Delhi wants the Maoists to make a “course correction”

PRASHANT JHA

Ever since they resigned from government, the Maoists have tried to play on anti-Indian nationalism. But senior leaders now admit there is no alternative but to renegotiate with India.

“We made mistakes in handling India,” confessed one Maoist secretariat member, “but India also can’t ignore that we are the most powerful party here.”

Ahead of a politburo meeting, starting Monday, the Maoists will have to make crucial decisions about relations with India. It’s not going to be easy because New Delhi has drawn a line in the sand that it doesn’t want the Maoists to cross.

Senior Indian officials, from both the foreign office and the security establishment, have told Nepal Times meaningful engagement is difficult until the Maoists engage in a “course correction” and they have made the following “suggestions”:

The Maoists must make a clear and unconditional commitment to multiparty democracy, which India says was not visible during their nine-month stint in power. The party has to shift from its radical dogmatic line to a moderate left-of-centre orientation. One official told us: “They have to give up dreams of capturing the state.”

Delhi doesn’t believe Pushpa Kamal Dahal anymore when he says he is under pressure from hardliners. Said the official: “No more excuses. If it is a tactic, we are not falling for it. If it is for real, then it is time for the leader to assert and either bring the hardliners in line or marginalise them.” He added the onus lies on the Maoists to revive trust by steps like dismantling the YCL and behaving like a normal opposition.

An official said India is tired of “Maoist duplicity”, adding: “They have to learn that they cannot keep chanting anti-India slogans here, and then privately come to us for help to bail them out.” This is a clear reference to Maoist rhetoric on “foreign intervention” and the Dang border controversy, which is seen as being engineered by “Maoists and friendly media”.

India says it still supports the peace process and wants a new constitution, but the Maoists can’t “bulldoze” their way through. “There has to be reasonable discussion on integration between all stakeholders, including the Nepal Army,” he added. Token integration under strict parameters may be feasible, but unit level entry and space to PLA commanders in the NA is a strict “no” for India.

What didn’t go down too well in Delhi was that even as the Maoists were calling for a total overhaul of the “special relationship” with India, they were cozying up to Beijing. Indian officials, however, are at pains to emphasise that their role must not be overstated and politics emanates from within. But, warned one diplomat: “The present behaviour of ranting against everyone is not winning them friends. It will dig them into a hole.”
Indoctrinated in the theory that power comes out of barrels of guns, former guerillas in the former government were understandably obsessed with the military. They still are.

And if there is one major hurdle ahead of the new coalition it is the issue of integration and rehabilitation. But for that the prime minister will have to cross the first hurdle of actually forming a government. The political void in Kathmandu has enforced the perception of a weak state. This in turn has led further erosion of the rule of law, institutionalised impunity and has fanned anarchy.

A traffic accident brings the northern half of the city to a standstill for two days. Kids daftle bicycle tyres to enflame bandh. Police look on as the YCL thrashes the YF in Banepa and vice versa. More worryingly, the three main parties are behaving as if they can do anything (see 10-11). Development has ground to a halt as cadre plunder the district budgets for road contracts.

There is now such criminalisation of politics and the politisation of criminality that it is becoming difficult to tell the difference between a politician and a dacoit.

The security apparatus that is most in touch with the public, the Nepal Police, has had no chance to recover from its politicisation, a process that began after the insurgency they are powerless to stop gangsters because they have patronage from biggies. They can’t even arrest hoodlums throwing a stone without cabinet authorisation.

Improving the efficiency of the police force is essential to check this country’s malignant lawlessness. The single most widespread demand among people across Nepal today is law and order. They are fed up with highway blockades, strikes, curfews and curfews.

New retirement rules provide the government with an opportunity to boost the morale of the police and hence reassure the public that they are safe. A younger police leadership is hence reassuring.

The most important component of police reform has to do with the functional freedom of law enforcement agencies. They must be the authority to apprehend on the spot any militant youth member of a political authority to apprehend on the spot any militant youth member of a political organisation who are being involved in vandalism or threats.

These aren’t things that need a police force. It is the duty of Prime Minister Nepal of Nepal to ensure that his citizens are safe.

**COP OUT**

**ETHNIC CARD**

*But there should be zero tolerance for incitement of ethnic intolerance and hatred for ‘short-term political gain’ (‘The ethnic card’, #454) —very well said indeed!* This wise line left me wondering how different our lives would be if the Maoists had taken a few years earlier when the Maoists were 크리기공 군단 the ‘genie-bottle’. Unfortunately, back then, the most of our intelligentsia, media, civil society were busy championing the Maoists as the Robin Hood of the poor and downtrodden. Has it taken all this while for the lights to finally go on, or had the Kathmandu intelligentsia simply ‘popped over’ their knowledge of Maoists’ misuse of this ‘combustible mixture’ for some short-term gain of their own?

**LETTERS**

*Your editorial (‘The ethnic card’, #454) is an early warning to this country that if politicians can’t resist the temptation to use ethnicity to forward their cause then all is lost. The former Yugoslavians who had only four ethnic groups, we have 103. Imagine a multi civil war over ethnicity. It will make the Jana Yuddha look like a picnic. We are already seeing signs of the fissures. The Limbuas are busy upgrading Raipur because of overlapping territorial claims. The Banepa riots were between Nepali Congress and Tamang. The Tharus and Maheshes are already confront in; politicians should wake up and nip this in the bud.*

Kiran Mainali, Pokhara

**LETTERS**

*At the forum

The MJF split makes politics even more unstable*

**ETHNIC CARD**

THUWAN AND JUNA

Thank you for that heart-warming cover story on Bhawan and Juna (#454). You have the heart of Nepal at a fundamental level Nepalis are all brothers and sisters and reconciliation is possible. The Rai siblings have shown their political worth of the way, but unfortunately I don’t think they’re paying any attention. They’re too busy quarrelling, and now even threatening each other.

Lina Sorenson, Dhankuta

**PRESIDENT’S LETTER**

YESTERDAY’S MEN

OK Lal has taken a potshotted again at the political parties (‘Yesterday’s men...’, #454). They are a soft target because they won’t threaten him or beat him up like the YCL. There are two types of forces in this country, ones that believe in (and use) violence as a political tool and others that don’t. It is now pretty clear to Nepal Times which side it should be on since your editor was at the receiving end of physical assault recently.

Name withheld, email

**LETTERS**

Nepal Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers should provide their real names and contact details for publication should be in text format without attachments with ‘LETTER’ in the subject line.

Email: letters@nepaltimes.com
Fax: 977-1-5021003
Mail: Letters, Nepal Times
GPO Box 7015, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Prime Minister Madhav Nepal claims that he never lobbied to be made prime minister. He’s partly right. Nepal did once petition the king to be appointed prime minister, but that was during the hybrid royal-military regime when the CEO of the country was also the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. This time, in GPK’s metaphor, the prize of premiership fell into Nepal’s lap like a ripe mango.

Nepal had once also aspired to be the president of the republic with the help of Maoists. But it didn’t take long for him to realise the futility of that dream. Having spent the better part of his life in various communist parties, Comrade Nepal knows that no apparatchik willingly accepts another even as a ceremonial superior.

What actually led to Nepal’s surprise selection remains unknown. Koirala may have thought that it would be imprudent to step into a chair just vacated by the leader of the largest party in the legislature. Chairman Jhalanath Khanal was probably considered too beholden to Pushpa Kamal Dahal to lead an anti-Maoist coalition. Mercurial Upendra Yadav was unlikely to receive the sanction of those who have the final say in the making and unmaking of governments these days.

Meanwhile, the paper crown of premiership, pasted overnight with the joint effort of proactive diplomats and an assertive military had to be put upon Nepal’s head precisely because he was the unlikeliest candidate to resist a rightist roadmap of the Kathmandu establishment.

Even Nepal didn’t expect to be at the head of an anti-Maoist coalition so soon after Dahal had been stripped of chairmanship of Constitution Drafting Committee upon him. There is no other explanation for the complete absence of vision, mission or plan of the anti-Maoist formation at the helm of government.

Other than an irresistible urge to have their hands at the till during a period of extreme volatility, Premier Nepal’s existing and probable colleagues have no plausible reason to join a government that is failed to fail even before being formed.

Fortunately, the Maoists have been kind towards the new government: their protests provide legitimacy to a ruling coalition that has done nothing to deserve such vigorous opposition. But now that Nepal is in hot seat, he has to make best use of this historic opportunity.

The greatest challenge for Nepal is to prove his authenticity. The Maoists can’t question his legitimacy because they were the ones to give cabinet berths to non-elected politicians in the previous government.

The prime minister can prove his political antecedents by insisting that at least all his senior colleagues be directly elected CA members. His helplessness in accepting the nominations of Bidya Bhandari and Sujata Koirala is understandable, but exceptions should not be allowed to become the rule. Nepal needs to be prudent in choosing his cabinet colleagues from his own party as well as from his coalition partners. He needsn’t hurry or worry, other than the Maoists no one can unseat him without losing credibility.

Asserting his authority is a little trickier for a premier who owes his position not only to constituent assembly members but also to various extra constitutional players. The BhadraKali Brass has thrown a challenge by insisting on the prosecution of an officer who just accepted the order of the government of the day. Premier Nepal has erred by extending the tenure of eight generals who had retired from their posts even as their combined appeal remains sub-judice.

The ripe mango in Premier Nepal’s lap is too small to be shared by all anti-Maoist forces in the country and outside. No matter what he does, Nepal would have to take the blame for being a lame duck prime minister, appointed merely to keep the seat warm for a more suitable successor.

Meanwhile, he has an unusual opportunity to prove the old hypothesis that accidents of history often produce extraordinary leaders. The mango tree grows from a seed. Being and nothingness are all about fundamental freedoms of human beings against determinists of all stripes.
Crafted in Kathmandu

Making the Valley’s unique artistic heritage pay for its own upkeep

The erosion of Kathmandu Valley’s unique cultural heritage has prompted many to find ways to preserve it. There is a renaissance of Newari architecture in Bhaktapur and Patan, the tourism industry has pitched in with heritage hotels and cultural sight-seeing, and the handicraft business is doing its bit.

Now, there is a unique effort to support Kathmandu’s artisans and craftsmen by helping sell their products in the local and international market. ‘Crafted in Kathmandu’ is not just a handicraft business, its founder Rosha Chitrakar hastens to clarify.

“Our goal is to help preserve the Valley’s heritage, the skills, knowledge and resourcefulness of our artisans in creating art and home decor objects that are good enough to be shared in the world market,” says Chitrakar.

The challenge for Chitrakar’s ‘Crafted in Kathmandu’ brand is to pay for the protection of the Valley’s built, living and natural heritage by the products and services of its artisans. Chitrakar calls this a “plus revenue” business and is focussing on selling products to these distinct markets.

The first is the local market where people need various pots, vessels, jewelry, musical instruments, chariot-building skills and monument restoration capacity. The trend is towards restoring homes to their original and operating them as bed and breakfast pensions in the old city.

The second is the high end Nepali market such as hotels, homes of expatriates, corporate gifts, gardens, sculpture, home decor etc. This market has the highest growth potential because of the increasing tendency of identifying with one’s heritage. Tourists and expatriates also increasingly look for hotels and homes that reflect the unique history and heritage of the Kathmandu Valley.

