**DEWAN RAI**

After marathon meetings and shuttles all week, it now looks more and more likely that the UML-NC+15 small parties combine can reach the magic number 301 to form the next coalition. If that happens, it will be Madhav Kumar Nepal’s turn to finally fulfill his ambition of becoming prime minister.

But as with past efforts at government formation, there can be last minute upsets. The wild card is the MJF, which is a kingmaker party with its 53 seats. However, the Forum is internally divided over whether or not to join the government. The Maoists for their part are reverting to mass mobilisation on Sunday in Kathmandu to shore up their bargaining position. The Maoists have not ruled out joining the government, but their pre-condition that the president backtrack and the army chief step down is unlikely to be met.

“We first want the civilian supremacy restored and then we will even support the UML to form the government,” Maoist leader Barsaman Pun told Nepali Times.

However, away from the media glare in the capital, Maoist cadre across the country have been physically assaulting UML and NC cadre. “Chase them away and capture the villages,” Maoist central committee member Top Bahadur Rayamajhi instructed his supporters in Argakhanchi on Monday.

In other districts the Maoists have given a one-week ultimatum to NC and UML cadre to resign from the party or face “physical action”. However much they deny it, instructions to district committees to carry out these threats appear to come straight from the top Maoist leadership.

Many analysts think Madhav Kumar Nepal’s mediation skills and acceptability make him an ideal candidate to lead the coalition. As head of the committee on constitution drafting, he could also re-focus government attention on getting the job done in time.

“Nepal is the right man for the job,” said one Kathmandu-based diplomat, “an equilibrium of smaller parties that he leads may be more stable than one dominated by one big party.”

Even so, it doesn’t look like a new coalition will be possible without the Maoists having some kind of say, which is why they are staging a show of force on Sunday. “The Maoists are deliberately using delaying tactics by obstructing parliament so the new government formation will be delayed,” says NC chief whip, Laxman Ghimire.

Given New Delhi’s current engagement with developments here, a new coalition in Nepal could also depend on who gets to lead the coalition in India.

With additional reporting by Kunda Dixit in Argakhanchi

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**Nepal’s turn?**

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**Enjoy the moment a swing at a time**

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Countries in fragile political transition have to be governed differently from stable democracies. Transitional politics require a unity of purpose. It calls for political parties to never lose sight of the goal: preserving the peace, writing the constitution and keeping its content.

Unfortunately, consensus has become the first casualty in the conflict of interest between the Maoists and the rest. Chairman Dahal erroneously thought that being the biggest party in the CA gave him the right to decide things on his own. The NC leadership erred grievously by first calling for the CA session and then obstructing its proceedings. The Maoists are now following the example the NC set. The controversy over unilateral dismissal and subsequent reinstatement of the army chief was a consequence rather than cause of the crisis of confidence between the main political parties.

Contrary to what many fear, the Maoists are not in a position to capture the state apparatus through a populist slogan of “civilian supremacy”. The Supreme Court will soon decide if the president’s actions were constitutional. The case could also be taken to the CA, which has the power to even impeach the president. But his detractors have no patience or use for such constitutional and democratic remedies. They have already pronounced him guilty through a self-serving interpretation of the constitution backed up by street pressure and intimidation.

Lost in the hype is the constitutionality of the decision to oust parliamentarians who have consistently opposed his presence in the CA. The UNMIN failed miserably to capture this nation had banked on UNMIN’s numbers. Now we have proof. The new soldiers were recruited to fill the estimation. It was public knowledge that falls in line with most people’s original mouth about the real strength of the new soldiers. This number was arrived at by now the UN has kept its own army wants “civilian supremacy”.

What an irony that a party that hasn’t renounced violence and keeps its own army wants “civilian supremacy”.

The videotape of PKD speaking to the former king is yet another example of the constraints in free and fair elections to the Maoists in 2008. We have seen Pushpa Kamal Dahal shocked me with his irrationalism. CK Lal shocked me with his irrationalism. CK Lal shocked me with his irrationalism. CK Lal shocked me with his irrationalism. CK Lal shocked me with his irrationalism.

It is ironic that the one political party that has not renounced violence, that keeps a private army of its own, and that still subscribes to an ideology of “war without the barrel of the gun”, claims to stand for “civilian supremacy”. All other political parties with a much longer and consistent record of following democratic norms are castigated as supporting militarisation, and being fascist, reactionary and anti-people, lackeys of foreigners. No political party in Nepal currently matches the camaraderie and trust, goodwill and compliance with the Maoists in terms of their capacity to organise demonstrations, agitation, intimidation and even “physical action” which means killing and maiming opponents.

The Maoist cause has become greatly aided by a group of well-known and influential civil society leaders, some of whom have played an important role at the time of the 2006 people’s movement, but who seem to have allowed themselves (perhaps inadvertently) with the Maoists since then.

The one-sided vitriol coming from some members of this civil society cohort is breathtaking and reminiscent of Stalin’s hired propagandists. A well-known and thoroughly partisan leftist writer known for his poison-pen activism, characterises Ram Pashupati Yadav as “an evil president who is tempered by greed for power, and is desperately seeking a crown and a thrones”. No one with an iota of objectivity would characterise Yadav, a humble son of a farmer and a life-long democrat, in such hyperbolic terms.

There is something deeply disturbing about civil society members not even granting the benefit of doubt to a president.
with a life-long record of commitment to norms of democracy, while guaranteeing carte blanche to unilateral decisions of a party that waged a violent insurgency against parliamentary democracy.

This is not to blindly defend the Nepal Army or its chief. There are many documented cases of unprofessional behaviour, human rights abuses and impunity perpetrated by the army in the past. But the Maoist army is no less guilty of its own brutalities, forced recruitment, including that of minors, and other violations of human rights and impunity.

