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ALEX TREADWAY

**HIGH AND DRY:** Ama Dablam towers above the Imja Valley in Khumbu last week as rainless pre-monsoon weeks offered spectacular views.

## Fresh start

One month after being elected prime minister by parliament, Madhav Kumar Nepal was still not able to complete his cabinet expansion despite the induction of 10 new ministers on Wednesday.

Nepal has still not been able to convince the MJF, TMLP and SP to join. The reason: disagreement about who should get plum ministries.

However, ministers appointed without portfolios two weeks ago finally got their assignments with the UML's Bhim Rawal at



the helm of the key Home Ministry. Analysts say with the problems of rising crime

and a deteriorating law and order situation, Rawal has his work cut out.

NC-nominated CA member Nilambar Acharya says he is encouraged because this is a civilian cabinet with members that believe in democracy. "There is no one in it with guns," he told *Nepali Times*.

Maoist CA member Hari Roka is not so positive: "They are all people who have lost elections, so they are accountable to their parties and not to the people."

The visit by Indian Foreign Secretary Shiva Shankar Menon

on Saturday is seen as significant as New Delhi tries to use its leverage to end the prolonged political deadlock over government formation. Menon is expected to urge the Madhesi parties to join a consensus government. His visit may also have a bearing on the Maoist Politburo meeting where a hardline faction advocating confrontation is facing a more pragmatic, but beleaguered, party leadership. ●

*Dewan Rai*

**EDITORIAL p2**  
**Civilian parties**

**Times** **nepalnews.com**  
Weekly Internet Poll # 456

Q. Which of these phrases best describe your current feeling about the delay in government formation?

Total votes: 3,521

Completely disgusted 64.3%  
So what else is new? 26.8%  
Normal in democracy 8.9%

Weekly Internet Poll # 456. To vote go to: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com)  
Q. Cabinet expansion still stuck.  
Your comment:

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## CIVILIAN PARTIES

Confused by the political wrangling and back-stabbing? Frustrated and cynical about the political leadership? Let's try to simplify it for you. The political forces in this country can be narrowed down to just two types: ones that believe in violence as a political tool, and the others that don't.

Using that criteria, it is pretty clear which side peace-loving Nepalis are on. In last month's regime change the party that believes in the supremacy of the gun was replaced by a coalition of civilian parties. The Maoist self-admitted strategy of grabbing the national army to complete their agenda of total state capture was foiled. Which is why they are again on the warpath.

They seem to have no qualms about stirring the hornet's nest of ethnic unrest, they have no misgivings about punishing the people with impromptu shutdowns like the one they throttled Kathmandu with on Monday.

A banda is terrorism pure and simple. It is invoked and implemented by instilling the fear of physical harm, by whoever calls for it. The streets of Kathmandu on Monday was a preview of the kind of society the Stalinists want in Nepal: blocking ambulances, forcing the sick to walk, detaining a cardiac surgeon and setting fire to his vehicle, deflating the tyres of bicyclists who dared pedal past their barricades and selectively attacking the independent media.

The great pity is that this needn't have been. With their convincing win in last year's elections the Maoists had the peoples' support to engage in non-violent civilian politics. But they chose to retain their militant avatar, their wartime use of threats, intimidation and killings. The call for integration of two armies leaves out the more important component of the guerrilla force: the YCL which roams the country sowing terror.

Unfortunately, the civilian parties are exhibiting the same greedy, selfish, short-sighted opportunism that they showed in the mid-1990s. It's been nearly a month, and the prime minister doesn't yet have a functioning government. They have shown no capacity to learn from mistakes and understand the gravity of what is at stake here. This has hurt efforts to democratise the Maoists, and has emboldened hardliners. If these are our guardians of civilian politics, they don't need enemies.

But the onus lies with the Maoists to prove their commitment to non-violent multi-party democracy by disbanding the YCL and all other militant groups, abide by the laws of the land. They must stop using deceit, stoking pseudo-nationalism and fanning the flames of ethnic conflict.



KIRAN PANDAY

# Squeeze the middle

## History is repeating itself, but not as a farce

The present political mood is eerily similar to pre-October 2002 and pre-February 2005, with the ultra-left and ultra-right feeding on each other.

The political parties were still running show in principle then. But everyone knew that Sher Bahadur Deuba's governments (after the dissolution of the parliament as well as the one in alliance with UML, and the



**PLAIN SPEAKING**  
**Prashant Jha**

Lokendra Bahadur-Surya Bahadur interregnum) were masks. Narayanhiti and Bhadrakali were calling the shots.

A deep sense of foreboding prevailed. As soon as a government was formed, people were calculating how long it would last. The democratic space in the districts had shrunk with the army colonel and Maoist commissar setting the terms and agenda. The war escalated. There was a hankering for a 'strongman' to see the country through, even as democratic aspirations were growing on the ground.

At a time when the rest of the country was moving left with the Maoist transformation, Kathmandu turned right with the king's takeover. This disconnect led to the regime's downfall.