The third is the market for exports of Kathmandu artifacts to North America, Europe and East Asia. ‘Crafted in Kathmandu’ has a gallery outlet in North America that tells the story of how the artisans and crafts persons of the Kathmandu valley are restoring the World Heritage City. It sells products that have been designed and crafted to meet local demands.

Chitrakar explains that an example of this three-tiered marketing strategy is a potter making clay pots for local local yogurt whose family is also making terracotta garden animal figures and also ceramic bases for table lamps for the North American market.

“This keeps artisan families fully employed all year round, increasing their quality of life and ensuring that the skills are passed down to a new generation,” says Chitrakar.

Crafted in Kathmandu’s exhibition runs till 15 June at Dwarika Hotel, 11AM-7PM. www.craftedinkathmandu.com
Lip service or tongue lashing?

Talking about how Nepal’s political parties lack the seriousness to safeguard press freedom is both acutely depressing and mildly hopeful. It’s depressing, because if one compiles a mere six-months worth of coverage of threats, physical abuses, mental torture and harassment against journalists, with details even of their murderers, numbers thicker and thicker.

Strictly Business
Aashutosh Tiwari

Yet it’s also hopeful, because, at least from the lip service that spokespersons of the political parties offer to press freedom, it’s clear that our politicians do understand the importance of press freedom. But that hope dissipates into cynicism when the politicians are then unable to explain to their militant cadres the reasons behind their intangible as press freedom matters for all Nepali citizens, including those who disagree with or are indifferent to any political ideology.

Just four days ago in Lamjung, YCL activists warned journalists that they would take apart pieces. The journalists’ only crime was to be on duty to cover a quarrel between the YCL activists and local people.

On Saturday morning, Maoist cadres halted a van belonging to Kantipur Publications on the East-West Highway. They took control of the vehicle, set it on fire, and burnt down not only the vehicle but thousands of copies of The Kathmandu Post and Kantipur. The driver had dared to do his daily job of transporting the newspapers to subscribers and news stands in Eastern Nepal on the day of a forcible quit strike.

On Monday 1 June, on the day of another forced shutdown in Kathmandu, cadres of the Neel Autonomous State routinely stopped vehicles that had press logos, smashed the windows, seized the keys, harassed the journalists, and stopped them from reporting and photographing the hardships faced by many ordinary people when the city was forced to a standstill.

Online visitors to this newspaper’s website must have noticed a boxed item that’s been there for the past few months. It says: Punish Uma Singh’s Killers: End impunity. Uma Singh was a fearless journalist in Janakpur. Last January, she was hacked to death in her own apartment. A January, she was hacked to death by Maoist cadres on duty to cover a ‘crime’ was to be on duty to cover a quarrel between the YCL activists and local people.

And that brings us to the part why politicians must re-educate their cadres about the importance of press freedom. They can start by offering three basic reasons. First, press freedom helps aggregate information. In a country of 30 million people, most of whom are illiterate and poor, no citizen or group can expect to be on top of all the information related to their well-being. Press freedom allows reporters and strippers media to widely disseminate reports and analyses about events and people that they believe are of public interest. These reports and analyses, in turn, add layers of nuanced information to help everyone from national policy-makers to village councils, to households and individuals to make decisions about their lives in ways they see fit for themselves. For those Maoist leaders who never tire of making decisions about their lives in ways they see fit for themselves, it’s a craft, press freedom allows all to exercise judgment to choose news that they find enlightening to decide what is right and what is not. Sure, not every citizen is equally enlightened to decide what is right and what is not.

Press freedom needs to be defended by its maximum application

Press freedom is built up by consistently reporting the verifiable truth, and openly correcting errors as soon as they become known. This fact should reduce the worries of those who say that mainstream newspapers print false news to serve their interests of the ‘bourgeoisie’. Rather, as we have seen again and again, it’s the reputation of the perpetrators and their political parties that takes a blow globally when media houses and journalists are threatened, abused, attacked and killed.

Unless our political leaders, especially those of Maoists who make all the right noises about their commitment to build plural democratic societies, seriously educate and train their unruly cadre about the importance of press freedom for Nepal’s democracy, their paying more lip service is as good as their keeping lips sealed against the daily attacks on the press in Nepal.

Free Fedora

Fedora 10, a free Linux-based computer operating system, is now available for people who want to avoid the Microsoft Windows system. Fedora 10, code-named Leondidas, is free and open source software (FOSS) which was developed by the Fedora Project, a community of people across the globe.

Flying higher

Yet Airline has launched its first Flight Potter, PC-6, a multi-purpose airplane best for short take off and landing. Yeti intends to add two more PC-6 aircrafts to its fleet.

Drink in Rome

Lager brewer Carlsberg is attempting to up sales by giving away two tickets to visit Italian capital Rome and its bars. Under the ‘Best Bar Tour’ scheme consumers receive a coupon with every Carlsberg purchase.

Facelift

Yamaha dealers in Nepal, Moring Auto Works will distribute the bikes.
Turn by turn

Editorial in Janadisha, 7 June

Four days after being arrested during a protest at Baidapataura, Rautahat, Ladai Shah, 40, was still in police custody. He was severely beaten by UML cadres and had to be taken to Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu where he died while being treated for injury. This Rautahat native was demonstrating against newly elected prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, a candidate they had rejected during the elections. Home Ministry, currently headed by Nepal, had ordered Shah’s arrest and UML party workers were given a free rein to beat him up. PM Nepal should take responsibility for his death. Only two weeks have passed since the UML-led government was formed and incidents of violence are becoming common. Shah had never even shown a black flag. But even if he had, it was his right. There needs to be an inquiry into the killing of an ordinary citizen held in police custody.

Meanwhile, unlike in the past, the media has shown little interest in this tragedy. Neither have the Maoist leaders protested even shown a black flag. But even if he had, it was his right. There needs to be an inquiry into the killing of an ordinary citizen held in police custody.

What’s in a name?

Editorial in Janadisha, 7 June

From the Nepali Press

The South Asia Poverty Reduction, Economic Management, Finance and Private Sector Development Unit (SASPEF) of the World Bank invites applications for the position of a Senior Governance Specialist which will be based in Kathmandu, Nepal. The position will initially be a local one year extended term consultant appointment with a possibility for renewal.

The Senior Governance Specialist will serve as a key member of the Nepal Country Team as well as a member of SASPEF’s regional team working on governance. Based out of the Kathmandu Office, she or he will be responsible for working as part of a multidisciplinary team focusing upon issues of transparency and accountability, service delivery and institutional development with government and other partners. Specific duties will include; (1) advising clients on governance and public management reforms, and monitoring progress with the same; (2) supporting the Country Management Team in analyzing information on emerging governance issues (3) providing operationally relevant governance and institutional support to and participating in cross-sectoral teams working on various development projects; The incumbent should be capable of working independently with minimum supervision.

The successful candidate will have the following qualifications:

- An advanced degree in public administration, business administration, public sector management, political science, economics, finance and/or comparative politics with a strong record of academic achievement;
- A minimum of eight years of relevant professional experience (or the equivalent combination of education and experience) in the field of public sector management, governance and anti-corruption reforms; Experience in managing or overseeing development projects desirable;
- Excellent people skills and the capacity to lead and participate effectively in multidisciplinary teams;
- Strong analytical skills, a willingness to work hard, the ability to gather and analyze significant quantities of data;
- Demonstrated ability to develop and maintain productive, professional relationships with government counterparts, donors and other stakeholders;
- Excellent written and oral communication skills and ability to foster long-term, productive client relationships;
- Both international and Nepali experience will be highly valued.

This is a country office position in Nepal subject to local recruitment under the Nepal compensation plan. The World Bank offers a locally competitive package and is committed to attract and maintain a diverse, highly qualified and dedicated workforce. Equally qualified women and members of disadvantaged groups are encouraged to apply.

The details of the post are available at www.worldbank.org/jobs. Qualified candidates should apply on-line referring to job # 090816 by 25 June 2009.

Learning mothers

Annapurna Post, 8 June

“Before our mothers used to teach us,” says Saraswati Shrestha, a teacher from Angkhali, Gorkha. “Now I am happy that we are teaching them.” Shrestha has been teaching her 52 year old mother Mina in grade five. At Nabchetana Women’s School, there are a total of 66 students, aged from 17 to 73 in grade one to eight. Eight teachers, taught by two women teachers. The school was established by women who were too old to attend regular schools, but wanted to study. Many community groups, such as Himali Sector Development Centre’s Hope program, Arunchauasi VDC, Janpriya Mothers group, Janashramdan and Kopila Nepal, have given financial support and donated furniture.

Although a good initiative, attendance is still poor at the school because rural women still face the problem of getting to go to school only after finishing their housework. However, this is a start. “Not being able to read a word when going to cities has been the incentive to study,” says Santa Kumari Baram, 43. Now, many men in the area are becoming inspired to study as well after seeing the women’s progress.

Manoj Chari Magar in Naya Patrika, 8 June

Lakhan Thapa, the first martyr of Nepal. In Milum Chok the statue of Bipendra has also been demolished, but no group has claimed it yet.

Meanwhile, Kaski’s Nepal Maoist Centre’s CDO, Shree says he is unaware of the renaming: “When I don’t know about any chok being renamed, how do I sanction or not sanction it?”

Bishnu Sharma in Gorkhapatra, 7 June

Tourists are willing to pay Rs 900 a day for pony trekking. “We had a very unique culture,” he says, “Tourists would ride on horses and mules to take pictures, while yaks would carry their belongings.”

BAGLU–Dhara Gurung used to own horses and mules, now he has a motorcycle, tractor and two jeeps.

“Animals need to be fed and look after when they fall sick,” Gurung says, “Motorcycles are so much easier”. But horses do have their benefits in terms of carrying tourists and generating income. “We have a day for pony trekking. “We had a very unique culture,” he says, “Tourists would ride on horses and mules to take pictures, while yaks would carry their belongings.”

Horse trading

Kiran Panday

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Mustang, replacing horses and mules with vehicles. And, while inhabitants are happy about the development, they are also worried that old traditions are being lost forever. The biggest concern, however, is that the loss will have a negative impact on tourism.

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Consensus, not confrontation

Editorial in Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 May

After stepping down from the government, the Maoists launched protests against the new coalition and leadership. Although the language is strong (foreign lackeys) the protests are relatively mild in tone.

Despite tirades against political parties, the Maoists are stressing their commitment to the constitution and consensus politics. This means they don’t want the current situation to head towards confrontation.

Maoists chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal saying that “we will not be provoked and abandon the peace process” should be seen in a positive context.

Although the Maoists boycotted the election process of the prime minister in parliament, Krishna Bahadur Mahara from the Baidya bloc, Naryanajyoti Shrestha from the Dahal bloc and Dinanath Sharma from the Baburnam Bhattaari bloc all attended the swearing in ceremony of the new prime minister and congratulated him. This can be seen as proof that the Maoists do want to move towards consensus. Dahal’s meetings with the new prime minister also indicates an effort towards consensus.

Dahal probably hadn’t bargained for the Katawal episode to spiral so much out of control and lead to his government’s resignation. He may not have also imagined that the 22 parties could garner the numbers to form a coalition. The withdrawal of the UML consent in the Katawal case was not actually a betrayal by Jhala Nath Khumal, but the weakened position in the party which Dahal hasn’t fomented.

The Maoists even failed to take the MJF into confidence which could have kept them in power. Dahal boxed himself in with his rigid rhetoric so there was no way out but resignation.