One can speculate about the president’s intentions, but the Maoist intention to intimidate the army, destabilize other independent institutions and to capture state power need no speculation. The official pronouncement of the recent Maoist party convention in Kathmandu, Dahal’s video-taped message to his party cadres in January 2008, and a consistent pattern of follow-up actions ever since, are all there in the public domain.

Yet, it is the humble and domesticated President Yadav, circumscribed by the decorum of his office, and mindful of his constitutional duties, who is being portrayed as the villain. Yadav possibly helped prevent a major national disaster by his consistent champion of what he believes to be in the best interest of the country. But he has been a serving detractor: he has been a bystander, a spectator, not a player. His quality rarely found in his self-appointed political party on 3 May.

The Indian meddling has been so blatant in the past few months that Indian damage-control measures don’t seem to be working. They must be quite desperate over there to think that they can micromanage power-starved Kathmandu’s affairs from their air-conditioned Lutyens bungalows in New Delhi. In an attempt to shore up the legitimacy of their besieged leader. The propaganda machinery has since marshaled all past records in commuting between Lainchaur and Baluwatar. With the result that a prime minister with the support of their open support for his resignation. The Indian propaganda machine has since marshaled its considerable resources to counter Caretaker Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s allegations that can neither be confirmed nor denied. Ironically, Dahal’s accusations carry considerable weight in Nepal precisely because he is believed to have been closer to the South Block than any other prime minister.

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Do or die

“Either we finish what we started, or we get finished.”

T

he most dangerous and worrying feature in the last few weeks is the resurgence of visceral anti-Maoist politics. The line between the liberals and the right wing has suddenly blurred and they are united in their hatred of the former rebels. The Kathmandu middle class, a part of which gave the benefit of doubt to the Maoists in the polls, had to cough up concessions under ERP’s fiscal regime. With the recent video revelations, they have veered away even further. The urban lower middle class suffered during eight months of misgovernance with price rises and collapse of services and is hoping the next government may provide some relief.

The Maoist is repeating the mistake of talking to itself to make a point. The army establishment has reasserted itself and is actively hacking plans to undermine the Maoists. Most of the press, with ownership and editorial staff affiliated to ‘mainstream’ parties, is toeing the NC-UML line. And erstwhile sympathisers in the Indian establishment are now sick of what they see as Maoist duplicity, and the nationalist rhetoric has made it worse.

For the Maoists, allowing so many forces to gang-up against them and in such isolation is bad politics. Their arrogance in power and refusal to heed the concerns of others has now boxed them into a corner. It is a powerful temptation to stay on in power as long as possible by obstructing the house, to hope that relations with India would improve with the arrival of a new government and strike a renegotiated deal.

The Maoists have shown in the past they are capable of making the best of a bad situation. Their organisational machinery and connection at the grassroots give them the confidence and power to deal with all kinds of adverse situations. Instead of relishing in their discomfort, the broad anti-Maoist front would do well to introspect about its own politics.

For one, the army-UML-NC could be a bit more humble and admit that they have got a lot wrong in the past three years. They thought the Maoists came into the process because they had no choice, that they could bully them into submission, that Maoists would get decimated in the elections, that they would never have the gumption to sack Katalaw, that PKD would not resign.

The non-Maoists have repeatedly shown they neither understand the Maoist mind nor do they know how to deal with it.

The conventional wisdom in these circles at present is that PKD is weaker in the party and the unraveling of the Maoist structure has begun. The NC-UML hope that the Maoist potential to disrupt government functioning can be countered by tiring it in government as a junior partner. Some others feel that the Maoists can be bought back later at a ripe moment, maybe after General Khadka retires and Katalaw can be sent on leave. This means Madhav Nepal’s dream of being PM will not last more than a few months.

But most privately want to keep the Maoists out, calculating that they can be ‘taught a lesson’. This strategy goes something like this: get a new government, try to make it relatively successful by easing the power and fuel situation with help from India, simultaneously work to increase disillusionment among Maoist cadre with its own leadership, and leave the Maoists with no choice but to get back to the process on terms set by the others.

All these plans miss the fact that attempts to divide and weaken the Maoists have fallen flat in the last few years. It underestimates the rage that runs deep among the Maoist rank and file, and gives the party the energy to mount political offensives. It ignores the connection of the Maoists to the poor. It concludes that a Peace plan, an Ananta, a Kisan bring to the table: just compare them to the Ram Chandra Poudel and Bishnu Poudel to know the difference. It is based on the premise that we can happily go back to the 90s political games without bringing any corresponding progressive change. And it recklessly ignores the implications of a Maoist split and emergence of lower level splinters.

Kathmandu is repeating the mistake of talking to itself to make political assessments. The last time it did that in the run up to polls, we know what happened. The stakes are even higher this time. As a young Maoist activist told us: “Sometimes it is do or die. Either we finish what we started or get finished ourselves.”

Hard nut to crack

SHRADHA BASNAYAT

I

n May 2007, when US medical student Mark Arnoldy was visiting Nepal he had an experience that would change the course of his life. After eating a paneer dish containing cashews and peanuts, he suffered an immediate allergic reaction. Then a bandage prevented him from reaching hospital. The episode gave him a rare glimpse of what it feels like to not have access to healthcare when it’s most needed.

He survived but it got him thinking more about the properties of peanuts and not just the negative ones— but their ability to combat malnutrition in children.

He realised that what nearly caused his death could actually take the form of life saving medicine for numerous children suffering from malnutrition. Using peanut butter as a cure has already been pioneered in some of the worst afflicted African states—Ethiopia, Malawi, Niger and Sudan.

A third year medical student at the University of Colorado, Mark took a year off and came back to Nepal, where there are more than 500,000 children under five, who suffer from malnutrition.

Studying peanut butter production with Meds and Foods for Kids in Haiti, Mark saw how fortified peanut butter, known as a ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF), could be highly effective in stimulating weight gain among malnourished sufferers.