Contexts differ but examine the similarities with the present. While the electorate delivered a verdict in favour of left forces, the centre is being run from a definite right orientation.

Madhav Nepal is the face but has to report to multiple masters. Those who helped cobble together this government (from the president to army chief) already have differences with the PM. No one knows who's the real boss.

There is a concerted effort by previous benefactors to discredit an already fragile government.

Isolated and hounded by other parties in capital politics, the Maoists have gone back to their old violent ways out in the districts. The general sense is that the present government won't last very long: both because of the opposition from outside and contradictions within. Even cabinet ministers admit this is a "stopgap arrangement".

Within a few months, as protests escalate and the government is seen to have failed, there will be a growing clamour for an alternative. A top businessman told us this week: "These parties are useless. We will finally need the army, and the president playing a more active role to control things."

The fall of this government, whenever it happens, will be a critical moment. Will it mean a renegotiation with the Maoists, their re-entry into government, and movement on contentious issues? Or will it be followed by an even more rightward shift in the polity, with the military taking an assertive role?

Going by the trend, the latter is more likely. And Maoist actions will only help push us towards that.

Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai have learnt the limits of their power after the army chief episode. They want to escalate protests but

only in a calibrated manner to increase their bargaining power. Both realise that the only way out of the impasse is to make up with India and other parties.

But they have to deal with the Kirans, Gajurels and Biplabs within the party. These divisions are for real. One leader from the dogmatic faction recently said that he would like to see the parties go with the army.

Their aim is to deepen the polarisation, monopolise the opposition space, create urban unrest, and attempt a power grab. The revival of parallel governments in Surket and Bajura, hitting out at rivals in Kalikot stems from this approach.

Squeezing the middle ground is common to the aim and orientation of both the ultra left and the right-wingers who are powerful in the present dispensation. Erstwhile royalists, hardliners in the army, NC and UML conservatives have always felt that the last few years was "unnatural", that another onslaught on the Maoists is both necessary and desirable, and the time is now ripe.

What can pull things back?

The Maoists have to practice peaceful oppositional politics and reassure other parties of their commitment to democracy. Parties have to realise that the army is not their natural ally and they will be left nowhere when the democratic space shrinks. The military must recognise that it may become more powerful in the short-term, but the present route will discredit them and hamper their institutional development as a modern army.

And India must temper the rightward drift, for that can only lead to conflict. Delhi will not be able to escape the consequences of an unstable and anarchic Nepal. ●

## LETTERS

### CLOSE TO THE EDGE

I was thoroughly depressed reading Prashant Jha's page 1 story ('Close to the edge', #455). It removed any illusions anyone had that Nepal is a vassal state of India, and New Delhi essentially runs the show here. Prachanda was just the latest victim.

**Saman Thapa, email**

● The most insightful scoop that the *Nepali Times* has ever printed. Thanks to Prashant Jha for telling it like it is. Governments through Nepal's history since 1816 have failed to grasp the geopolitical reality of the Himalayas, which is why they have all come to grief. A simple understanding that we are in India's sphere of influence, and behaving accordingly to extract maximum concessions, would have been a much better foreign policy strategy. But what we have done since the

days of British India is to irritate the Delhi Durbar and invite its wrath. After all look at what playing China off against India has got us: we have become India's protectorate.

**Jib R Acharya, Darbar Marg**

### COP OUT

I would like to point out that this is not the first time our country is facing a political void from lack of clear leadership (Editorial, 'Cop out,' #455). Accountability is the key word and it should start with you, the media and then by all, including the Nepal Police of course. After all, media must take the major chunk of the blame for the current situation

that we are in now. In your haste to do away with the monarchy and your willingness to go along with anything and everything opened 'pandora's box'. If we are to find our way, media must provide an unbiased view, as is and fair coverage and not just feed us your individual political opinions and views.

**Jyoti Singh, Kamalpokhari**

### LAW AND DISORDER

As Mallika Aryal points out ('Law and disorder,' # 455) attacks on school

buses, sexually motivated mob violence against a girl in Ratna Park and torturing

suspected kidnappers to death in the Tarai are horrifying incidents but more gruesome atrocities were committed by the Maoists during their so-called 'people's war'. Were those responsible ever brought to justice? Instead their leader became the prime minister of this country. A Maoist cadre who proudly confessed to the media that he was responsible for assassinating IGP Krishna Mohan Shrestha and his wife attends receptions organised by human rights groups. What are we going to tell those three tiny school children who were attacked on their way to school last week? Will we tell them that those who stoned them were bad, while those who blew up a bus in Madi and burnt people alive for violating a Maoist banda were revolutionaries who needed to do just that to liberated the country?

**Forum for Education and Development, Kathmandu**





# Mutually assured demolition

## The country lurches from one shutdown to another

JANAKPUR-From a capital paralysed by strikes to a Tarai paralysed by strikes, the long-suffering people of this country have learnt to cope. They've also learnt to make hay while the sun shines. Rickshaw fares quadruple when motorised vehicles disappear from the streets. Since the demand for pedal power far outstrips supply during a banda, it's the provider rather than the customer who sets the fare. Our driver, Sovit, says he makes most of his money carrying children to school. That's the regular income on which he bases his monthly budget. He can take one or two days of banda per month in his stride. But anything more than that can push him below the poverty line.