The Maoists have been trying to put on a brave face by saying they left the government to establish civilian supremacy. They knew well that the slogan “government to establish civilian supremacy” is meaningless in the absence of elections.

The Indian establishment, which the Maoists consider an enemy thinks the peace process and constitution writing can be completed without them in the government. Analysts close to the Maoists who understand Delhi well say India was unhelpful as the Maoists attempted to move forward ignoring the past agreements between the political parties and India, which could pose a threat to security. So, whatever the Maoists may be saying at their public rallies, they do not want to head for a ruinous confrontation with India and the other parties right now.

There is still the hope that the Maoists will abandon the path of violence and democratisation themselves. They know the strategy taken during the conflict didn’t work. They are having a difficult time adjusting to coalition politics, but they’ll have to learn. The Maoists need a foundation for safe landing for which the government and political parties should help them, in an issue, such as army integration for instance. The resolution of the army now with the retirement of both protagonists could be a face-saving way out for the Maoists and even pave the way for the Maoists to join a national government.

The Maoists, who are in politics for power cannot stay out of government for long. They know that confrontation is not an option, consensus is. Although they have been threatening to chase away cadres of other parties from villages and run a parallel government, it is not as easy as during the insurgency. Hounding unarmed party cadres will be counterproductive, and they will have to fight the enemies they make in future. There is no alternative but to follow the past agreements and democratic path and avoid violence, anarchy and lawlessness to capture state power.

After all, what is all this for? It is to keep the peace process on track and facilitate the writing of the new constitution.
It is only after you reach Jomsom in half a day from Pokhara that you realize how distances (and time) have shrunk in Nepal. A journey that used to take five days of steep climbs and descents is now a question of a few hours. And it will be even shorter once Nepal’s trans-Himalayan highway is black-topped. Tourists, pilgrims, even conference participants have started streaming to Jomsom and Muktinath. Upper Mustang and Lo Manthang have suddenly become much more accessible for Nepalis.

Not everyone here is happy with this change. Tourism entrepreneurs are worried the road will damage Mustang’s fragile culture and ecology. Seeing the haphazardly parked passenger jeeps at Jomsom bus park, you can already see the squalor you see in Beni or Baglung. Noise and diesel smoke are the new hazards of walking Jomsom’s cobblestone streets.

Trekker numbers have dropped, complain local hoteliers and they blame the road. Lodge owners in Tatopani, Ghunsa, Marpha and Tukuche who used to depend on night stop hikers have lost their business.

However, most traders and ordinary people are happy with the road. It makes things cheaper and they don’t have to pay the extortionate tariff on the Pokhara flight. There are now 50 buses that ply to Muktinath every day from Jomsom, and an equal number that leave for Beni.

Trekking groups now take the high road to Jomsom from Ghorepani, avoiding the road. The new highway has also made the side valleys of East Dhaulagiri Glacier and Meso Kanto Pass more accessible.
Local politics today is all about cadre dividing up development contracts

KUNDA DIXIT in DOLAKHA

Prolonged political wrangling in Kathmandu has paralysed development activity nationwide, and more worryingly, set off bitter competition between local politicians for budgets and contracts.

From the mountains of Dolakha to the central hills of Arghakhanchi and out in Kailali in the far-west, political uncertainty following the resignation of the Maoist-led government last month has created a power vacuum in which plundering budgets and corruption have become the norm.

Maoist cadre, aided and abetted by the more recalcitrant political parties, have taken control of the purse strings. Even in districts where local councils have been set up in the last elections, the Maoists backed out of agreements after their government fell. In districts like Lamjung, local councils have not been set up at all so development plans and budgets for the coming year have been languishing. Local civil society is trying to get the parties to work together, but so far unsuccessfully.

“arion of rivalry between fellow kangresis. The discussions are all about who gets what share of the development budget, and there is a frenzy of new construction is also a result of mass-scale corruption. Local political cadre are exploiting the instability and confusion of the past two years by misappropriating local development budgets and distribute cash to party faithful. Most roads are built by overseers with scant regard for environmental norms, ravaging steep slopes and threatening settlements with landslides. Political parties prefer contractors with bulldozers so they can speedily build duplicate roads to the valley below. Some donors have actually gifted bulldozers to DACOs in the name of ‘development.’

In Dolakha alone, the district spent Rs 40 million on roads last year. Half of that money went to pay for bulldozers rentals. Although they cost Rs 1,700 per hour to rent, records show many were hired at up to Rs 2,400 per hour.

Activists in Charkot have calculated that at Rs 150 per day wage for villagers, the bulldozers cost 5,000 jobs last year. “Most of us are willing to work for free to get roads to our village, but there is too much money tied up in road contracts,” lamented one ex-VDC chairman from northern Dolakha.

In the past, even if political parties quarrelled in Kathmandu, local bodies somehow kept functioning. Many village elders elected to VDC councils from the last local elections in 1999 took charge of development activities. Now, even that mechanism is not working as political parties compete to steal from the development budget for personal gain or to replenish party war chests.

“When the district council in Dailekh found it had Rs 10 million in unspent development funds, the three main political parties divided it among themselves. In Ramechhap, there is a frenzy of road-building as political parties award themselves contracts. Rival parties sometimes build duplicate roads to the same village. The roads are built with no regard to engineering or the environment and most will not survive the coming monsoon [see box]. The local NC committee has actually split in Dolakha over a Rs 3.5 million road contract because of rivalry between fellow kangresis. DACOs and district police chiefs are demoralised, as Maoist cadre publicly abuse and threaten them. In Tanahu, a district administration official says he has given up trying to work with the political parties. He told Nepali Times: ‘What can I tell you? We have a three-party dictatorship. They decide on the budget and divide it up. There is no accountability, and no one dare ask questions. We are helpless and hopeless.’

Even in districts like Gorkha where former finance minister Baburam Bhattarai lavished cash in his home district to win elections, there is little accountability. “I have seen one crore being given to a friendly contractor to build a highway culvert,” recalled a local journalist, who added investigating such stories would be suicidal.

To be sure, pork-barrel politics was the norm also with the NC and UML. But local politicians interviewed in districts across Nepal in the past month confirmed that the Maoists are different because of their threats and violence. “They beat up rival contractors in front of the police station, and police can’t do a thing,” an NGO activist in Hetauda told us. Indeed, parties mobilise goons from Kathmandu when tenders for contracts are opened and beat up rivals if they don’t get it. “So ‘Shikar’ is why we fought a 10 year war in which 14,000 people were killed: for thekka patta,” said a district development officer in Charkot this week, using the Nepali phrase for ‘contracts’. “They have forgotten it was all supposed to be for the people.”
INTERESTING TIMES
Malika Aryal

**Incident One.** Late last month a woman was stripped and severely beaten in the middle of Ratna Park at around 9PM. A mob of about 60 men dragged her towards the bus park to parade her around the city when the police finally showed up. An eyewitness with a camera took pictures and posted them on a popular Nepali blogsite. She was crying for help but the men called her “charitrahin” and stripped her.

**Incident Two.** This week Kathmandu’s Ring Road area was blocked off for two days due to demonstrations by relatives of the two men who were killed in an accident when their motorbike was hit by a public bus. On Monday, an unruly mob attacked a van trying to take children to school. When the van driver tried to reason with the mob by explaining he was transporting small children he got hit by a brick. Three other children and a teacher were hurt.

These are two isolated incidents in the Valley, but across the country women accused of being “witches” are being tortured, and nine people suspected of being child traffickers have been lynched in the Tarai. Violence has become the norm. Police are mute spectators when the militant youth wings of various parties beat up innocent people on the streets.

Whether it is in the city or rural Nepal, women’s violence against women has become a way of life. Nepali women have learnt to live with a lot of hardships. We thought that with the end of war there would be peace. The law and order situation is actually worse. The government whose fundamental task is the security of citizens, doesn’t seem to care. No child must get up in the morning with the fear that she and her friends may end up in hospital because the bus carrying her to school was smashed up by people not much older than her. No woman should fear walking around the city because she may be stripped and beaten.

Law and disorder
A generation for which impunity is the norm

KESHAV THOKER
If the pugnacious, arch-Tory British wartime leader were with us today, he’d be furious.

For despite what many believe, he never said the following words.

“Not to be a socialist at twenty is proof of want of heart, to be one at thirty is proof of want of head.”

No, that was George Clemenceau, a French Prime Minister and statesman from the early part of the 20th century, also renowned for combativeness, iron will and catchy phrases.

His most famous quote in English turns out to be one that most of us wrongly attribute. Such is life. But let’s examine M Clemenceau’s thinking and apply it to South Asia today, Nepal in particular.

Socialism as he knew it meant workers committees manning barricades and shutting down cities and industries. Basically it meant revolution as defined by Karl Marx in The Communist Manifesto of 1848.

Today, we have a broader, gentler definition of socialism and fondness for its methods, if not the nomenclature. To be a contemporary socialist is to be broadly in favour of an equitable, rights-based agenda that admits the existence and desirability of free well-regulated markets. Socialism, as we know it now, thrives in Sweden, Spain, Canada and many other well-off countries.

Defined as allowing governments to run, regulate and occasionally bail out the marketplace, socialist thinking informed both the George W Bush and Barack Obama administrations’ approach to current economic turmoil. General Motors, once the mightiest of global capitalist behemoths, is now nearly three-quarters owned by taxpayers in America and Canada.

What global centrists can’t afford is hard-line ideology of right or left. World conditions are too fragile, interconnected and uncertain at the best of times. Only the nimble survive.

What’s pretty clear is that the world has rejected coercive Marxism (Communism) and anyone who believes otherwise is dangerously deceiving themselves.

Nepal and parts of India are among the last places where people who believe they find wisdom and solace in Stalin, Lenin and Mao still get a chance to serve as legislators, even Prime Ministers.

Hell, you can find people here who admire Kim Il Sung and Pol Pot. It helps that Nepal, and for that matter West Bengal and Kerala, are isolated, full of a self-righteous sense of carefully cultivated uniqueness, and largely at the fringes of the modern world.

Local Hindu caste patterns help too. The purity so beloved at the Brahminical heights sits comfortably alongside the doctrinaire Left’s obsession with examining primary political texts in search of self-confirmatory analyses.

In fact, were Marx, Engels or even Lenin with us today, they’d have a hard time recognising their handiwork in the positions and political records of our South Asian Marxists-Leninists. Not that I’m arguing for a return to basics, far from it. But a little intellectual honesty from all who bask in the prefix ‘Comrade’ would go a long way.

On the surface, they claim work for the rights of workers and peasants but the best they have ever achieved has been through compromise with a broad range of political ideas that they sniffsly dismiss as bourgeois democracy. They conveniently forget that their own Marx was a middle class nightmare of a human being who loathed the idea of a day’s work for a day’s pay. For easier to sponge off his wealthy friend, Engels, who inherited his wealth from a capitalist father.

There are no working men and women at the top of today’s South Asian leftist movements, just bourgeois hypocrites and ‘whole-timers’ who have lived off the toil of their own party cadres as they espouse respect, equity and revolution.

Even so, voters in India gave their Communists decades to deliver the goods but recently found them wanting. Nepal’s leftists need to see this as an early warning, a signal that change, compromise and nimble politics will keep them relevant. Marx will not.
**Individual spirit**

The European psyche laid bare in film festival

A full range of human emotions and psychological states—pride, ambition, outrage, determination, guilt, revenge, insecurity—are explored in the ten films that make up the second European Film Festival in Kathmandu from 13-17 June at Nepal Army auditorium.