Developed by a French paediatric nutritionist in the 1990s the product has already been certified by WHO, WFP and UNICEF as an effective method to treat patients with severe malnutrition and no access to healthcare. Children have been cured of malnutrition in approximately 8-12 weeks after it was given.

Mark has been working with Himalayan Health Care in Nepal and is looking for ways to make fortified peanut butter cost-effective as possible. Surbotam pitho is cheap. But unlike surbotam pitho, fortified peanut butter requires no preparation at all and has an extremely long shelf life (up to two years). Also to prepare surbotam pitho, mothers or carers require know-how and clean water or milk—none of which is available amongst the poorer and less educated families.

“This initiative is also a way to support the local economy,” says Arnoldy adding that he hopes that fortified peanut butter, which contains peanuts, sugar, oil, powdered milk and a vitamin and mineral complex, can be produced in Nepal, rather than imported.

He hopes the project will be fully-implemented in various regions by January 2010.

#451
Seamless banking

A contemporary home furnishing store from Thailand has opened a showroom in Lagankhel, Lalitpur teaming up with SN Joshi and Sons. It is selling 80 furniture collections under the brand names Concept and S.B. Furniture. Products use low formaldehyde wood conforming to European standard Class 1 furniture.

Cash clinic

Laxmi Bank Limited

over Rs 100,000 for renovation of the hospital’s paediatric ward. All banking facilities are available at the branch including savings accounts with interest of up to 7 per cent per annum.

Banking up

KIST Merchant Banking and Finance has converted into an authorised commercial bank. With 24 branches across the country and its head office at Anamnagar, the bank offers a 10.25 per cent savings scheme for women and a 9.12 per cent loan scheme for small entrepreneurs.

High flyer

Qatar Airways has been named best economy class airline in the Middle East in a survey by Business Traveller magazine and Conde Nast "Traveller" magazine.

Pandé is no stranger to those acquainted with the Nepali banking sector having worked first at Himalayan Bank and now as CEO of Nepal Investment Bank. A visit to any branch of the bank will tell you that Pandé prides himself on having a nose for aesthetic investments as well as for those who have privileged information, and to allow some to exercise influence over their peers. When it’s harmful, as it often is, it pits one group of employees against another, fans misperceptions about issues and staff, makes the working environment negatively charged, and even details jobs and careers of otherwise promising employees.

How does one deal with office politicians (OPs)?

Acceptance: When Nepali managers bemoan the very existence of office politics, they are being naive. A company where people meet to work every day for eight hours is, by definition, also a social place. In social places, whether we like it or not, people talk about people, and not in flattering terms. The sooner managers accept the existence of office politics, the quicker they can learn to deal with it.

Share information: OPs trade in distributing (negative) information about others that the rest of the staff members do not know. This could be about managers, employees, products and customers. The best way to preempt OPs from gaining ground is to share relevant positive and more negative information faster and widely to reduce relevant parties via face-to-face meetings, emails, text messages and memos. Consistent and widespread verifiably true information is a manager’s best defence against OPs’ coercive gossip.

Point to data: My 10-year experiences in dealing with OPs in South Asia suggest that they are often poor students of data interpretation. That is because their strengths lie not in doing cool-headed analyses but in starting hot-headed, wordy, and emotional flare-ups against those they don’t like. Given this, a secret manager should refuse to give in to OPs’ emotional sways, and stick to sharing the truth from data tables with regard to what the company is doing or not doing, and what its plans ahead are.

Focus on the future: OPs live in the past. If you listen to their conversations, you’ll see that they love endlessly exhuming all the past mistakes so that they can blame others for all that has gone wrong. Blaming others is the only way they can present themselves as innocent by-standers. The way to neutralise OPs’ blaming negativity is to make the manager relentlessly focus on the future and on upcoming opportunities for growth. When staff members feel that the company is set for a better future, they will not want to live in the past.

Go on the offensive: Through a process of trial and error in their company, smart managers come to understand which facts are worth fighting for, and which ones are all right to ignore or lose. This knowledge is important because it allows managers to focus their limited energy on activities that give the best results, even if that means strategically going on the offensive against the OP in a manner that publicly shuts him up. When the OP reacts, a manager’s defence is to be steady and proactive in a manner which makes the OP look like an evergreen complainer in their colleagues’ eyes. Dealing effectively with office politicians is one career-strengthening skill they don’t teach at business schools. But not being able to deal with them guarantees the failure of most high-flying executives.

Alternative investment

works of students from Sirianna Art Gallery to allow them to fund their trip for training in India. The bank’s calendar and greeting cards also features Nepali art works every year.

Pandé advises that art is a great investment option and that it is still relatively cheap to buy a high quality work of art here. “Art is an investment I don’t think one will ever regret.” He recommends the works of Durga Baral, Manoj Babu Mishra, Sunita Rama, Sashi Bikram Shah and Shewa to name a few.

Pandé intends to put together a sizable collection and eventually create a trust that will take care of his paintings and showcase them for the public.

“I feel the return on art is better than on a fixed deposit. Both are valuable but a deposit does not give you the satisfaction you get when you have a beautiful frame on your wall.”

Flawan Mathema
We thought it was a machine to build roads, turns out it is to establish people’s supremacy!

Sign: People’s supremacy
Newspaper: NC and UML party workers chased out from the villages!

Supremacy of the people? Supremacy of command
Paper: Law, political culture, process

Go! Don’t miss the chance to lead the government!
Lion: challenges
Chair: government
Flags: peace process, constitution writing
E

tihnicity has taken the central stage in the debate on federalism. Many languages and regional criteria have also been mooted. Janajatis are pushing for ethnicity-based federalism while the political parties and Bahun Chhetris argue this will lead to fragmentation of the country and have proposed a federal system based on toponomy. But what about Dalits?