During the Madhes Uprising two years ago, he says he endured untold hardships for prolonged periods because it was his struggle for a life of dignity. Thanks to the andolan, no Pahadi passenger now dare talk to him in a spiteful tone. But he doesn't know what this nagarik sarbochata is all about. "Isn't President Ram Baran Yadav also a nagarik?" asks Sovit with the profound wisdom of a man who has pulled rickshaw for a living ever since he dropped out of school at the age of 14 to support his family. A hartal also eliminates the most attractive source of a rickshaw-puller's income: short trips with the possibility of tips. With businesses shut, people just walk across the street to hire pirated DVDs to spend the day at home. Buses stop, railways do not ply and the

**STATE OF THE STATE**  
C K Lal



KIRAN PANDAY

cigarette factory is shut. The quadrupled income from one or two trips to the airport doesn't compensate. Sovit's economic sense is remarkable enough, but his political instincts are even more impressive. The 24-year-old looks double his age and sounds as wise, and thinks that no political force other than Forum can resist the Maoist onslaught in the Madhes. The deserted streets confirm his prognosis. There are no YCDL hoodlums visible, but the fear of their wrath is enough to force businesses to shut. Sovit campaigned for MJF lawmaker Sanjay Sah during CA elections but considers Upendra Yadav to be a better representative of Madhesis than the opportunistic gang of Bijay Gachhedar. Whoever says that the popular verdict that produced a hung Constituent Assembly was freak phenomenon should listen to porters in the mountains, rickshawalas in the Tarai and cabbies in Kathmandu. The Nepali voter wanted to send a strong message to its leaders: if you don't swim together, we wouldn't be there to rescue you when you drown. The message has been either misread or wilfully misinterpreted.

The political class in the capital is yet again engaged in mutually assured demolition of each other's reputation even as the country descends into anarchy. Sovit is a worried man: his son is not old enough to go to Malaysia and he doesn't want to keep him in Janakpur. He wants to know if his son can find job as a domestic in a Kathmandu household. Everybody in Janakpur wants to move to the capital city. The once-famous RR Campus has deteriorated beyond recognition. The town is not safe anymore for girls to walk alone. When Pahadis move to safer locations, it's big news. But Sovit insists that for every Pahadi settler who has moved out, there are at least two Madhesis who have done the same and for similar reasons. The only difference is that when a Pahadi leaves, he often sells his property never to return. Criminality is so pervasive that all hopes of the town returning to normal are fading. Work on Dhalkebar-Bhitamod Highway is held up because every gang with a gun wants a cut from construction contracts. People don't pick up any calls from phones with unfamiliar numbers. Motorcycles are snatched from riders in broad daylight. Sovit wants to know whether he can survive pulling rickshaws in Kathmandu. He has been told that tourists pay more there than here and plans to move out of Janakpur as soon as his son completes school. At least that's a point on which the entire country is one: everybody dreams of living in the capital city some day. ●

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# Despite all odds

Biratnagar braves floods, crime and power cuts to keep on going

The past year has been bad for Biratnagar and the industrial belt in eastern Nepal.

First, there were the relentless hartals that had brought life to a standstill along the eastern Tarai. Then the Kosi breached its embankment, not just making 60,000 people homeless but also cutting off the East-West Highway linking the east with the rest of Nepal.

Manufacturers were affected, the tea industry suffered huge losses and hundreds of thousands of people had their movement restricted. The alternative was to travel two days via India, or take the precarious ferry across the Kosi at Chhatara.

“Our region was devastated, business and industry was severely affected, but still the business community got together to help the victims,” says Mahesh Jaju, president of the 58-year-old Morang Merchants Association (MMA).

MMA’s members represent 850 companies, 1150 trading houses, 12 commodities



PICS: KHAGENDRA KATTEL

association members and it has branches in Uurlabari, Rangeli, Letang, Madhumalla, Pathari, Belwari and Indrapur. Jaju is also the Managing Director of Asian Thai Foods, which produces noodles and snacks, and employs about 550 people.

MMA has been visiting the flood-affected areas to organise relief and also to keep an eye on

the rehabilitation work on the Kosi embankment. The business community has also taken the lead to bring various stakeholders in the Kosi reconstruction together to speed up the work before the next monsoon.

MMA estimates that the business community in Biratnagar lost an estimated Rs 3.5 billion in the floods.

Factories selling goods in the rest of Nepal had to close shop. However, thanks to an Indo-Nepal agreement brokered by MMA, transit facility was provided via India that gave some relief to medium and large industries.

The MMA has demanded a relief package for flood-affected industries including subsidy for electricity, VAT rebate, reduction in bank interest rates, loan rescheduling. But businessmen say there has been no response from the state.

Jaju says that even though the east may survive flood disaster, the law and order problems continue to be precarious with abduction, extortion and threats against businesses by various militant and underground criminal groups.