Two films from each member state of the EU (represented in Nepal: Germany, France, the UK, Denmark and Finland) are being screened.

**Ferenc Weigl of the European Union, which is organising the festival, says,** “Last year’s response from the audience proves that the Nepali audience is very interested in European movies. Our main aim is to introduce modern European cinematographic art to nations outside Europe.”

**Le Coupéret**

This French film, directed by Constantin Costa-Gavras, is about Bruno Davert, a top executive at a paper factory who is fired. He is about 11 year old Sebastian’s search for immortality. Believing that he is responsible for the death of his mother, who died in childbirth, he tries to cleanse himself of his sins.

**The Flying Scotsman**

Based on a true story, UK-produced. The Flying Scotsman follows the turbulent life of cyclist Graeme Obree, who broke the world one-hour record on a bike of his own revolutionary design.

**Blindsight**

Blindsight is a gripping adventure of six blind Tibetan teenagers who go on a climbing expedition up the 7,000 metre Lhakpa Ri, the north side of Mount Everest.

**Wer früher stirbt, ist länger tot (Grave decisions)**

This German children’s movie is about 11 year old Sebastian’s search for immortality. Believing that he is responsible for the death of his mother, who died in childbirth, he tries to cleanse himself of his sins.

**Never Again**

This Finnish Christmas film tells the touching story of how Santa Claus came to be Santa. The film portrays the life of Nikolas, a young orphan boy who is looked after by the villagers in Lapland.

**Tyttö sinä olet tähti (Beauty and the Bastard)**

This romantic comedy tells the story of Sune, a fanatical hip-hop DJ and Nelli, a snobbish over-achiever who fall in love while trying to take advantage of each other.

**Joulutarina (Christmas Story)**

This Finnish Christmas film tells the touching story of how Santa Claus came to be Santa. The film portrays the life of Nikolas, a young orphan boy who is looked after by the villagers in Lapland.

**Yella**

Yella is the story of a young woman, Yella (Nina Hoss) who moves away from her glamorous Eastern neighborhood and her abusive husband Ben to the West, where a job offer might bring her peace she has been searching for.

**Ekko (echo)**

In this Danish drama, Simon, a police officer, loses custody of his six-year old son in a divorce and in desperation, abducts the boy. Soon his plan becomes a nightmare as old haunting memories resurface.

**Joultutarina (Christmas Story)**

This Finnish Christmas film tells the touching story of how Santa Claus came to be Santa. The film portrays the life of Nikolas, a young orphan boy who is looked after by the villagers in Lapland.

**Til døden os Skiller (With your Permission)**

When nepa-ly’s picture book of the conflict, *A People War*, was released in 2007 it told in pictures the story of how the violence had affected civilians. The pictures were taken on a travelling photo exhibition in Tunisia throughout the country in 2008 and some 350,000 viewed them. They left heart-wrenching testimonies about their war experiences, and the yearning for peace.

Nepa-ly has selected some of the tens of thousands of testimonies in a new book, *Never Again*, which is being launched on Sunday. All the feedback, from the page-long ones to ‘Malai naramro lagyo’ written by a kindergarten student have the same message: ‘never again’.

The testimonies force us to remember the sorrows of war. Nepal went through a collective catharsis, and these words are the outpourings of our nation’s soul. The victims of war saw that there were many more like them, and the exhibition helped them share the pain. Looking at the pictures together, people, who did not suffer directly, cried with the ones who did.

During the war, we all prayed for peace, for fewer deaths, less destruction. But casualties became statistics, and we soon forgot about the families of the deceased, the disappeared, the injured, and the displaced. The photos in A People War tell the stories behind the numbers, which is why they were so powerfully moving.

In the sequel, Never Again, we hear the voices of Nepalis from Mechi to Mahakali, all ages, religious and ethnic groups and through boundaries of literacy. (Diplomate and visa impaired visitors dictated their responses.) Everyone’s opinion is equally important. For once, this is history written by the people of what happened to them, not history written by the winners or so-called experts.

Most agree that we should learn lessons and be inspired to work towards social transformation and sustainable peace.

Some think violence is sometimes needed for social justice. Baburam Bhattarai writes a dialectic critique of political violence after seeing the exhibition in Gorkha. His comment shows how arrogantly ignorant leaders are about the war they unleashed on the people. Bhattarai’s comment will break the hearts of many who expected leaders to understand, but it seems the pictures somehow failed to do so: that we have cried together, and that no matter for what ends, violence is not justifiable.

What is the price of tears? ’writes one viewer. ’History doesn’t edit, writes another. The back cover of the book has a profoundly short sentence: ’After the blood come the tears.’ Another viewer says ’Show these pictures to Gyanendra, Girija, Prachanda why are you showing it to us?’

The war may be over, but there is no peace yet. For the families of the disappeared, the sorrows continue, the children of the dead suffer hardships. It will take time for people to forgive and start trusting each other. Perhaps because we have been through so much, we want to forget and move on. But we can’t forget until we have learnt our lessons.

Never Again helps us remember, and helps the process of reconciliation through justice.

Aditi Adhikari

Never Again will be launched on 14 June after which it will be available at all leading book stores. The documentary *Firma of War* based on the book will be screened at the Russian Cultural Centre 14-20 June. Admissions free, but bookings must be made in advance through nepa-ly at 9795103435.
EXHIBITIONS

- In praise of the patterns, a PFA solo exhibition by Gyanu Gurung from 13 June, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal.
- Portraits from the Shadow - The plight of street children, an exhibition by Sanjeev Maharjan, till 16 June at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited.
- Transcendental Vibrations’, an exhibition by Kabi Raj Lama, till 17 June at Hotel de l’Annapurna, Durbar Marg.

EVENTS

- E-Car rally in support for Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Center starts at Madigadh Mandala, 13 June. 9AM. 984109819
- Nepa-laya’s film tour, 15-20 June, 3:30 and 5:30 PM. Russian Cultural Center. 4431983
- Learn Esperanto Language - free Introductory class on 13 June, 9-10AM at School of Creative Communications. 5546705
- 38th Yala Maya Classic, a classical music series, 16 June, 5PM. Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dikoks. 5559107
- Star Trek, a sci-fi movie on 17 June, 6.30 PM. Lazzimpat Gallery Café. 4226549
- Tai Chi, 13 June, 10-11.30AM. Yoga 9-10AM & Buddhist Meditation 5-6PM. 15-19 June. Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre. Keshar Mahal Marg. 4410402
- Call for entries for Film South Asia till 30 June, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5552141

MUSIC

- TGIF at Jazzabella Café every Wednesday and Friday. 2110475
- Baja gaja, every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 pm onwards. Pulchowk. 5525912
- Kathmandu express, performance by International Arts, 7.30 PM onwards free entry at Moksh
- Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Durbar Marg. 4227988
- Sunday Jazz brunch barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12.30 PM. 4491324
- Jazz evening at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM. 4280326
- 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 Jazzabella Café. Happy hour 6-8PM and TGIF party with live band Epic every Friday at BPM, 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. 4479489
- Happy cocktail hour, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jazza Cafe & Bar
- Live Sensation, performance by Yankey every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4461234.
- Fusion and Lozza Band every Friday night, Bhu Resto Lounge, Lazzimpat. 4412193

DINING

- A café’s café, Dhokaiama Café, Patan Dikoks. 55222113
- The Corner Bar. 3-11PM, 5-7PM. Reddison Hotel Kathmandu. 4411818
- 7th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival, from 15 June-15 September, Kilroy, Thamel. 4250440
- Tango party with live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika’s Hotel. 4479489
- Happy hour from 4.30-6.30PM. Hyatt Regency. 4489362
- Weekend Brunch by the Poolside every Saturday and Sunday, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu ,11AM-3PM. 4273999
- Home made pasta at Al fresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited. 4263070
- Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491324
- Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri la, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4225341
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Claye Gurung, Rs 899, at the Pandamba Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999

IN DAN BROWN’S ANGELS AND DEMONS, symbologist Robert Langdon (Tom Hanks) returns again to decipher hidden sculptural symbols and secret architectural clues. When Langdon finds evidence of the resurgence of an ancient secret brotherhood known as the Illuminati—the most powerful underground organization in history—he also faces a deadly threat to the existence of the Illuminati’s most deposed enemy, the Catholic Church. Upon learning that the clock is ticking on an unstoppable Illuminati time bomb, Langdon is recruited to travel to Rome, where he joins forces with Vittoria Vetra (Ayelet Zurer), a beautiful and enigmatic Italian scientist. Embarking on a nonstop, action-packed hunt through sealed crypts, dangerous catacombs, deserted cathedrals, and even the heart of the most secrecy-sealed vault on earth, Langdon and Vetra will follow the 400-year-old Path of Illumination that marks the Vatican’s only hope for survival.

Call 4442220 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com
MARCHING ORDERS: Upen德拉 Yadav announces the dismissal of Bijay Gachchhadar and seven other leaders from MUF last week. Two factions of the party clashed in Birganj on Wednesday.

DEAD END: The road leading up to Banepa remained tense for hours on Friday when locals clashed with Maoist affiliated Tamsaling Mukti Morcha to protest the banda. A curfew was imposed to control the situation.

DAILY ROUTINE: Maoist cadres block the road in Darbar Marg on Friday as part of their continued protest demanding civilian supremacy.

SEEDS OF HOPE: Despite the delayed onset of monsoon and prolonged drought, farmers have started planting rice seedling in Hatiban on Tuesday.

CATCHING UP WITH TIMES: Granddaughter of Sir Edmund Hillary, Emily Rose Hillary, reading Nepal Times in Namche after the Tenzing-Hillary Everest Marathon last week. German Ambassador Verena Gräfin von Roedern looks on.
Even the Ass had underestimated just how serious the lust for power was going to be on the part of the netas who wanna be in the new coalition. The donkey had predicted here that it would take a week for Makunay to cobble together a cabinet. It’s been nearly three weeks. What is holding things up in this Government Sans Portfolios?

Well, it boils down to arithmetics. There are 22 members in the coalition, so we need a minimum 36-member cabinet because the Big Boys (and Gals) want more than one ministry. This presents a bit of a problem because there ain’t enuf ministries to go around. So Baluwatar has hit upon a wonderful idea: they’re going to split up the double-barrelled mantralayas.

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation can be bifurcated into the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Civil Aviation. And if even that won’t do, they can go a step further and divide it up into the Ministry of Civil, Ministry of Aviation.

The PMO had just heaved a sigh of relief that it’d resolved the issue when the parties also started splitting, thus necessitating chopping up the ministries into further pieces. The MIF is going through binary fission with full-scale coola-cool in Birgunj, the hangers-in the loggerheads over Sodaka Koirala becoming Faming Minister, and even Chauri Bhaluk may split one of these days. How on earth are all these new parties and their new leaders going to be accommodated?

And true to the legendary inability of Nepal to get along, the Brahmanical e-maleys (pronounced ‘eh-malaise’) have a serious rift between JN and his home ministry nominee Iswar P and the Oli faction. KP has never really trusted the fellow-comrade and communist atheist named Iswar, and has opposed his candidacy for Home Sweet Home Ministry. JN and Bidya are also on a collision course with their publicly divergent views on the eight jarsaps and the proposed court martial for Cool Budder.