Various proposals to include Dalits are:
1. Separate state: As the ethnic groups, Tharu, Madhesis and Khas Chhetri of Karnali region have been demanding separate provinces, Dalits also have realised the need for a separate province. Various Dalit groups have proposed Siraha and Saptari as ‘Sahalesh’ province, Parbat and Bajhang and Kailali, combined province of Surkhet, Dailekh and Achham will be sub-provinces.

2. Non-geographic province: If provinces are created on the basis of ethnicity and Dalits do not get any geographic state, they should be given separate non-geographic states. The Maoist-affiliated Dalits have demanded a non-geographic province, which they believe can guarantee Dalit representation. This can be relevant if provinces are created on the basis of ethnicity.

3. Sub-autonomous region: Sub-autonomous provinces should be created even within provinces. The Maoists have proposed 13 provinces and sub-provinces based on ethnicity that gives rise to debate on this issue. They have understood the state structure based on ethnicity can ensure Janajatis opportunities and allow their language and culture to flourish and help build unity. But there is significant difference in understanding between the Maoists and others regarding state restructuring on the basis of ethnicity. Some Madhesis and Janajatis believe they can rule the region forever while the Bahun-Chhetri, Dalits and minorities fear that they would be driven away from such provinces. Before we decide on federalism, therefore, the issue raised by Madhesis, Tharu and Janajatis should be taken into account and analysed to clear doubts.

Dalits think there is no need for a federal system as there seems no possibility of creating provinces for Dalits. They were exploited by Bahun and Chhetris for centuries, it makes no sense to replace them with new Janajatis or Madhesi rulers in a federal republic. Whichever way the provinces are carved out, Dalits should be represented in them proportionately. Since they were exploited by the state for centuries, they should be given certain privileges as compensation.

The new constitution should have provisions to end all kinds of discrimination and social ostracism. A mixed election system should be followed in all regions and levels. It should be 60 per cent proportional, 30 per cent direct voting and the remaining 10 per cent seats should be allotted for Dalits, women and marginalised communities as compensation. Dalits should be given dual voting rights in the proportional election.

The constitution, provincial status and laws should guarantee secularism. All citizens should be given freedom to choose or discard religion or simply remain atheist. Similarly, all kinds of exploitation and oppression in the name of religion should be outlawed.

Kisan is a member of the Dalit Commission.

What about Dalits?

Many tongues, one voice

Language and ethnicity are at the heart of federalism, not just geography

AMAR KANTA JHA

I f dialogue is to improve between Rajbodh and Nepali, then everyone needs to be speaking in Hindi, Madhesis claim. But almost 70 per cent in the Tarai speak Maithili, Bhojpuri, Avadhi and Tharu languages. Their voices have been ignored because their languages are not used in education, administration and the media. Many feel that federalism will divide the nation, but in fact it is the opposite. If we continue with the present system of central rule, it will be difficult to save the country’s geographic unity. Thus we have to adopt a system of federalism that will address this issue of diversity and empower the marginalized communities.

Transforming Nepal into a federal state is no easy task. Every person, group, community and political party has a different view and there will inevitably be a clash of interests. Different groups lay claim to the same area. Federalism is indispensable if we are to address Nepal’s ethnic diversity. We have to explore the basis of federalism in language, culture, ethnicity, society, geography and history. We have to keep in mind the economic and administrative possibilities.

There are 93 languages spoken in Nepal, but only Nepali has received the designation of national language. Non-Nepali speaking communities have therefore been discriminated in terms of jobs, education and media.

Language is a social heritage and preserving a language means also preserving its community and culture. Language can be the means for developing education and for overall socio-economic transformation of a society.

Language is therefore a vital basis for federalism. We have the prerequisites to establish language-based Mithila, Bhojpuri and Avadhastani states in the Tarai-Madhes area. In the hills, Nepali language is predominant, so federal states there should be based on ethnicity rather than language, like Limbuwan, Kirat, Tamang, Newa, Tamuwan and Magar. Because the Tharus hold a majority in the Western Tarai, it might be possible to establish a Tharuwan state to ensure social justice. The areas in which there is no clear ethnic majority can have a mixed approach.

In the language and ethnicity-based states, two languages spoken by the majority, besides Nepali, should be used for official purposes. If there is a constitutional provision for this, we will be able to address the issue of diversity in language and culture.

There is a possibility that there will be a struggle for identity even within these provinces between ethnicities, in such cases we may have to establish additional autonomous regions as well.

The 13 autonomous states proposed by the Maoists take language and ethnicity as their basis. The NC and UML also support such a system in their manifestos. Although NC and UML leaders have been proposing a geography-based ethnicity, this has not emerged as a party decision. The MUF, TMLP and Sadbhakatam party have been proposing ‘One Madhes One State’ which will have Hindi as the common language. But this will disregard the mother tongues of the Tarai and as a result will weaken the socio-economic transformation in the Tarai-Madhes.

Amar Kanta Jha is former central committee member of Tribhuvan University Teacher’s Association.
A generation awake

There are more parallels between the streets of 1970’s Bronx, USA and Kathmandu than you can imagine—ethnic conflict, dissatisfaction with the state and a population of frustrated youth with little to do but lots of energy to burn.

STEP UP: (l-r) Nepali b-boy Naresh Darlami performs an ‘elbow freeze’; a Thai judge demonstrates a move at a b-boying battle at Tripureswor; and DoomSquad stuns the crowd gathered at the same event.
his abundance of unreleased energy and anger is what the first hip hop ‘crews’ hitting American streets fed on. They moved their bodies with an unusual freedom, they battled, waved, popped, krumped and saved an entire generation from wasting away to drugs and violence.

“There’s little you can do after a session of ‘breaking’,” says Krisada Kawjanwat, originally a boxing instructor from Thailand who has been promoting ‘b-boying’ in Nepal. Here in Nepal a generation of young people is being lured to hip hop not just for identity and release, but as a creative sport and art form. Most hope to make careers out of it.