“Crime and law and order is the biggest problem we have,” Jaju says, “the administration is not able to restore security and the political parties seem to lack the will.”

The floods and law order crises have been compounded by the 18-hour load-shedding for the

first half of this year. “It crippled whatever was left of the industries,” says Jaju, “the cost of production shot up and affected turnover, especially of the smaller industries.” The politicisation of the unions was another issue that exacerbated existing crises.

Jaju is convinced that political stability in Kathmandu is the key factor. After that, a visionary plan to exploit natural resources to spur infrastructure and economic growth holds the key to creating jobs so Nepalis don’t have to migrate overseas.

“It is now becoming very urgent to find a way out of this crisis,” he told *Nepali Times*, “until we find ways to use our energy and ideas, we will never develop.”

Juju’s Rumpum noodle brand has carved out a name for itself in Nepal and northeastern India. “As an industrialist, my aim has always been innovation,” says Juju, “despite obstacles and negative factors all around, the trick is to never lose the hope and keep a positive outlook.” ●  
*Khagendra Kattel*

## “The east has potential”



After completing his MBA in Sydney in 2001, Roshan Bahadur Thapa returned to Nepal to start the South Asia School of Tourism and Hotel Management (SASTHM) in Biratnagar. Thapa was warned that Biratnagar was not a tourist-friendly city but eight years later, he says he made the right choice. Extracts of interview:

**Nepali Times:** Biratnagar is not thought of as a touristy destination. What made you start your hotel management school here?

**Roshan Bahadur Thapa:** Agreed that Biratnagar is not a tourist destination. However, for infrastructure and proximity to India, it is by far the best place in Eastern Nepal. Biratnagar is also a hub of Eastern Nepal and is still a growing industrial town with immense business potential.

It is the gateway to Nepal if one would consider Indian states of Bihar and West Bengal as potential tourism generating states. Darjeeling and Gangtok are always packed during the summer season, there is no reason why Ilam and Bheketar couldn’t have similar traffic.

The South Asian School of Tourism and Hotel Management (SASTHM) is an initiative to decentralise and regionalise the hospitality industry and tourism education. Everything is highly concentrated within Kathmandu valley. I wanted to make sure that I have a school, which would produce skilled workforce for tourism industry right here thus eliminating the problems of importing skilled workforce from Kathmandu. In fact our graduates are now working in hotels in eastern Nepal, Kathmandu and even Indian hotels are recruiting here. We started with three students who enrolled for Bachelors of Hotel Management course in 2004. Right now we have more than 60 students in various semesters. We have a fully operational 28 room hotel with several banquet facilities (Ratna Hotel) as well. In Kathmandu the Radisson, Annapurna and Soaltee Crowne Plaza are supporting us with internships.

**What constraints do you face in operating the school on a day-to-day basis?**

This was not going to be an easy job. I was prepared for it before I came to Biratnagar in 2003. The biggest problem we face is highly centralised Kathmandu. In Biratnagar, we don’t have that privilege of media attention or coverage. Getting teachers was the biggest hurdle in the beginning. Instructors from Kathmandu were reluctant to come to Biratnagar. But not anymore.

**What are some of the underdeveloped tourist attractions in eastern Nepal?**

Our tourism is focussed on the so-called “the golden

triangle” of Kathmandu, Chitwan and Pokhara. Eastern Nepal has a lot to offer. Basantapur, Tinjure, Milke Danda have great eco-tourism potential in the rhododendron season. Hile could easily outsell Darjeeling as a hill station with views not just of Kangchenjunga but Makalu and Everest as well. And it is all within four hours drive from Jogbani which is scorching hot in the summer.

**How can an entrepreneur help make Eastern Nepal a profitable tourism destination?**

If Nagarkot and Dhulikhel can be considered an attractive destination, why not the hills of Eastern Nepal? If nearby Darjeeling and Sikkim can attract thousands of Indian tourists, why not here? Tourism is a multi-faceted industry which has a huge potential of multiplier effect on jobs and economic growth besides helping conservation. Investing in tourism in Eastern Region is never a bad idea.

**But what are the constraints?**

First of all, tourism is at a very primitive stage in Eastern Nepal. Even before commercial promotion, there is an urgent need to develop infrastructure: accessibility, amenities, activities and attraction management. It is not too late to prepare a tourism masterplan for Hile and Ilam right away. Businesses also look at returns on investment, but tourism is a supply induced demand kind of investment.

**What is the role of the government?**

It can consider long-term land lease, subsidies on construction material or tax exemption. The government should arrange for soft bank loan, ease the registration process and remove bureaucratic hurdles. A PPP concept can be applied here, and the government could designate certain areas ‘Restricted to Tourism Development’ with the understanding of local communities for sustainable growth.

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### Swine flu update

Last week, the Nepal government said it was taking “stringent” action to prevent a Swine Flu outbreak following an announcement by WHO about a global pandemic.

But public health experts say the government doesn’t have a mechanism to detect, let alone respond, to a future epidemic in Nepal. The current outbreak is caused by a new strain of Influenza A virus subtype H1N1, and there are now almost 30,000 confirmed cases in 74 countries. The US has more than 13,000 and Australia 1,300 infections.

