6PM.
- ❖ **Sundance Music festival**, 2-3 May, The Last Resort.
- ❖ **The Kathmandu Chorale** presents -Enjoy Life, a spring Concert at the British School, Jhamsikhel, 16 May, 3.30PM-6PM
- ❖ **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
- ❖ **Epic**, at the Brunchilli- the Acoustic Lounge every Friday, Thamel. 9851035437
- ❖ **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.
- ❖ **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

- ❖ **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. 4101532
- ❖ **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 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

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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 shorter 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 afternoon.



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RING-A-RING O'ROSIES: Kangresi leaders gherao the rostrum on Sunday against the Maoist move to sack Chief of Army Staff Rookmangud Katawal.



SHUTTERBUG: PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal's son, Prakash Dahal, takes pictures of Army Chief Rookmangud Katawal, Lt Gen Kul Bahadur Khadka and Lt Gen Chhatra Man Singh Gurung at Khula Manch on the third Loktantra Dibas.



DIVINE INTERVENTION: Devotees drag the chariot of Rato Machhindranath, the rain god, through Pulchok on Wednesday, on the first day of the yearly festival.



WE CAN: UNICEF-partner Praxis Group, which supports Universal Access for Children Affected by AIDS in Nepal, hands over a token of commitment to its members in Kathmandu on Thursday.



SUFI EVENING: Pakistani classical musician Shafqat Amanat Ali performs at the Nepal Army Club on Friday.

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The Rook castles again

Parliamentary proceedings are beginning to look like a demo at Ratna Park. And the kangresis are falling right into the trap by gheraoing the rostrum every day, shouting slogans as the Red Guards try to shout them down from the middle row.

CA members are even coming to blows. Last week, Janata Dal rep Biswa Prasad Agrawal was beaten to a pulp inside Singha Darbar by none other than his party chairman Haricharan Shah and vice chairman Kabiraj Timilsina. Agrawal apparently had promised ten lacs as payoff to Shah for having made him a member under the PR list: half before and half after he made it to the CA. But the guy never delivered on the second installment.

So Shah and Timilsina ambushed Agrawal, and for good measure also smashed up his SUV. The cops arrived, but couldn't do much because CA members apparently don't just have impunity but also immunity from prosecution. For the record: besides Agrawal, Haicharan has also nominated Dad and his daughter Gayetri under the PR list.

At the rate we're going, it's just a question of time before the honourable members start burning tyres and vandalising each other's nostrils inside the **not-so-august** house.



Now that the epidemic of shoe-throwing at political leaders has spread from Iraq to India, it is only a question of time before it comes across the border. Which reminds me, one Nepali newspaper has called the global health alert as being caused by "Swan Flu": guess they thought a swine was a bird. Anyways, CA member Kamala Sharma actually preceded the Bush shoe in Baghdad attack by hitting Purna Bdr Khadka with her slippers in parliament last year. That didn't get her justice, so at her party's parliamentary office the other day Kamala threatened to hang herself from the rafters of parliament.



Far away from all the fun and games is Upadro Yadav, who blew another Rs 55 lacs on tickets and hotel bills. BRB refused to sanction the money, but the FM threatened to tattle to PKD. Upadro's logic is simple: this is a fight between pahadi bahuns and chhetris, with a gurung thrown in. If the army gets weaker, hill nationalism gets weaker, so why should I care?



The debate in international commie circles about whether or not Nepal's Maobuddies did the right thing or not by shelving their armed struggle is heating up. This week there are international **gostis** in New York and London titled 'The Dynamic Role of Theory and Two-line Struggle' where ideologues will discuss: 'The struggle within communist parties and among communists generally over questions of ideological and political line vs eclectics, pragmatism and attempts to rely on tactical finesse and what amounts to bourgeois realpolitik-maneuvering within the framework of domination by imperialism and other major powers, and the existing relations of exploitation and oppression.' (Exact quote from press release.)



Lots of speculation about who the **deep throat** is who leaked the intimate details of a meeting of The Rook with his top army brass last week to *Kantipure*. Well, it turns out it wasn't a leak at all but a disinformation drive, and deep throat was none other than Chairman Terrifico himself. Despite multiple crises, PKD finds time for all kinds of extra-curricular activities, even skipping the CC meeting Tuesday to watch a 2.5 hr documentary extolling the Maoist war made by Anand Swaroop Verma, a key Maoist cheerleader from down south. Tremendousness attended an event organised by Verma during his last visit to Delhi during which he said he will fight Indian political and economic expansionism: a day after begging businessmen at a CII meeting to invest in Nepal.



'Tis the season for unnatural alliances. Sujata's anti-Katawal tirade was apparently because she wasn't invited to the Army Day parade. Now she is angling for DefMin from Cloudy. Pragmatist BRB and dogmatist Cloudy for their part are cosying up. Do they share an interest in weakening the Chariman? By trying to sound more radcial than he is, Laldhoj maybe trying to shore up party support and present himself as an alternative supremo.



From this week, we start in this space contributions from loyal readers and royal leaders alike of their nominations for the **Absurdity of the Week**. The Ass'd like to get the ball rolling with my own nominations for this week:

a.Headline in a Nepali paper: 'Peace Minister Threatens to Go Back to War'

b.The twice-postponed UML central committee meeting finally ended Tuesday with members agreeing that they should agree among themselves.

Send your nominations for Absurdity of the Week to: [ass\(at\)nepalitimes.com](mailto:ass(at)nepalitimes.com)



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