B-boying, where ‘b’ is short for ‘breaking’ is a form of hip hop that is a mix of physically challenging manoeuvres, gymnastics, martial arts and break dance. Already there are a number of crews—from younger b-boying groups that Krisada is helping like Swayambu Monkey Boys, Fantastic Breakers, Basantapur Breakers to DoomSquad, known for their masked performances and synchronicity steps. In the UWTC corridors at Tripureswor, Krisada helps a mix of people that range from 14-year-olds to a Tribhuvan University professor. Some are preparing for the Asian Title qualification rounds.

But Krisada wants to defy the stereotype of violence that hip hop has been historically associated with. As young people become more hesitant to take on traditional jobs, he believes that they can earn a living through hip-hop. “There is scope,” says Krisada, “You can become a dance instructor, dance for commercials and music videos and apply to dance schools abroad with scholarships.”

Adds Sandip Gurung, one of the crew members of DoomSquad, “Most young people don’t want more regulations to those they already have. Hip hop is a relatively free form. You can mix anything with hip hop, including kathak and salsa, but it can’t go the other way around.”

Without institutions that teach hip-hop well in Nepal, however, almost everyone around is self-taught. Even Nepali Hip Hop singers hardly use any well-trained hop dancers in their videos. “You’re on your own here,” says Sandip. “Most of us learned our moves from the movies. Once you learn how to do the first ten moves, you’re ready to create the 11th.”

Despite possible hurdles, younger b-boys are optimistic. Despite possible hurdles, younger b-boys are optimistic. Despite possible hurdles, younger b-boys are optimistic. Despite possible hurdles, younger b-boys are optimistic. Despite possible hurdles, younger b-boys are optimistic.
Semi-automatic
The suspension of the Tharu agitation gives the Tarai some respite

KUNDA DIXIT in KAILALI

Evelling from Butwal west towards Kohalpur on the East-West Highway it feels like driving through a war zone. Charred skeletons of trucks and buses, felled trees still litter the road. People along the highway call it the “The Second Tharu Banda”. It closed down the Tarai for two weeks and paralysed the rest of the country earlier this month. The blockade was called off the day Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal resigned on 4 May.

The First Tharu banda in March had lasted nearly three weeks and brought the country’s economy to a standstill.

The efforts to cobble together a new coalition in Kathmandu this week has overshadowed the Tharu agitation, but many fear the highway blockade will restart as soon as a new government is sworn in.

There was widespread support across the Tarai for the first Tharu protest in March. RamKrishna Lekhi’s Tharu Kalyankari Sabha and the Tharu Autonomous State Council led by Laxman Tharu had united against what they saw as Madhesi hegemony and even the hill ethnic groups supported the agitation.

But in the second protest, Tharu and Lekhi split and went on to demand a separate Tharu state. According to the 2001 census, there were 164 Kusundas in Nepal, but actual figures now may be lower. Those who have drifted to urban areas have assimilated through marriage, but live in poverty and are illiterate.

“Because the Kusunda have been living away from civilization for so long, they themselves are unaware of their rights and means to access social support,” explains Basnet, “they themselves are unaware of their rights and means to access social support.”

Ram Saran Basnet of the Rural Strengthening Centre in Gorkha calls the possible extinction of the Kusunda a national loss: “The disappearance of any of Nepal’s ethnic groups and the extinction of their culture, heritage, history and lifestyle is a tragedy, and the Kusunda is the most endangered of Nepal’s ethnic groups.”

Married to the youngest son of a Kusunda family in Palungtar of Gorkha, Sumitra used to pride herself in her knowledge of the forests. “We could hunt freely for whatever we wanted and build things on our own, life was so free then,” she says.

But after disease wiped out most of her clan 15 years ago, she sought refuge in neighbouring villages with her four children, and has been living in poverty and dependence since. Facing ostracism from villagers, Sumitra has since drifted from village to village finally settling down with her three grandchildren, a daughter and daughter-in-law in Deurali. Sumitra’s family is believed to be the last surviving Kusunda family in Gorkha.

According to the 2001 census, there were 164 Kusundas in Nepal, but actual figures may be lower. Those who have drifted to urban areas have assimilated through marriage, but live in poverty and are illiterate.

“T’m worried about the continuation of the Kusunda bloodline but we have no say over what’s written in our futures,” says Kamala, Sumitra’s daughter-in-law.

Human rights activists are concerned that the continuation of this trend may soon drive the Kusunda to extinction. Dil Bahadur Basnet from the Human Rights Organization of Nepal estimates that there are only seven Kusunda individuals in Gorkha, three in Tanahun and 18 in Dang.

“Because the Kusunda have been living away from civilization for so long, they have been hidden from the attention of the public and government,” explains Basnet, “they themselves are unaware of their rights and means to access social support.”

Ram Saran Basnet of the Rural Strengthening Centre in Gorkha calls the possible extinction of the Kusunda a national loss: “The disappearance of any of Nepal’s ethnic groups and the extinction of their culture, heritage, history and lifestyle is a tragedy, and the Kusunda is the most endangered of Nepal’s ethnic groups.”

Sumitra’s son is working in the Gulf while the rest of family takes up odd jobs as farm labourers, firewood cutters, alcohol manufacturers and bus conductors to earn a living. “So many foreigners have come to enquire about us, they make money from selling their books and stories while I remain poor,” says 69-year-old Sumitra, “I want to speak to someone who can give me money directly.”

The Kusunda can’t roam freely in the forest anymore and have been forced to find other ways to earn money to feed themselves. The government’s social security system is supposed to provide Rs 50 per month to marginalized and minority ethnic groups. But Gorkha LDO Raj Kumar Shrestha admits the amount, even when available, is too nominal to make a big difference to the lives of the Kusunda.

Says Shrestha: “The first step to empowering the Kusunda is to include them in all spheres of development policy, and this needs to be guaranteed in the new constitution.”

Says Kamala: “All we want is to live life like the other groups, to be treated with respect and dignity like any human being.”