Meanwhile, it looks like Comrade Awful is missing the Rs 100,000 bed he had rigged up at Baluwatar. PKD now finds the Pistachio Palace a tad too claustrophobic, so he’s moved to an orchid farm in Godavari to put finishing touches to his proposals over future strategy at the party’s secretariat meeting next week. The strategy is reportedly to just wait it out patiently to allow the UML-led coalition to self-destruct by Dasain, and then make a move to stage an even stronger comeback.

It’s four down 99 to go if the Baddies get all the ethnic groups in Nepal to stage their own bands. The Ass’ solution to this is for Nepal (the country, not the premier) to dissolve parliament, dismantle the army, abolish the portfolioless cabinet, go back to the Baise and Chaubise Rajahs. The donkey’d rather have 22 rajahs than 22 unruly coalition members.

22 rajahs
Close to the edge

Delhi wants the Maoists to make a “course correction”

PRASHANT JHA

Even since they resigned from government, the Maoists have tried to play on anti-Indian nationalism. But senior leaders now admit there is no alternative but to negotiate with India.

“We made mistakes in handling India,” confessed one Maoist secretariat member, “but India also can’t ignore that we are the most powerful party here.”

Ahead of a politburo meeting, starting Monday, the Maoists will have to make crucial decisions about relations with India. It’s not going to be easy because New Delhi has drawn a line in the sand that it doesn’t want the Maoists to cross.

Senior Indian officials, from both the foreign office and the security establishment, have told Nepal Times meaningful engagement is difficult until the Maoists engage in a “course correction” and they have made the following “suggestions”:

The Maoists must make a clear and unconditional commitment to multiparty democracy, which India says was not visible during their nine-month stint in power. The party has to shift from its radical dogmatic line to a moderate left-of-centre orientation. One official told us: “They have to give up dreams of capturing the state.”

Delhi doesn’t believe Pushpa Kamal Dahal anymore when he says he is under pressure from hardliners. Said the official: “No more excuses. If it is a tactic, we are not falling for it. If it is for real, then it is time for the leader to assert and either bring the hardliners in line or marginalise them.” He added the onus lies on the Maoists to revive trust by steps like dismantling the YCL and behaving like a normal opposition.

An official said India is tired of “Maoist duplicity”, adding: “They have to learn that they cannot keep chanting anti-India slogans here, and then privately come to us for help to bail them out.” This is a clear reference to Maoist rhetoric on “foreign intervention” and the Dang border controversy, which is seen as being engineered by “Maoists and friendly media”.

India says it still supports the peace process and wants a new constitution, but the Maoists can’t “bulldoze” their way through. “There has to be reasonable discussion on integration between all stakeholders, including the Nepal Army,” he added.

Token integration under strict parameters may be feasible, but unit level entry and space to PLA commanders in the NA is a strict “no” for India.

What didn’t go down too well in Delhi was that even as the Maoists were calling for a total overhaul of the “special relationship” with India, they were cozying up to Beijing.

Indian officials, however, are at pains to emphasise that their role must not be overstated and politics emanates from within. But, warned one diplomat: “The present behaviour of running against everyone is not winning them friends. It will dig them into a hole.”

BLASHI 04
Indecisive in the theory that power comes out of barrels of guns, former guerrillas in the former government were understandably ossified with the military. They still are.

And if there is one major hurdle ahead of the new coalition it is the issue of integration and rehabilitation. But for that the prime minister will have to cross the first hurdle of actually forming a government.

The security apparatus that is most in touch with the public, the Nepal Police, has no chance to recover from its politicisation, a process that began after the war as they say they are powerless to stop gangsters because they have patronage from biggies. They can’t even arrest hoodlums staining a school without cabinet authorisation.

Improving the efficiency of the police force is essential to check the country’s malignant lawlessness. The single most widespread demand among people across Nepal today is law and order. They are fed up with highway blockades, strikes, curfews and vandalisms.

New retirement rules provide the government with an opportunity to boost the morale of the police and hence reassure the public that they are safe. A younger police leadership is welcome despite attendant risks of incompetence: immaturity is preferred over inexperience. However, changes at the top of the police force aren’t enough. Intelligence-based community policing that prevents crime requires that the political class cooperate with the law and order machinery, and not be on the side of criminals.

The most important component of police reform has to do with the functional freedom of law enforcement agencies. They must be given the authority to apprehend on the spot any militant youth member of a political front organisation who are engaging in vandalism or threats.

These aren’t things that need a cabinet and a budget. These are the duties of Prime Minister Nepal of Nepal to ensure that his citizens are safe.

Kiran Mainali, Pokhara

* Your editorial (“The ethnic card”, #454) is an early warning to this country that if politicians can’t resist the temptation to use ethnicity to further their cause then all is lost. The former Yugoslavia had only four ethnic groups, we have 103. Imagine a multiple civil war over ethnicity. It will make the Jana Yuddha look like a picnic. We are already seeing signs of the fissures. The Limbu are being upset, the Rai because of overlapping territorial claims. The Banapa riots were between Newars and Tamang. The Tharus and Maheshis are already confront. Psychiatrists should wake up and rip this in the bud.

Kiran Mainali, Pokhara

** Letters **

**ETHNIC CARD**

* ‘But there should be zero tolerance for incitement of ethnic intolerance and hatred for short-term political gain’ (The ethnic card, #454) — very well said indeed! This wise line left me wondering how different our lives are today. Did they have them a few years earlier when the Maoists were cracking open the “genie-bottle”. Unfortunately, back then the Maoists were cracking open the ethnic card — very well said.

Satyajeet Nepali, email

* BHUWAN AND JUNA*  

Thank you for that heart-warming cover story on Bhurban and Juna (#454). You have a readership in the fundamental level Nepal are all sisters and brothers and s姊s and reconciliation is possible. The Rai siblings have shown their political acumen in the way they have handled this. Unfortunately I don’t think they’re giving any attention to the people in this two quarrelling, and even now threatening each other.

Lina Sorenson, Dhankuta

**YESTERDAY’S MEN**

OK Lal has taken a potshot again at the political parties (“Yesterday’s men...”, #454). They are a soft target because they won’t threaten him or beat him up the way the YCL would. There are two types of forces in this country, ones that believe in (and use) violence as a political tool and others that don’t. It isn’t very pretty to know that Nepal Times which side it should be on since your editor was at the receiving end of physical assault recently.

Name withheld, email

**LETTERS**

Nepali Times welcomes feedback. Letters should be brief and may be edited for space. While pseudonyms can be accepted, writers should provide their real names and contact details will be given preference. Email letters should be in text format without attachments with ‘letters to the editor’ in the subject line.

Email: letters@nepalitimes.com  
Fax: 977-1-5220103  
Mail: Letters, Nepal Times, GPO Box 7251, Kathmandu, Nepal.
Prime Minister Madhav Nepal claims that he never lobbied to be made prime minister. He’s partly right.

Nepal did once petition the king to be appointed prime minister, but that was during the hybrid royal-military regime when the CEO of the country was also the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. This time, in GPK’s metaphor, the prize of premiership fell into Nepal’s lap like a ripe mango.

Nepal had once also aspired to be the president of the republic with the help of Maoists. But it didn’t take long for him to realise the futility of that dream. Having spent the better part of his life in various communist parties, Comrade Nepal knows that no apparatchik willingly accepts another even as a ceremonial superior.

What actually led to Nepal’s surprise selection remains unknown. Koirala may have thought that it would be imprudent to step into a chair just vacated by the leader of the largest party in the legislature. Chairman Jhalanath Khanal was probably considered too beholden to Pushpa Kamal Dahal to lead an anti-Maoist coalition. Mercurial Upendra Yadav was unlikely to receive the sanction of those who have the final say in the making and unmaking of governments these days.

Meanwhile, the paper crown of premiership, pasted overnight with the joint effort of proactive diplomats and an assertive military had to be put upon Nepal’s head precisely because he was the unlikelyst candidate to resist a rightist roadmap of the Kathmandu establishment.

Even Nepal didn’t expect to be at the head of an anti-Maoist coalition so soon after Dahal had bestowed the chairmanship of Constitution Drafting Committee upon him. There is no other explanation for the inexplicable absence of vision, mission or plan of the anti-Maoist formation at the helm of government. Other than an irresistible urge to have their hands at the till during a period of extreme volatility, Premier Nepal’s existing and probable colleagues have no plausible reason to join a government that is failed even before being formed.

Fortunately, the Maoists have been kind towards the new government: their protests provide legitimacy to a ruling coalition that has done nothing to deserve such vigorous opposition. But now that Nepal is in hot seat, he has to make best use of this historic opportunity.

The greatest challenge for Nepal is to prove his authenticity. The Maoists can’t question his legitimacy because they were the ones to give cabinet berths to non-elected politicians in the previous government. The prime minister can prove his political antecedents by insisting that at least all his senior colleagues be directly elected CA members. His helplessness in accepting the nominations of Bidya Bhandari and Sujata Koirala is understandable, but exceptions should not be allowed to become the rule. Nepal needs to be prudent in choosing his cabinet colleagues from his own party as well as from his coalition partners. He needsn’t hurry or worry, other than the Maoists no one can unseat him without losing credibility.

Asserting his authority is a little trickier for a premier who owes his position not only to constituent assembly members but also to various extra constitutional players. The Bhadrakali Brass has thrown a challenge by insisting on the prosecution of an officer who just accepted the order of the government of the day. Premier Nepal has erred by extending the tenure of eight generals who had retired from their posts even as their combined appeal remains sub-judice.

The ripe mango in Premier Nepal’s lap is too small to be shared by all anti-Maoist forces in the country and outside. No matter what he does, Nepal would have to take the blame for being a lame duck prime minister, appointed merely to keep the seat warm for a more suitable successor.

Meanwhile, he has an unusual opportunity to prove the old hypothesis that accidents of history often produce extraordinary leaders. The mango-tree grows from a seed. Being and nothingness are all about fundamental freedoms of human beings against determinists of all stripes.
The erosion of Kathmandu Valley’s unique cultural heritage has prompted many to find ways to preserve it. There is a renaissance of Newari architecture in Bhaktapur and Patan, the tourism industry has pitched in with heritage hotels and cultural sight-seeing, and the handicraft business is doing its bit.

Now, there is a unique effort to support Kathmandu’s artisans and craftsmen by helping sell their products in the local and international market. ‘Crafted in Kathmandu’ is not just a handicraft business, its founder Rosha Chitrakar hastens to clarify. "Our goal is to help preserve the Valley’s heritage, the skills, knowledge and resourcefulness of our artisans in creating art and home décor objects that are good enough to be shared in the world market," says Chitrakar.

The challenge for Chitrakar’s ‘Crafted in Kathmandu’ brand is to pay for the protection of the Valley’s built, living and natural heritage by the products and services of its artisans. Chitrakar calls this a “plus revenue” business and is focussing on selling products to three distinct markets.

The first is the local market where people need various pots, vessels, jewelry, musical instruments, chariot-building skills and monument restoration capacity. The trend is towards restoring homes to their original and operating them as bed and breakfast pensions in the old city.

The second is the high end Nepali market such as hotels, homes of expatriates, corporate gifts, garden sculpture, home décor etc. This market has the highest growth potential because of the increasing tendency of identifying with one’s heritage. Tourists and expatriates also increasingly look for hotels and homes that reflect the unique history and heritage of the Kathmandu Valley.

The third is the market for exports of Kathmandu art to North America, Europe and East Asia. ‘Crafted in Kathmandu’ has a gallery outlet in North America that tells the story of how the artisans and crafts persons of the Kathmandu valley are restoring the World Heritage City. It sells products that have been designed and crafted to meet local demands.