The government says there are no cases of H1N1 detected, and has a medical team checking every arriving passenger at the airport, leading to long delays at immigration. But India has nine confirmed cases and China 188. Countries which source tourists to Nepal also have cases: Japan (549), Germany (95), Korea (53), Israel (68).

Experts say the absence of cases in Nepal may not be because there aren’t infected people, but because of the lack of detection facilities. Currently, samples are sent overseas to confirm the identity of the virus, but there are privately-owned laboratories that can carry out confirmatory tests for H1N1.

Says Sameer Dixit of Center for Molecular Dynamics Nepal: “It is time Nepal got serious about meeting the challenge of this and future epidemics. Nepal must develop its own network of laboratories and hospitals to deal with a viral outbreak as soon as it is detected.”

He says these facilities must not only be able to detect prevalent strains but also identify a new strain of the virus when it appears in the population.

### Recession hits MDG goals

The global economic crisis is threatening to have a devastating impact on the health of women and children, and may prevent countries from meeting the UN’s Millennium Development Goals of halving poverty and disease by 2015.

A new study released this week says eight of the MDGs, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases will be most affected.

The Global Campaign for the Health Millennium Development Goals focusses on the health of mothers and children, and highlights practical ways to reduce the continuing and unnecessary death toll in developing countries.

The proposal calls for increased political mobilisation; adequate financing and effective delivery, streamlined and harmonised aid operations, free services for women and children at the point of use and the removal of access barriers, skilled and motivated health workers at the right place at the right time and accountability for results with robust monitoring and evaluation. (IPS)

### Maoists target media

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) this week called on the Maoists and all political groups in Nepal to end attacks on media personnel reporting on street protests.

On Tuesday, Maoists attacked a vehicle carrying FNJ secretary Ram Dahal, *Himal Khabarpatrika* editor Kiran Nepal, *Himal Khabarpatrika* managing editor Indra Shrestha and journalist Rameswor Bohara in Nepalganj even after they showed their press pass. They stoned the vehicle and looted the key.

On 15 June, Maoist YCL cadre physically and verbally abused reporters as they tried to cover their enforcement of a banda. In Chahabil a Kantipur Publications van was vandalised. In Gairegaun in Makwanpur Kantipur TV host Basudev Krishna was verbally abused.

In Sinamangal a vehicle transporting *Nepal Samacharpatra* editor Badri Tiwari was forced to turn back after activists blocked its path.

In Sitapaila Avenues TV correspondent Krishna Neupane was harassed by protesters who damaged his motorcycle. In Dhumbarahai FNJ staff member Bhojraj Ghimire’s motorcycle was nearly set on fire.

# Threatening move

Shutdowns violate the fundamental rights of citizens

Nepal’s political parties swear, in one form or another, that they are freedom fighters. They then go on to fight with one another to deny almost 30 million citizens the fundamental freedoms that have been enshrined in the Interim Constitution of 2007.

**STRICTLY BUSINESS**  
**Ashutosh Tiwari**

These include the freedom to move around any part of Nepal, and the freedom to carry on any occupation, industry or trade. The way the political parties, of all stripes, use to emasculate citizens’ freedom is by enforcing bandas. These shutdowns are carried out either nationally or locally: lasting anywhere for a few hours that brings everything to a standstill to violence-smear whole days, or the paralysing “indefinite” bandas.

Since the organisers, who are often amorphous groups of young political cadres, issue explicit threats, those who dare to defy the bandas run the risk of having their vehicles stoned or torched, their shops looted, and being beaten up publicly in broad daylight.

According to [www.nepalbandh.com](http://www.nepalbandh.com), a website that tracks the number of shutdowns, so far in June alone, as of this writing, there have been 38 instances of bandas across the country. Since 1 January, only 11 days have elapsed without there being a shutdown anywhere in Nepal.

It goes without saying that shutdowns severely restrict the movement of people, slow down trade and commerce, rob many labourers of their right to earn daily wages, and make life increasingly unbearable for all Nepalis who have quietly, even if seething inside, put up with these daily violations of their right to fundamental freedoms, even by putting their lives at risk.

Consider what happened last Monday at the National Kidney Center in Kathmandu. Because of the shutdown called by the Maoist YCL, the Centre could not buy water that it requires daily for dialysis. Water-providers could not send their tankers because they feared for their safety. Despite phone calls from patients, ambulance drivers stayed put. From previous shutdowns, they knew that there was no point in trying to reason with Maoist cadres on the deserted street on the days of bandas.

“Doctors and nurses could not come to work,” said Rishi Kumar Kaffle of the kidney centre. “We barely managed to offer dialysis to about 30 patients who had walked or had been carried to the Centre that day. But around 50 more patients who had signed up for that day did not come, and I know that some of them were already in dire conditions. Most would come the following day, and that would

put the pressure on the Center’s resources.”

The doctor asks: “What kind of new Nepal are we creating when innocent kidney patients may have to die so that political parties could go on with their protest programs against one another?”