KUNDA DIXIT

KONG YEN LIN in GORKHA

The Kusunda are not just facing poverty and alienation, but extinction

Close to the edge

Out of the jungle: Believed to be the last of the Kusunda in Gorkha, Sumitra (white hair) is the matriarch of this family of former hunter gatherers. The Kusunda are not just an endangered ethnic group, but are also finding it difficult to survive.
The Tharu

The Tharu form the country’s third largest ethnic group (after Bahun-Chhetri and Magar) even though they make up just seven per cent of the population. This shows just how diverse Nepal’s ethnic mosaic is, with a ‘long tail’ of nearly 100 smaller groups. The Tharu are one of Nepal’s few aboriginal groups and have population concentrations mainly in the Tarai, Chitwan, Dang, and in the western Tarai, and have been historically exploited from moderate Tharu leaders.

Recent protests were triggered by politicians lumping them in with others in the west. It boiled over after the abduction to demand a Rs 1 million ransom from the party. The party also suspected that he failed to hand over all his weapons after the war, and these guns are now reportedly in possession of the self-styled Tharhat Army.

Maoist distrust of the former Tharu comrades runs deep here in far-west in their Tharuhat Army. Laxman Tharu was a Maoist leader who has joined Laxman Tharu. Some FM activists for defying their own comrades over control of timber or quarry contracts and payoffs from smuggling syndicates. “We can’t write about these things, about quarries and payoffs from smuggling syndicates. “We can’t write about these things, about quarries and payoffs from smuggling syndicates.”

The slogan this time was for “All the support that we got from the people during the first agitation we squandered in the second,” said one Tharu businesswoman in Kathmandu’s highway hub of Annapurna. The Tharu demand for control over their water, land and forest resources. Local Tharu last week took control of Kathali’s scenic Ghodak Ghodak Lake. They burnt down more than 24 VDC buildings in Kathali.

“Their tactics are identical to what the Maoists did,” said one Tharu journalist in Dhanagadi. That is not surprising since Laxman Tharu was a Maoist battalion commander and broke away when he wasn’t made a CA member last year. He was also accused of engineering his own abduction to demand a Rs 1 million ransom from the party. The party also suspected that he failed to hand over all his weapons after the war, and these guns are now reportedly in possession of the self-styled Tharhat Army.

The Tharus during the agitation. For many, this is a warning about riots between Madhesis and Tharus. Many, this is a warning about riots between Madhesis and Tharus.

ALL FIRED UP: One of many Alpha banners demanding that the Tharu demand for control over their water, land and forest resources. Local Tharu last week took control of Kathali’s scenic Ghodak Ghodak Lake. They burnt down more than 24 VDC buildings in Kathali.

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Operation Democracy

Nepal needs to look beyond South Asia at how democracies manage their armies

From Kabul to Karachi, Kanyakumari to Kathmandu, civilians and soldiers have been interacting and the results are a cautionary tale to all of us. Democracies are strange. They are robust and seem able to survive almost anything. Venal politicians, angry or apathetic electors, floods of money from vested interests, natural catastrophe and terrorism: democratic societies take the hit and carry on.

A key element of a sturdy democracy is largely lacking across this region though, with the notable exception of India. That's the notion of a civilian-led military. Among major South Asian capitals, only New Delhi's political leaders indisputably call the shots over the men and women in uniform.

Elsewhere it's a sorry picture of covert and open military supremacy and the impact on local democratic space is palpable. Pakistan springs most obviously to mind. Pakistan's military commanders have grabbed power in that country more often than elections have been held. Not once in the country's 62 years of existence has an elected government been voted from office.

Prime Ministers lose their jobs in Pakistan when they're sacked by generals, not the people. Sometimes that's a coup, other times it's a provision put in the constitution by the army to allow a president chosen by limited franchise to dismiss an elected head of government.

Scholar Ayesha Siddiqa, in her captivating treatise, Military Inc., shows how Pakistani military officers have exploited hostility with India and American paranoia, first about Russian communism then about radical Islam, to stay firmly in charge of economic and political life in a country they're sworn to protect. By some estimates, 75 per cent of national income over six decades has been sopped up by a force that has outlasted every major war it's ever fought.

Democracy has paid a grim price in the past week's assertions by President Asif Ali Zardari that he is firmly in charge of his soldiers and army as hollow as his claims of innocence in myriad corruption cases against him around the world. There's a semblance of democracy in Sri Lanka, regular elections, high voter turnout and peaceful transfers of power from loser to winner. But the beautiful island off the southern tip of India has become the most militarised state in the region, thanks to nearly three decades of brutal civil war with the Tamil Tigers.

Sri Lanka's military and national security elite have used that conflict to increase the stature of the army and its claim on the country's limited revenues. Soldiers are armed to the teeth, serving and retired officers occupy key positions in public life and government. Procurement budgets for everything from high tech aircraft to boot polish and rations have enriched a military-civilian nexus that conflict to increase the stature of the army and its claim on the country's limited revenues. Soldiers are armed to the teeth, serving and retired officers occupy key positions in public life and government. Procurement budgets for everything from high tech aircraft to boot polish and rations have enriched a military-civilian nexus.

Look to Bangladesh for another democracy badly damaged by its soldiers and their penchant for an ever-increasing share of the national polity. Democracy limps and staggers, sometimes that's a coup, other times it's a provision put in the constitution by the army to allow a president chosen by limited franchise to dismiss an elected head of government. The Maoist model of an indoctrinated fighting force may have helped the Great Helmsman abolish feudalism in China but Nepalis want sloppy civilian democracy, not military-Maoism. A nation needs its armed forces but voters and elected leaders must set the rules, budgets and mission statements, with openness and consensus building.

No side of the current argument in Nepal has this mix right. As the country's politicians struggle for power, they need to look around the region, around the world, and consider how prosperous democracies organise their affairs. In those countries, soldiers work for the taxpayer, not the other way around.