Chitrakar explains that an example of this three-tiered marketing strategy is a potter making clay pots for local local yogurt whose family is also making terracotta garden animal figures and also ceramic bases for table lamps for the North American market. “This keeps artisan families fully employed all year round, increasing their quality of life and ensuring that the skills are passed down to a new generation,” says Chitrakar.

Crafted in Kathmandu’s exhibition runs till 15 June at Dwarika Hotel, 11AM-7PM.

www.craftedinkathmandu.com

Times

Company of the Month

Making the Valley’s unique artistic heritage pay for its own upkeep

Heritage Pieces: Rosha Chitrakar points at an antique photograph of the Machendranath Jatra, among the items that her company markets in Nepal and abroad to raise money for heritage conservation.
Charity electric car rally
A group of 30 battery and three petrol-powered wheeler-cyclists will travel in an electric vehicle rally between the Makthal Mandala in Kathmandu to Banepa on Saturday to raise awareness about people disabled by spinal injuries as well as to promote renewable energy.

Revenue shortfall
The government has raised Rs 11.6 billion in revenues in the first 10 months of the current tax year, Rs 15 billion less than its target.

Nepali Potter
Sunbird Publishers is releasing the first of J.K. Rowling’s hit Harry Potter books in Nepal after a young reader from Gorkha requested to be translated via a letter in Nepali.

Free Fedora
Fedora 10, a free Linux-based computer operating system, is now available for people who want to avoid the Microsoft Windows system.

Lifestyle
Lip service, or tongue lashing?
Talking about how Nepal’s political parties lack the seriousness to safeguard press freedom, both acutely depressing and mildly hopeful. It’s depressing because if one compiles a mere six-month window worth of evidence because of threats, physical abuses, mental torture and harassment against journalists, with details even of their murders, much clearer and thicker.

Strictly Business
Ashutosh Tiwari
Yet it’s also hopeful, because at least from the lip service that spokespeople of the political parties offer to the press, it’s clear that our politicians do understand the importance of press freedom. But that hope dissolves into cynicism when the politicians are then unable to explain to their militant cadres why something intangible as press freedom matters for all Nepal citizens, including those who disagree with or are indifferent to any political ideology.

Free and open source software (FOSS) which is already translated in 67 languages, the series have sold more than 2.5 billion copies worldwide.

One stop
Nepal CRIS Company has launched e-CON, an emergency contraceptive pill that prevents unwanted pregnancy. The pill is effective if taken within five days of unprotected sex. e-CON is available for Rs 50.

Press freedom needs to be defended by its maximum application
Press freedom allows all of us, irrespective of our social status, to make decisions about their lives based on a variety of aggregate information. In a country of 30 million people, most of whom are illiterate and poor, no citizen or group can expect to be on top of all the information related to their well-being. Press freedom allows reporters and media to widely disseminate reports and analyses about events and people that they believe are of public interest. These reports and analyses, in turn, add layers of nuanced information to help everyone from national policy-makers to village councils, to households and individuals to make decisions about their lives in ways they see fit for themselves. For these journalists who never tire of emphasizing the importance of civil-society, what could be the surest path to such supremacy but just publishing press freedom by making it easier for journalists to work?

Second, press freedom allows an exchange of views in the public domain. It is built up by consistently reporting the verifiable truth, and openly correcting errors as soon as they become known. This fact should reduce the worries of those who say that mainstream newspapers print false news to serve their interests of ‘the bourgeoisie’. Rather, as we have seen again and again, if the reputation of the perpetrators and their political parties that takes a blow globally when media houses and journalists are threatened, abused, attacked and killed.

Unless our political leaders, especially those of Maoists who make all the right noises about their commitment to build plural democratic societies, seriously educate and train their unruly cadres about the importance of press freedom for Nepal’s democracy, their paying more lip service is as good as their keeping lips sealed against the daily attacks on the press in Nepal.
**What's in a name?**

Lakshya Thapa, the first martyr of Nepal. In Milam Chok the statue of Birendra has also been demolished, but no group has claimed it yet. Meanwhile, Kaski's COO, Mahesh Shrestha says he is unaware of the renamings: “When I don’t know about any chok being renamed, how do I sanction or not sanction it?”

Learning mothers

Shiv Aprajya in Annapurna Post, 8 June

“Before our mothers used to teach us,” says Saritsha Shrestha, a teacher from Anghat, Gorkha. “Now I am happy that we are teaching them.” Shrestha has been teaching her 52 year old mother Mina in grade five.

At Nabchetana Women’s School, there are a total of 66 students, aged from 17 to 73 in grade one to eight, taught by two women teachers. The school was established by women who were too old to attend regular schools, but wanted to study. Many community groups, such as Himali Sector Development Centre’s Hope program, Aruchanauti VDC, Janpriya Mothers group, Janashramdan and Kopila Nepal, have given financial support and donated furniture.

Although a good initiative, attendance is still poor at the school because rural women still face the problem of getting to go to school only after finishing their housework. However, this is a start. “Not being able to read a word when going to cities has been the incentive to study,” says Santa Kumari Baram, 43. Now, many men in the area are becoming inspired to study as well after seeing the women’s progress.

**Turn by turn**

Editorial in Janadisha, 7 June

Four days after being arrested during a protest at Baidapataura, Rastahat, Ladai Shah, 40, was still in police custody. He was severely beaten by UML cadres and had to be taken to Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu where he died while being treated for injury. This Rastahat native was demonstrating against newly elected prime minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, a candidate they had rejected during the elections.

Home Ministry, currently headed by Nepal, had ordered Shah’s arrest and UML party workers were given a free rein to beat him up. PM Nepal should take responsibility for his death. Only two weeks have passed since the UML-led government was formed and incidents of violence are becoming common. Shah had never even shown a black flag. But even if he had, it was his right. There needs to be an inquiry into the killing of an ordinary citizen held in police custody.

Meanwhile, unlike in the past, the media has shown little interest in this tragedy. Neither have the Maoist leaders protested even shown a black flag. But even if he had, it was his right. There needs to be an inquiry into the killing of an ordinary citizen held in police custody. "He says he won the election and now wants to be a minister!"

**Horse trading**

Manoj Gharti Magar in Naya Patrika, 8 June

Mustang, replacing horses and mules with vehicles. And, while inhabitants are happy about the development, they are also worried that old traditions are being lost forever. The biggest concern, however, is that the loss will have a negative impact on tourism.

Vacancy Announcement

The South Asia Poverty Reduction, Economic Management, Finance and Private Sector Development Unit (SASPEF) of the World Bank invites applications for the position of a Senior Governance Specialist which will be based in Kathmandu, Nepal. The position will initially be a local one year extended term consultant appointment with a possibility for renewal. The Senior Governance Specialist will serve as a key member of the Nepal Country Team as well as a member of SASPEF’s regional team working on governance. Based out of the Kathmandu Office, she or he will be responsible for working as part of a multidisciplinary team focusing upon issues of transparency and accountability, service delivery and institutional development with government and other partners. Specific duties will include: (1) advising clients on governance and public management reforms, and monitoring progress with the same; (2) supporting the Country Management Team in analyzing information on emerging governance issues (3) providing operationally relevant governance and institutional support to and participating in cross-sectoral teams working on various development projects; The incumbent should be capable of working independently with minimum supervision.

The successful candidate will have the following qualifications:

- An advanced degree in public administration, business administration, public sector management, political science, economics, finance and/or comparative politics with a strong record of academic achievement;
- A minimum of eight years of relevant professional experience (or the equivalent combination of education and experience) in the field of public sector management, governance and anti – corruption reforms; Experience in managing or overseeing development projects desirable;
- Excellent people skills and the capacity to lead and participate effectively in multidisciplinary teams;
- Strong analytic skills, a willingness to work hard, the ability to gather and analyze significant quantities of data;
- Demonstrated ability to develop and maintain productive, professional relationships with government counterparts, donors and other stakeholders;
- Excellent writing abilities, persuasive oral communication skills and ability to foster long-term, productive client relationships;
- Both international and Nepali experience will be highly valued.

This is a country office position in Nepal subject to local recruitment under the Nepal compensation plan. The World Bank offers a locally competitive package and is committed to attract and maintain a diverse, highly qualified and dedicated workforce. Equally qualified women and members of disadvantaged groups are encouraged to apply.

The details of the post are available at www.worldbank.org/jobs. Qualified candidates should apply on-line referring to job # 090816 by 25 June 2009.
Corruptions, not confrontation

Kiran Panday

Editorial in Himal Khabarpatrika, 30 May

After stepping down from the government, the Maoists launched protests against the new coalition and leadership. Although the language is strong (foreign lackeys), the protests are relatively molten in tone. Despite tirades against political parties, the Maoists are stressing their commitment to the constitution and consensus politics. This means they don’t want the current situation to head towards confrontation. Maoists chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal saying that “We will not be provoked and abandon the peace process” should be seen in a positive context.

Although the Maoists boycotted the election process of the prime minister in parliament, Krishna Bahadur Mahara from the Baidya bloc, Niranjan Shrestha from the Dahal bloc and Dinanath Sharma from the Baburnam Bhattan bloc all attended the swearing-in ceremony of the new prime minister and congratulated him. This can be seen as proof that the Maoists do want to move towards consensus. Dahal’s meetings with the new prime minister also indicate an effort towards consensus.

Dahal probably hadn’t bargained for the Katawal episode to spiral so much out of control and lead to his government’s resignation. He may not have also imagined that the 22 parties could garner the support of India and the other parties right now. There is still the hope that the Maoists will abandon the path of violence and democracy themselves. They know the strategy taken during the conflict didn’t work. They are having a difficult time adjusting to coalition politics, but they’ll have to learn. The Maoists need a foundation for safe landing for which the government and political parties should help them, in an issue, such as army integration for instance. The resolution of the army now with the retirement of both protagonists could be a face-saving way out for the Maoists and even pave the way for the Maoists to join a national government.

The Maoists, who are in politics for more than 30 years, are in a difficult time in politics. We have very high hopes for Lila. In her short time in politics, this economics and English literature graduate has already proven that she will be in Nepali politics for the long haul.

Three years ago when discussions over the writing of the interim constitution were taking place, Nyaichai was suddenly asked to come to a high-level party meeting. After a short meeting with the party chair she was told that she was going to be an MP. Her father had been an active member of the party since the early 60s. Lila herself was affiliated with student unions since she was in Grade Six. In 1997, she stood for her party affiliated All Nepal Revolutionary Student Union, was the central committee member for the union in 2000 and is now the secretary of the revolutionary women’s organisation of Nepal Workers’ and Peasants’ Party.

Lila has always believed that young people should be more involved in politics. She also thinks that being a CA member is a big responsibility and political parties must not make just anyone a CA member to fill their quota or for other party interests. While her colleagues are pushing for inclusiveness based on gender, caste, ethnicity and religion, she has a different take. Nyaichai strongly believes that class should be the main agenda for inclusion.

In line with her party’s beliefs, she maintains that Nepal should be a socialist republic of peasants and workers, but she hopes that the new constitution will immediately favour the peasants and workers. “We have very high hopes for Lila,” in her short time in politics, this.
It is only after you reach Jomsom in half a day from Pokhara that you realize how distances (and time) have shrunk in Nepal. A journey that used to take five days of steep climbs and descents is now a question of a few hours. And it will be even shorter once Nepal’s trans-Himalayan highway is black-topped. Tourists, pilgrims, even conference participants have started streaming to Jomsom and Muktinath. Upper Mustang and Lo Manthang have suddenly become much more accessible for Nepalis.