Private businesses are also sick and tired of bandas. Last Tuesday, at a meeting between aid agencies and representatives of the private sector, convened by International Alert and the National Business Initiative (NBI), the number one problem that the participating firms cited in doing business in Nepal is the prevalence of bandas, and the violence, the vandalism, and the climate of fear and

uphold in public.

This is an issue that needs to be raised all the more to change how we view bandas: as a gross violation of our fundamental rights by the same people who we elected to safeguard our rights.

Anchoring the language of change to the tenet of the Constitution is important for two reasons. First, it brings all citizens into the same sphere of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. Second, it helps counter a disturbing sense that seems to find an easy acceptance in the media these days. For example, after motorcycles belonging to doctors and journalists were attacked on



MIN BAJRACHARYA

**CATCH ’EM YOUNG:** Really young Young Communist League member holds the party flag while others set about threatening vehicles that dared ply Kathmandu’s streets on Friday.

uncertainty that often accompany the shutdowns.

“Employees have a hard time coming to office, when they do come, they find that customers’ and dealers’ offices are closed. Transactions grind to a halt, while the expenses keep mounting,” said Anand Bagaria, who runs a company that produces poultry and livestock feed.

One suggestion that the NBI meeting threw up was that the language of politics should change in this country. True, on the face of it, not only does that suggestion sound abstract, it is also easier said than done.

Still, in concrete terms, such a conversation about the need to change the political language could be framed (by the media, civil society pundits and rights activists) in terms of promoting positive individual liberty in a way that propagates and respects what’s written in the Interim Constitution.

After all, no matter how many variables of bitter disagreement there remain among political parties, the Interim Constitution is the only document that was publicly signed by all of them, saying that they would adhere to its tenets. And its tenet on every citizen’s right to fundamental freedoms is crystal clear to anyone who bothers to read the Part III. As such, it’s arguable that any political party or any tangential group affiliated with a political party calls for bandas is contravening what they agreed to

Monday, medical bodies and media organisations issued statements saying that doctors and journalists, being special members of the society, were not to be treated like shopkeepers by the banda organisers.

The intention of the medical and media bodies might have been sincere. But they need to be told to tone down their language to recognise that even shopkeepers, as free citizens of this country, have the same Constitutional right as everyone else so as not to be forced to shutter stores just because a group of political cadres call for shutdowns and issue threats to non-adherents.

In the past few years, Nepalis pushed for a republic, took part in the Constituent Assembly elections, and cast their votes to elect representatives. They did these all for a better future: a future that gives them the right to live as free citizens.

Bandas called by political parties destroy that future as they are acts of indignities and humiliations forced upon the very voters who trusted them. The sooner we all come around to using the language of the Constitution to hold the parties accountable to what they promised to uphold, the language of banda will change from putting up with inconveniences to not tolerating repeated violations of citizens’ freedom to move freely to practice their occupations in Nepal. ●

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# Revolutionary voice

Purushottam Dahal in *Annapurna Post*, 17 June

अन्नपूर्ण पोस्ट

It takes an inordinate amount of perseverance and patience to become the kind of politician who has no expectation of a personal return from political life. Shailaja Acharya was one of the very few politicians with such devotion.

In her six-and-a-half decades of life, Shailaja spent around 50 years involved in politics. She was the first revolutionary youth to speak out against king Mahendra's takeover in 1960. Shailaja was the epitome of revolution. Her death comes at a time when the country is in dire need of such dedicated politicians.

Nepal has been declared a democratic republic, having abolished the monarchy and taken steps towards federalism. But what it lacks is political integrity, which Shailaja possessed. Who in the present cabinet would resign from a ministerial post while admitting their inability to control corruption? Who would stand against those in power and yet appeal to all with her logic?

Shailaja resigned from the post of agriculture minister even when her maternal uncle Girija Prasad Koirala was the prime minister. Baladeb Majganya, Lok Krishna Bhattarai and Homnath Dahal were other leaders who were inspired by her to resign. The resignation of former prime minister Girija Prasad Koirala, former home minister Gobindaraj Joshi and erstwhile PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal are remarkable. But their resignations had more to do with strategy, politics and personal dignity than ethics.

Shailaja's death comes at a time the NC needs good leadership. Shailaja, Sher Bahadur Deuba and Ram Chandra Poudel were all candidates to replace Koirala. Now, Sujata Koirala has come to



KIRAN PANDAY

the fore in place of Shailaja.

In the coming days, Sujata, Sher Bahadur and Ram Chandra will either have to loosen the shackles imposed by the party or work together to lead. It has to be understood that the second generation leaders in NC are as responsible for party failures as Koirala. There is a sliver of hope in the new generation, but they are not yet ready to take leadership.

Sujata is attempting to take the leadership of the party with the backing of her ageing father, thereby continuing the Koirala political dynasty. There is not just the need for a new face but also new ideas in order to democratise the party. The party needs a complete overhaul in order to uphold democracy.