Daniel Lak's latest book is India Express. The Future of a New Superpower by Penguin
Electric ‘car’-nival

Most of Kathmandu’s battery-operated vehicles will be joining a charity electric car rally next month to raise money for the rehabilitation of patients with spinal injuries.

More than 30 cars, three wheelers, vans and even some electric bicycles will take part in the rally that will start from Mulitgarh Mandala and travel to the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre (SIRC) near Banepa on 13 June. They will cover a roundtrip distance of 50km.

“SIRC is organising the event to support two causes: electric transport and spinal injury rehabilitation,” said the centre’s Ojashwi Thami, “all the money raised from the event will go to fund free rehabilitation services to indigent patients.”

In Nepal, spinal injury is overwhelmingly linked to subsistence living (climbing trees for tree fodder, cliffs over cliffs) and a large number of SIRC’s patients are not able to pay even the minimal charges applied.

In addition, the rally hopes to pressure the government to announce tax rebates on electric vehicles to proactively protect the environment and reduce the nation’s fuel bill so that transportation can rely more on domestic hydropower.

Electric vehicle owners will need to raise a minimum of Rs 30,000 per car to be eligible to participate in the rally. There will be fun games, a jungle hike and a free lunch at the destination.

There are 27 Reva cars, Nepal-made vans and new model Safa Tempos in operation in the Valley. Says Thami: “Cars that run out of juice can recharge their batteries for the drive back to Kathmandu.”

Inquiries:infosfia@wlink.com.np 011-666848

Festivals of the Valley

U S-born Scott Fiia’s photographs reveal the seldom-captured on film side of Nepal life—a man with jamara bunched up over both ears, an agore baba chatting in the sun. This week, he will display at least 50 photographs of 16 different festivals celebrated in the Valley including Teej, Shiva Ratri, Samek Shah and Mataya.

“The festivals here are really alive,” says Fiia, “so colourful and full of energy.” Professionally, he is an environmental engineer and his skills as a photographer are strictly self-taught. He started taking pictures while he was working in Ethiopia, in the late 80s, when he needed to escape from the gloom enveloping the country at that time. He also wanted to photograph the other side of Ethiopia, closed to the rest of the world, beyond the famine and war.

“It’s similar here,” says Fiia, “there are hardly any tourists at these festivals and everyone participating is a local.” Fiia’s photographs have been used on a number of US calendars and brochures, is presenting a Nepal that is quite different to the stereotypes that cloud its image.

Fiia lived in Kathmandu for 7 years almost 10 years back. When he came back last year, he started photographing festivals, sometimes even coincidentally finding the same people he photographed a decade ago. Most of his pictures are a product of relentless cycling around and pure serendipity.

“Festivals of the Kathmandu Valley” will be exhibited at the Siddhartha Art Gallery, Balmar Malal Revisited from 15-29 May.

Nepal to the Nile

When one talks about Nepal’s tourism industry, most people think of foreign visitors coming to Nepal. But outbound tourism from Nepal to various parts of Asia is catching on, both among Kathamnud-based expats and a new generation of affluent young Nepalis.

Nepal is usually a springboard for people going to the beaches of Thailand, Malaysia or Sri Lanka in winter, or shopping holidays in Singapore. Nepal is even booking cruises in the Malacca Straits. But one of the best-kept secrets about outbound travel from Nepal is how cheap and easy it is to visit Egypt. With five West Asian airlines now flying from Kathmandu, the Persian Gulf region, Turkey and Egypt have suddenly become much more accessible.

Of all the destinations, it is Egypt that is a once-in-a-lifetime holiday. With its historic sites, museums, fabulous food and culture and the Nile, a trip to Egypt is not just enjoyable but also educational. The best way to see Egypt is in a cruise up and down the Nile. The river is Egypt’s lifeblood and the country’s historical sites are dotted along this mighty river.

Nepalis used to go to Goa, Malaysia and Mauritius, but the Nile cruise is becoming increasingly popular,” says Nili Shah of Marco Polo Travels that organises outbound tours to Egypt from Nepal.

Marco Polo has teamed up with Spring Tours in Cairo to offer surprisingly affordable eight-day packages for Nepali tourists with roundtrip airfare, hotel and Nile cruise. The cruise itself is like a floating five-star hotel.

Ram Krishna Banjara in Cairo

Eight-day Egypt Package from Marco Polo Travels:
Rs55,300-71,100
Marco Polo Travels:
malaysiaholidays_marco(at)polo.com.np, 4247215

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Events

3rd Anniversary of Yala Maya Classic, 16 May, 5PM, Yala Maya Kendra.

Festivals of the Kathmandu Valley, an exhibition by Scott Faiia at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited till 29 May, 11AM-6PM. Daily. 4218004

Workplace Bullying, a talk program, 24 May at The New Era Institute, Battaliwati. 9815033958

IPL 2009, watch IPL 2009 live at Rox Bar Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491224

Call for entries for Film South Asia till 31 May, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5552141

Exhibitions

Silent Witnesses, an exhibition by Aymeric Hamon at the Alliance Francaise Garden, 16 May, 10 AM.

Festivals of the Kathmandu Valley, an exhibition by Scott Faiia at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited till 29 May, 11AM-6PM. Daily. 4218004

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

Music

Smooth Ambient Jazz with Helen Louise Jones and Eric Slaughter and Nich. Joel, 16 May, 7PM, New Orleans Cafe, Pulchok.

The Kathmandu Chorale presents Enjolra Life, a spring Concert of British School, Thamel. 16 May, 3.30PM-8PM

Louis Bertignac & Bijaya Vaidya concert, with SAC MUSIC, Academy Hall, 23 May.

TGIF at Jazzabella Cafe every Wednesday and Friday, 2110475

Kathmandu express, performance by International Acts, 7.30 PM onwards free entry at Mokhot.

Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Durbur Barg. 4227288

Sunday Jazz brunch barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491924

Jazz evening at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM. 4492032

Epic, at the Brunehill the Acoustic Lounge every Friday, Thamel. 9815038437

Strings Band live every Tuesday at G’s Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.

Wednesday Melody at Jazzabella Cafe, 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 Cafe & Bar.

Live Sensation, performance by Yarkey every Saturday, 8PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4492124

Fusion and Looza Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412183

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. 4488062

Pasta pesto passion at La Dolce Vita, Thamel. 4709612

Home made pasta at Alfredo, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, 4273999

Gourmet trout at Olive Garden, 8PM 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. 4491224

Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Cafe, Hyatt Regency. 4491234

Nuthuche goes Thai at Nuthuche’s Thai Kitchen, Baluwatar. 4428903

Fusion of Marcola Ragas’s new menu and Mannie’s new bar at Dohalima Cafe. 5522113

Piat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 60. 4412969

Realish Bites, The Kaiser Cafe, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341

Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Giri Guynar, Rs 999, at the Shamshaba Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999

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Weekend weather

The bolstering westerly fronts which we have been waiting for since January are here now, lowering temperatures by some five degrees and bringing good rainfall to the Valley for the first time this year. Earlier this week farmers in Mustang, the other side of the Himalaya, were pointing to the snow-free conditions on the other side, the side that had heavily eroded the fragile landscapes on the other side. Satellite pictures of Thursday noon show vibrant fronts heading towards the eastern side of the Himalaya in response to a strong low pressure trough over the region. However, the concern is these delayed westerly fronts could possibly push back the onset of the monsoon. Expect heavy rainfalls in the eastern mountains of Nepal and sunny intervals and afternoon thunderstorms in the Valley.
HINDU SOLIDARITY: Religious devotees rally against a secular federal state on Sunday at Sundhara.

GRAVEYARD SHIFT: Maoist cadres carry mock corpses of President Ram Baran Yadav at a protest in Ratna Park on Monday, demanding that he reverse his move to reinstate the army chief.

VIVA EUROPA: The EU delegation in Nepal celebrate EU Day on Saturday at the Hyatt Regency.

YOOF DONE GOOD: An art exhibition organised by the Manang Youth Society at Yala Maya Kendra to raise funds to build a community lodge in Larkepass, Manaslu region.


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Civil society supremacy

Syllabuses of the civilian society have been demonstrating their supremacy by joining nationwide protests by kranki kari buffalos this week. But the buffalo rallies backfired when the animals refused to denounce the president’s move. In numerous district headquarters, the buffaloes threw off their presidential impersonators and hoofed it. Several Ram Baran lookalikes were hospitalized. The protests ended up looking like a cross between a rodeo and the Pamplona bull run. They should have just used donkeys.

Given the new confidence with which Comrade Makunay is fielding questions at tv ambushes, it does look like he is finally getting the chance he has patiently waited for 15 years. In the past, every time he got to within striking distance of PM-ship, MKN has had the rug pulled from under him. Even if he makes it to Baluwatar, it would put Nepal’s democracy to shame that after elaborate elections last year we get a new prime minister who was defeated in not just one but both his constituencies. But let’s give the man a medal for sheer persistence.

Ibum Dev himself is uncharacteristically quiet these days, and his role in the coalition has raised suspicions within the party that he is actually a Badde deep penetration agent. Some seniors reportedly refused to discuss sensitive policy matters about party strategy in cobblining a new coalition when Comrade Dwarf Divinity was around at the central committee’s caucuses this week. JN apparently agreed to MKN as PM only on condition that he (Ihallu) gets to appoint all other ministers.

Comrade Ian’s return to Nepal has created quite a flutter, with one paparazzi even sneaking in to shoot him sitting with his successor at the Summit the other day. Much as one would like to connect dots, seems the ex-SRSG UN is here to pick up his stuff and take a break from all the Israeli wrath at his report on the bombing of six UN premises in Gaza. Back home, Israeli papers have poured scorn on him, linking that report to revelations in the Shaktikhor Tapes, saying Hamas hoodwinked him just as the Maoists duped him in Nepal over actual guerrilla numbers.

Meanwhile, with Gen Cutwall now firmly ensconced once again at Bhadakali, the generals are trying to distance themselves from the JMCC verification process. They allege the army’s rep in the JMCC, Shivram Pradhan was a Cool Budder loyalist and therefore a Maoist plant. Some expect the new government on Friday, but others say nothing will happen until the outcome of the Indian elections are known over the weekend, especially if Manmohan and Yechury get together again. But anything is possible, including the Maoist compromise formulae: Get Ram Baran to resign, make GPK president, retire off Cool Budder and make Cutwall step down and kick CB upstairs. But then BRB is lobbying actively for PMship. And does a new govt mean we are going to have new ambassador candidates to UK, US and India and hearings all over again? How about the new NRB governor? And Com Yummy’s siblings who all got govt jobs? Meanwhile, Nepal’s Asstrolgers (the only group that still puts national interest above all else) have pitched in with their prediction that the Maoists won’t be leading the government anytime soon because they are under the influence of Saturn, just as Kingji was when he was ousted.

Chairman Chhabilal is now getting ensnared in his own doublespeak. He told the Hindu he lobbied hard to get Indian approval to sack the army chief. Wait a minute, isn’t he the one complaining about Indian arm-twisting? Squatting in Noida for ten years during the war isn’t Indian interference, but when Delhi outflanks him it is. And PKD is on a charm offensive in the Indian media: NDTV for 20 mins, exclusive on CNN-IBN, Hindu, TOI. Why don’t we all just accept that this country is only partly sovereign and do away with all the drama?

As usual, Terrifico was too smart by half. In his bid to woo the Indians he has again ticked off the Chinese by telling the Hindu: ‘None of the Chinese delegations came to Nepal at my invitation.’ ‘So, to please his cadre, he abuses India, to please India, he calls the Chinese gatecrashers.’ Way to go.

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