Not everyone here is happy with this change. Tourism entrepreneurs are worried the road will damage Mustang’s fragile culture and ecology. Seeing the haphazardly parked passenger jeeps at Jomsom bus park, you can already see the same squalour you see in Beni or Baglung. Noise and diesel smoke are the new hazards of walking Jomsom’s cobblestone streets.

Trekker numbers have dropped, complain local hoteliers and they blame the road. Lodge owners in Tatopani, Ghunsa, Marpha and Tukuche who used to depend on night stop hikers have lost their business.

However, most traders and ordinary people are happy with the road. It makes things cheaper and they don’t have to pay the extortionate tariff on the Pokhara flight. There are now 50 buses that ply to Muktinath every day from Jomsom, and an equal number that leave for Beni.

Trekking groups now take the high road to Jomsom from Ghodepani, avoiding the road. The new highway has also made the side-valleys of East Dhaulagiri Glacier and Meso Kanto Pass more accessible.
Local politics today is all about cadre dividing up development contracts

A division of the spoils

KUNDA DIXIT in DOLAKHA

Prolonged political wrangling in Kathmandu has paralysed development activity nationwide, and more worryingly, set off bitter competition between local politicians for budgets and contracts.

From the mountains of Dolakha to the central hills of Arghakhanchi and out in Kalaihi in the far-west, political uncertainty following the resignation of the Maoist-led government last month has created a power vacuum in which plundering budgets and corruption have become the norm.

Maoist cadre, aided and abetted by a corrupt ruling elite, now monopolise all district and village-level contracts for everything from new roads to bulldozer and sand mining and even the trade in stolen cars and wildlife contraband from India. No private contractor anywhere can get development activity for personal gain or to replenish party war chests.

“IT'S now standard operating procedure in the New Nepal,” says a private contractor based in Sukhpet, wryly, “we factor the protection money into our contracts.” In many places the construction, bridges, highways and hydropower projects have been halted because of extortion.

Even in districts where local councils had been set up in the last elections, the Maoists backed out of agreements after their government fell. In districts like Lamjung, local councils have not been set up at all so development plans and budgets for the coming year have remained languishing. Local civil society is trying to get the parties to work together, but so far unsuccessfully.

“The discussions are all about who gets what share of the development budget, and they can’t agree on a formula,” said one exasperated activist in Besisahar. In the past, even if political parties quarrelled in Kathmandu, local bodies somehow kept functioning. Many village elders elected to VDC councils from the last local elections in 1989 took charge of development activities. Now, even that mechanism is not working as political parties compete to steal from the development budget for personal gain or to replenish party war chests.

When the district council in Dailekh found it had Rs 10 million in unspent development funds, the three main political parties divided it among themselves. In Ranchhuli, there is a frenzy of road-building as political parties award themselves contracts. Rival parties sometimes build duplicate roads to the same village. The roads are built with no regard to engineering or the environment and most will not survive the coming monsoon (see box). The local NC committee has actually split in Dolakha over a Rs 3.5 million road contract because of rivalry between fellow kangaris. CDOs and district police chiefs are demoralised, as Maoist cadre publically abuse and threaten them.

In Tanahu, a district administration official says he has given up trying to work with the political parties. He told Nepal Times: “What can I tell you? We have a three-party dictatorship. They decide on the budget and divide it up. There is no accountability, and no one dare ask questions. We are helpless and hopeless.”

Even in districts like Gorkha where former finance minister Baburam Bhattarai lavished cash in his home district to build roads and upgrade colleges, there is little accountability. “I have seen one crore being given to a friendly contractor to build a highway culvert,” recalled a local journalist, who added investigating such stories would be suicidal.

To be sure, pork-barrel politics was the norm also with the NC and UML. But local parties are exploiting the result of mass-scale corruption. Local political cadre are exploiting the instability and confusion of the past 10 months to misappropriate local development budgets and distribute cash to party faithful.

Most roads are built by overseers with scant regard for environmental norms, ravaging steep slopes and threatening settlements with landslides. Political parties prefer contractors with bulldozers so they can operate inside pocket kickbacks. But the machines are much more destructive to the mountains, and in addition take away jobs from villagers. Some donors have totally gifted bulldozers to DDCs in the name of “development”.

In Dolakha alone, the district spent Rs 40 million on roads last year. Half of that money went to pay for bulldozer rentals. Although they cost Rs 1,700 per hour to rent, records show many were hired at up to Rs 2,400 per hour. Activists in Charikot have calculated that at Rs 150 per day wage for villagers, the bulldozers cost 5,000 jobs last year. “Most of us are willing to work for free to get roads to our village, but there is too much money tied up in road contracts,” lamented one ex-VDC chairman from northern Dolakha.

A new landscape feature has appeared right across the mid hills of Nepal in the past two years: lush hillsides scarred by zig-zagging roads. The landslides they trigger tumble down gullies to the valley below.

The road-building spree is a response to local demand. Most villagers in Nepal when asked what their development priority is, immediately reply: “A road.” But the frenzy of new construction is also a result of mass-scale corruption. Local political cadre are exploiting the instability and confusion of the past 10 months to misappropriate local development budgets and distribute cash to party faithful.

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Law and disorder

A generation for which impunity is the norm

The series of pictures on the site have high-resolution images. Each face in the picture, including that of a boy who looks 12 is identifiable. What is even more shocking is that the men seem to be enjoying what they are doing, and are not even trying to hide their faces.

Incident Two. This week Kathmandu’s Ring Road area was blocked off for two days due to demonstrations by relatives of the two men who were killed in an accident when their motorcycle was hit by a public bus. On Monday, an unruly mob attacked a van trying to take children to school. When the van driver tried to reason with the mob by explaining he was transporting small children he got hit by a brick. Three other children and a teacher were hurt.

These are two isolated incidents in the Valley, but across the country women accused of being “witches” are being tortured, and nine people suspected of being child traffickers have been lynched to death in the Tarai. Violence has become the norm. Police are mute spectators when the militant youth wings of various parties beat up innocent people on the streets.

Whether it is in the city or rural Nepal, women’s violence against women has become a way of life. Hindus beat up their wives, in-laws pour kerosene on newly-married brides and set them alight, nine women are scarred by acid or sexually abused in the family. Victims stay quiet, silently bearing the torture and pain because they can’t come out and say anything. And why would they? The security apparatus and the justice system is so weak and impunity so rampant that the perpetrators get away. Every time.

The Ratna Park incident was never filed at the police station. Apart from the blogsite and some international coverage, the local media stayed mum. It is still not known who the woman is, and the men who were involved went scot free again.

In the past decade, Nepalis have learnt to live with a lot of hardships. We thought that with the end of war there would be peace. The law and order situation is actually worse. The government whose fundamental task is the care of citizens, doesn’t seem to care. No child must get up in the morning with the fear that she and her friends may end up in hospital because the bus carrying her to school was smashed up by people not much older than her. No woman should fear walking around the city because she may be stripped and beaten.

Even our anger is politically motivated: we come out to protest when a foreigner allegedly says the Buddha was born in India. We burn tyres when oaths are taken in Hindi because all this is an attack on sovereignty. What good is sovereignty when we are not safe in our own sovereign country?

INTERESTING TIMES

Mallika Aryal

Incident One. Late last month a woman was stripped and severely beaten in the middle of Ratna Park at around 9PM. A mob of about 60 men surrounded the woman and dragged her towards the bus park to parade her around the city when the police finally showed up. An eyewitness with a camera took pictures and posted them on a popular Nepali blogsite. She was crying for help but the men called her “charitrahin” and stripped her.

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KEMI TIGER

The market is red hot for foreign companies to demonstrate by relatives of the two men who were killed in an accident when their motorcycle was hit by a public bus. On Monday, an unruly mob attacked a van trying to take children to school. When the van driver tried to reason with the mob by explaining he was transporting small children he got hit by a brick. Three other children and a teacher were hurt.

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**Hypocrite whole-timers**

Nepal’s communists need to see the defeat of India’s left as an early warning

If the pugnacious, arch-Tory British wartime leader were with us today, he’d be furious.

For despite what many believe, he never said the following words.

“Not to be a socialist at twenty is proof of want of heart, to be one at thirty is proof of want of head.”

No, that was George Clemenceau, a French Prime Minister and statesman from the early part of the 20th century, also renowned for combativeness, iron will and catchy phrases.

His most famous quote in English turns out to be one that most of us wrongly attribute. Such is life. But let’s examine M Clemenceau’s thinking and apply it to South Asia today, Nepal in particular.

Socialism as he knew it meant workers committees manning barricades and shutting down cities and industries. Basically it meant revolution as defined by Karl Marx in *The Communist Manifesto* of 1848.

Today, we have a broader, gentler definition of socialism and fondness for its methods, if not the nomenclature. To be a contemporary socialist is to be broadly in favour of an equitable, rights-based agenda that admits the existence and desirability of free well-regulated markets. Socialism, as we know it now, thrives in Sweden, Spain, Canada and many other well-off countries.

Defined as allowing governments to run, regulate and occasionally bail out the marketplace, socialist thinking informed both the George W Bush and Barack Obama administrations’ approach to current economic turmoil.

General Motors, once the mightiest of global capitalist behemoths, is now nearly three-quarters owned by taxpayers in America and Canada.

What global centrists can’t afford is hard-line ideology of right or left. World conditions are too fragile, interconnected and uncertain at the best of times. Only the nimble survive.

What’s pretty clear is that the world has rejected coercive Marxism (Communism) and anyone who believes otherwise is dangerously deceiving themselves.

Nepal and parts of India are among the last places where people who believe they find wisdom and solace in Stalin, Lenin and Mao still get a chance to serve as legislators, even Prime Ministers.

Hell, you can find people here who admire Kim Il Sung and Pol Pot. It helps that Nepal, and for that matter West Bengal and Kerala, are isolated, full of a self-righteous sense of carefully cultivated uniqueness, and largely at the fringes of the modern world.

Local Hindu caste patterns help too. The purity so beloved at the Brahminical heights sits comfortably alongside the doctrinaire Left’s obsession with examining primary political texts in search of self-confirmatory analyses.

In fact, were Marx, Engels or even Lenin with us today, they’d have a hard time recognising their handiwork in the positions and political records of our South Asian Marxists-Leninists.

Not that I’m arguing for a return to basics, far from it. But a little intellectual honesty from all who bask in the prefix ‘Comrade’ would go a long way.

On the surface, they claim work for the rights of workers and peasants but the best they have ever achieved has been through compromise with a broad range of political ideas that they snobbily dismiss as bourgeois democracy. They conveniently forget that their own Marx was a middle class nightmare of a human being who loathed the idea of a day’s work for a day’s pay. For easier to sponge off his wealthy friend, Engels, who inherited his wealth from a capitalist father.

There are no working men and women at the top of today’s South Asian leftist movements, just bourgeois hypocrites and ‘whole-timers’ who have lived off the toil of their own party cadres as they espouse respect, equity and revolution.

Even so, voters in India gave their Communists decades to deliver the goods but recently found them wanting. Nepal’s leftists need to see this as an early warning, a signal that change, compromise and nimble politics will keep them relevant. Marx will not.