## Bhutan's Maoists

*Naya Patrika*, 14 June

नयाँ पत्रिका

Following the footsteps of Nepal's Maoists, the Bhutanese Communist Party (MLM) has launched an armed struggle against its government to set up a sovereign democracy. The objectives of the two Maoist parties are remarkably identical. Both have emphasised the dominance of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat and imperialism as major obstacles. Like the CPN Maoists, the BCP wants Bhutan to be secular. Both also opposed the treaties with India, claiming they are unequal.

The BCP is also trying to emulate the success of their comrades in Nepal to turn the country from a monarchy to a republic. Party member 'Ajay' says the BCP has set up the Bhutanese Tiger Force, an armed wing to stage attacks within Bhutan. The BCP is trying to capitalise on the frustrations of one-third of Bhutan's disenfranchised population and the refugees. Currently the BCP is split into two groups with 'Bikalpa' and 'Birat' as the general secretaries.

## Young guns

Interview with Ramesh Chand Thakuri, Inspector General of Nepal Police in *Himal Khabarpatrika*, 15-29 June

हिमाल खबरपत्रिका

### What is the Nepali Police doing to maintain law and order?

A committee has been formed in both the east and the Tarai that is intervening to improve security. Their work has been made easy as the areas are constantly in touch regarding the law and order situation.

### What are some of the challenges you face?

The public is not afraid of breaking the law. They are encouraged and supported by the political parties so they don't get caught. We are often pressurised to release the perpetrators. We can only work well if political parties stop supporting impunity. We also do not have enough manpower and necessary resources, which has set us back.

### What problems have the party-affiliated youth wings aroused?

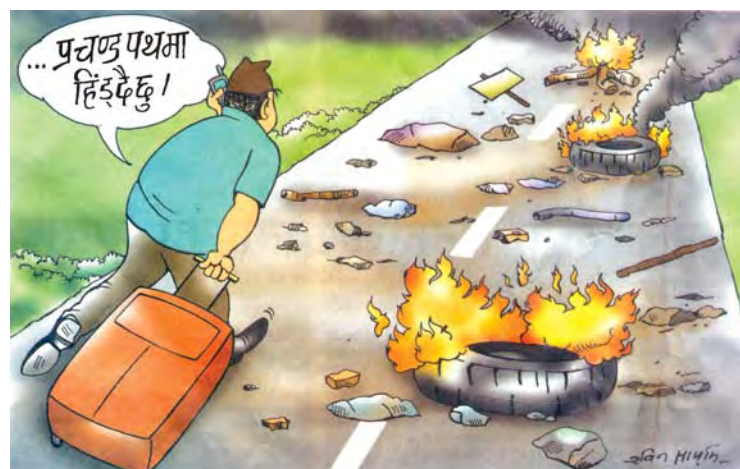
The main problem comes from them. We do not have the resources or favourable environment to take action against those who break the law. Any offences charged are immediately overruled. Parties regularly interfere in police activities and the locals fend for the offenders because they are threatened. The police follows the law of the country, yet we are always blamed. We are helpless because we cannot even use the rights given by the Nepali law.

## New cabinet

1. Prime Minister: Madhav Kumar Nepal (UML)
2. Deputy PM and Physical Planning and Works: Bijay Kumar Gachhadar (MJF)
3. Foreign Affairs: Sujata Koirala (NC)
4. Finance: Surendra Pandey (UML)
5. Defence: Bidya Bhandari (UML)
6. Information and Communications: Shankar Pokhrel (UML)
7. Energy: Prakash Sharan Mahat (NC)
8. Home: Bhim Rawal (UML)
9. Irrigation (NC): Balkrishna Khand
10. Federal Affairs, Constituent Assembly, Parliamentary Affairs and Culture: Minendra Rijal (NC)
11. Local Development: Purna Kumar Sherma Limbu (NC)
12. Health and Population: Umakant Chaudhari (NC)
13. Peace and Reconstruction: Rakam Chemjong (UML)
14. Labour and Transport Management: Mohammad Aftab Alam (NC)
15. General Administration: Rabindra Shrestha (UML)
16. Land Reforms and Management: Dumbar Shrestha CPN (ML)

### Ministers of state

17. Local Development: Ganesh Khadka (NC)
18. Peace and Reconstruction: Dilli Bahadur Mahat (UML)
19. General Administration: Jit Bahadur Dorjee Gautam (UML)
20. Energy: Chandra Singh Bhattarai (NC)
21. Home: Rizvan Ansari (UML)
22. Health and Population: Khadka Bahadur Basyal Sarki (NC)

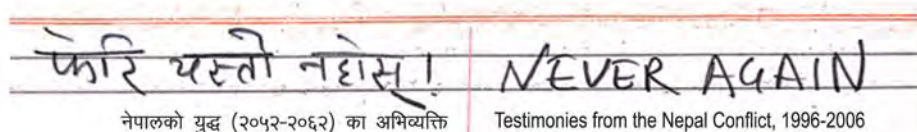


"I am walking on the Prachanda Path !"