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Kiran Panday
A full range of human emotions and psychological states - pride, ambition, courage, determination, guilt, revenge, insecurity - are explored in the ten films that make up the second European Film Festival in Kathmandu from 13-17 June at Nepal Army auditorium.

Two films from each member state of the EU are represented in Nepal. German, France, the UK, Denmark and Finland are being screened.

Ferenc Weigl of the European Union, which is organising the festival, says, “Last year’s response from the audience proves that the Nepali audience is very interested in European movies. Our main aim is to introduce modern European cinematographic art to nations outside Europe.”

Le Couperet
This French film, directed by Bruno Davert, is about Brune Devret, a top executive at a PR company. When his boss finally sends him into group therapy, he finds himself in the same group as the stays-at-home wife. But when Jan’s boss finally sends him into group therapy, the thuggish exhibits his helplessness and everyone’s lives take unexpected turns.

1st show: 14 June, 1PM
2nd show: 16 June, 3PM

Til doden os Skinner (With your Permission)
This film is about a painfully insecure ferryboat staffer Jan, who’s regularly beaten by his stay-at-home wife. But when Jan’s boss finally sends him into group therapy, he finds himself in the same group as the battle-axe.

1st show: 14 June, 1PM
2nd show: 17 June, 11AM

Individual spirit
The European psyche laid bare in film festival

La France
It is autumn 1917 and World War I is taking place. Camille is a young woman who, after receiving disconcerting news from her husband, disguises herself as a man and goes to find him at war.

1st show: 15 June, 3PM
2nd show: 16 June, 1PM

The Flying Scotsman
Based on a true story, UK-produced The Flying Scotsman tells the story of a young woman, Yella (Nina Hoss) who moves away from her home Eastern neighborhood and her abusive husband Ben to the West, where a job offer might bring her the peace she has been searching for.

1st show: 16 June, 11AM
2nd show: 17 June, 1PM

Tyttö sinä olet tähti (Beauty and the Bastard)
This romantic comedy tells the story of Sune, a fanatic hiphop-DJ and Nelli, a snobbish over-achiever who fall in love while trying to take advantage of each other.

1st show: 14 June, 3PM
2nd show: 17 June, 3PM

Joulutarina (Christmas Story)
This Finnish Christmas film tells the touching story of how Santa Claus came to be Santa. The film portrays the life of Nikolas, a young orphan boy who is looked after by the villagers in Lapland.

1st show: 13 June, 3PM
2nd show: 15 June, 11AM

When nepa-lya’s picture book of the conflict, A People War, was released in 2007 it told in pictures the story of how the violence had affected civilians. The pictures were taken on a traveling photo exhibition in 2008 and some 350,000 viewed them. They left heart-wrenching testimonies about their war experiences, and the yearning for peace.

Never Again
Nepa-lya has selected some of the tens of thousands of testimonies in a new book, Never Again, which is being launched on Sunday. All the footage, from the page-long ones to ‘Malai naramro lagyo’ written by a kindergarten student have the same message: ‘never again’.

The testimonies force us to remember the sorrows of war. Nepalis went through a collective catharsis, and these words are the outpourings of our nation’s soul. The victims of war saw that there were many more like them, and the exhibition helps them share the pain. Looking at the pictures together, people, who did not suffer directly, cried with the ones who did.

The war, we all prayed for peace, for fewer deaths, less destruction. But casualties became statistics, and we soon forgot about the families of the deceased, the disappeared, the injured, and the displaced. The photos in A People War tell the stories behind the numbers, which is why they were so powerfully moving.

In the sequel, Never Again, we hear the voices of Nepalis from Mechi to Makahai, all ages, religious and ethnic groups and through boundaries of literacy. (Illiterate and vision impaired visitors dictated their responses.) Everyone’s opinion is equally important: for once, this is history written by the people of what happened to them, not history written by the winners or so-called experts.

Most agree that we should learn lessons and be inspired to work towards social transformation and sustainable peace.

Some think violence is sometimes needed for social justice. Baburam Bhattarai writes a diatribe of critical political violence after seeing the exhibition in Gorkha. His comment shows how arrogantly ignorant leaders are about the war they unleashed on the people. Bhattarai’s comment will break the hearts of many who expected leaders to understand, but it seems the pictures somehow failed to do so: that we have cried together, and that no matter for what ends, violence is not justifiable.

What is the price of tears? writes one viewer. ‘History doesn’t die, writes another. ‘The back cover of the book has a poignantly short sentence: ‘After the blood come the tears.’ Another viewer says ‘See these pictures to Gyanendra, Girja, Prachanda why are you showing it to us?’

The war may be over, but there is no peace yet. For the families of the disappeared, the sorrows continue, the children of the dead suffer hardships. It will take time for people to forgive and start trusting each other. Perhaps because we have been through so much, we want to forget and move on. But we can’t forget until we have learnt our lessons.

Never Again helps us remember, and helps the process of reconciliation through justice.
EXHIBITIONS
- In praise of the patterns, a SFA solo exhibition by Gyana Gurung from 13 June, Nepal Art Council, Babar Mahal.
- Portraits from the Shadow - The plight of street children, an exhibition by Sanjeev Maharjan, till 14 June at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal.
- Transcendental Vibrations’, an exhibition by Kabi Raj Lama, till 17 June at Hotel de l’Annapurna, Durbar Marg.

EVENTS
- E-Car rally in support for Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Center starts at Mahipad Mandala, 13 June, 9AM - 9:10AM at School of Creative Communications, 5547005
- Nepa-laya’s film tour, 15-20 June, 3:30 and 5:30 PM, Russian Cultural Center. 4431893
- Learn Esperanto Language - free Introductory class on 13 June, 9-10AM at School of Creative Communications. 5547005
- 38th Yala Maya Classic, a classical music series, 16 June, 9PM, Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dkhok. 5552167
- Star Trek, a sci-fi movie on 17 June, 6.30 PM, Lazimpat Gallery Café. 4628549
- Tai Chi, 13 June, 10-11.30AM, Yoga 9-10AM & Buddhist Meditation 5-6PM, 15-19 June. Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Keshar Mahal Marg. 4414002
- Call for entries for Film South Asia till 30 June, documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5552141

MUSIC
- TGF at Jazzabella Café every Wednesday and Friday. 2110475
- Baja gaja, every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 pm onwards, Pushchowk. 5523312
- 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 Tentroc. Hyatt Regency from 12.30 PM. 4491234
- Jazz evening at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM. 4280326
- Epic, at the Brunchchili- the Acoustic lounge every Friday, Thamel. 9851035437
- Strings Band live every Tuesday at G’s Terrace Restaurant and Bar, Thamel.
- Wednesday Melody at Jazzabelle Café. Happy hour 6-8PM and TGF 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, Dwarka’s Hotel. 4479489
- Happy cocktail hour, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jai Café & Bar.
- Live Sensation, performance by Yankie every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234.
- Fusion and Lozza Band every Friday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193

DINING
- A café’s café, Dhokhala Café, Patan Dkhok. 5522113
- The Corner Bar. 3-11PM, 5-7PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu. 4411818
- 7th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival 2009, from 15 June-15 September, Kiloxy, Thamel. 4250440
- Mango Etagere with hi-tea, every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 pm onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarka’s Hotel. 4479489
- M40 at the Rox Restaurant every Monday & Tuesday, 5-8PM, ladies night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- Weekend Brunch by the Poolside every Saturday and Sunday, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu, 11AM-3PM. 4273999
- Home made pasta at Al fresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- Live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarka’s Hotel. 4479489
- Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Café, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Thai Food, every Thursday night, Bhumi Resto Lounge, Lazimpat. 4412193
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangrila with live performance by Gyana Gurung, Rs 999, at the Chhambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999

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MARCHING ORDERS: Upendra Yadav announces the dismissal of Bijay Gachhedar and seven other leaders from MJF last week. Two factions of the party clashed in Birganj on Wednesday.

DEAD END: The road leading up to Banepa remained tense for hours on Friday when locals clashed with Maoist affiliated Tamsaling Mukti Morcha to protest the banda. A curfew was imposed to control the situation.

DAILY ROUTINE: Maoist cadres block the road in Darbar Marg on Friday as part of their continued protest demanding civilian supremacy.

SEEDS OF HOPE: Despite the delayed onset of monsoon and prolonged drought, farmers have started planting rice seedling in Hatiban on Tuesday.

CATCHING UP WITH TIMES: Granddaughter of Sir Edmund Hillary, Emily Rose Hillary, reading Nepali Times in Namche after the Tenzing-Hillary Everest Marathon last week. German Ambassador Verena Graf von Roedern looks on.
Even the Ass had underestimated just how serious the lust for power was going to be on the part of netas who wanna be in the new coalition. The donkey had predicted here that it would take a week for Makunay to cobble together a cabinet. It’s been nearly three weeks. What is holding things up in this Government Sans Portfolios?

Well, it boils down to arithmetics. There are 22 members in the coalition, so we need a minimum 36 member cabinet because the Big Boys (and Gals) want more than one ministry. This presents a bit of a problem because there ain’t enuf ministries to go around. So Bhaluwatar has hit upon a wonderful idea: they’re going to split up the double-barrelled mantralayas.

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation can be bifurcated into the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Civil Aviation. And if even that won’t do, they can go a step further and divide it up into the Ministry of Works, Ministry of Physical and Ministry of Planning.

The PMO had just heaved a sigh of relief that it’d resolved the issue when the parties also started splitting, thus necessitating chopping up the ministries into further pieces. The MIP is going through binary fission with full-scale cutouts in Birgunj, the hangovers over Sodhata Koirala becoming Funning Minister, and even Chhure Bhakta may split one of these days. How on earth are all these new parties and their new leaders going to be accommodated?

And true to the legendary inability of Nepalis to get along, the Brahmanical e-maleys (pronounced ‘eh-malaise’) have a serious rift between JN and his home ministry nominee Iswar P and the Oli faction. KP has never really trusted the fellow-commie and communist atheist named Iswar, and has opposed his candidacy for Home Sweet Home Ministry. JN and BidyaB are also on a collision course with their publicly divergent views on the eight jarsaps and the proposed court martial for Cool Budder. No surprises there, but Oli and Bidya are now in open confrontation against Comrade Makunay who is trying to appease the Baddies with a commitment to civilian supremacy. With me so far?

MKN is in the horns of a dilemma. Decisiveness is not one of the prime minister’s strong points, which may be a good thing in a man supposed to keep everyone happy. Trouble is, he isn’t getting any guidance about what to do next from the guys who control the remote. So he has no idea whether he should be trying to appease the Marxists or twisting their tail.

Meanwhile, it looks like Comrade Awful is missing the Rs 100,000 bed he had rigged up at Bhaluwatar. PKD now finds the Pistachio Palace a tad too claustrophobic, so he’s moved to an orchid farm in Godavari to put finishing touches to his proposals over future strategy at the party’s secretariat meeting next week. The strategy is reportedly to just wait it out patiently to allow the UML-led coalition to self-destruct by Dasain, and then make a move to stage an even stronger comeback.

It’s four down 99 to go if the Baddies get all the ethnic groups in Nepal to stage their own bundles. The Ass’ solution to this is for Nepal (the country, not the premier) to dissolve parliament, dismantle the army, abolish the portfolioless cabinet, go back to the Baise and Chaubise Rajahs. The donkey’d rather have 22 rajahs than 22 unruly coalition members.