नागरिक Robin Sayami in *Nagarik*, 16 June

## NEW RELEASE

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Testimonies from the Nepal Conflict, 1996-2006

by **Kunda Dixit**



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# “We are in the boat we are rocking”

**C**A member Deep Kumar Upadhyay's commitment to grass roots development means he is now mourning the loss of ethical and ideological politics in Nepal.

It was social action rather than a hunger for power that first got Upadhyay involved in politics. He studied pharmacy at Banaras Hindu University under the Colombo scholarship plan but failed to complete the course because sustained strike action kept the university closed. In the early '70s, he returned to Nepal and became a social activist.

Although he was born in Kathmandu, his family moved to Kapilbastu after buying some land at auction. He launched a sanitation campaign and started infrastructure development in his Tharu-dominated village Bhadsaruwa, work that earned him popularity and enabled him to get elected as Pradhan Pancha and later as member of the District Panchayat.

After the NC offered him party membership he attended its Palpa Convention where he happened to meet BP Koirala. After the referendum in 1980



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

he participated in the general election although the NC had boycotted it. “It was a symbolic participation to gauge the party's influence,” he recalls.

After the success of the 1990 movement, he was elected to the

parliament Kapilbastu 2 in the 1992 and 1995 elections but lost in 1998. But soon after the NC formed a majority government following the 1992 election cracks started to appear within the party because of conflict between the party president KP

Bhattarai and the parliamentary party leader and prime minister GP Koirala. The internal conflict finally resulted in the launch of a separate party in 2001 named NC(D) led by Sher Bahadur Deuba.

Upadhyay joined Deuba's party as a central committee member. “It was a revolt against the party's undemocratic practices,” he recalls, “a party can never be a one man show.”

Today's politics worries him. “Why don't we realise that we are all in the same boat that we are rocking?” he questions, “We don't learn lessons and forge consensus.”

Upadhyay is in the National Interest Protection Committee in the CA, the first to submit its draft by the deadline. So far only three out of the 11 CA thematic committees have submitted their drafts even though the deadline was a month ago. But is still optimistic that the constitution can be written on time if leaders give priority to it.

Upadhyay has greater belief in the wisdom of the Nepali people than of the leaders. ●

## Present arms

### Weak civilian leadership is encouraging militarism

**DHRUBA KUMAR**

**M**ilitarism in Nepal is a cultural residue of the Gorkhali conquest of territory to build a unified country in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The contribution of the armed forces in the state-building process was crucial for ‘national integration’ in which aggression and conquest were employed overwhelming rather than negotiation and persuasion.

Though the military is the state builder, militarism and the military in Nepal are perceived and portrayed as a brutal force, violator of public norms with systematic malevolence, and unlawful interference in civil affairs. Military service, at least in the officer corps, has been an elite preserve. Until 1951, the power and political elite ruling Nepal considered the military profession their birthright. It was also the shortest route to political success since during the 104 years of Rana rule, one of the four Commanding Generals always went on to be prime minister.

As the country ruled by militocracy till 1951, militarism was naturally embedded in the general outlook of the rulers as the safest means to ‘primitive accumulation’ of power, property and privileges in a feudal system. Post-1951, the military remained the privy of the monarchy. The king being the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces as well as the executive authority enjoyed the power to use the threat to mobilise and use the armed forces. Suppression of democratic values in the name of order and stability was one of the most



KIRAN PANDAY

serious consequences of militarism in Nepal.

The government, though all powerful in accordance with the Interim Constitution 2007, has a weak and tepid leadership as political parties in coalition are overwhelmingly suffering from crony syndrome, making them least interested in governance than sharing the spoils of democracy. The army therefore believes that a weak and fragile government can be forced to comply with and be made subservient to their interests. This has encouraged militarism.

On 13 May 2006, a day after the Rayamajhi Commission recommended the suspension of security chiefs, the army chief

Pyar Jung Thapa, who met Prime Minister Koirala, along with seven other army top brass to express dissatisfaction over the government's steps of suspending three chiefs of Police, Armed Police Force and Intelligence Agency, told the latter: “You are a politician and that is why you look at the security forces through a political lens. But the security forces do not follow politics... We do not agree with your policy to take action against officers and soldiers of the security forces. The cabinet not taking the security forces into confidence could have adverse effects. You have to think seriously about this.”

General Rookmangud Katawal, accompanying Thapa, had

retorted: “You suspended three chiefs of security. But why did you not suspend the army chief? I may not ask you for an answer but the people surely will... you knew that we had a unified command security force under which the army, armed police, Nepal police and investigation department worked together.”

To all these tone and texture of direct warnings of the military top brass, Prime Minister Koirala, established as the most powerful executive by the forces of Jana Andolan II replied meekly: “I understand the army chief. You can remain assured that this will not happen. These sorts of problems occur during the transition period and must be

solved. We will help you in this.”

The meeting closed with a final bit of advice from the army chief: “The people only revolted to bring peace. Talk that will divide the country even before the election for a constituent assembly frames a constitution should not be made. The people will make the constitution that they want, only they have the mandate to do so. The movement has only given you the mandate to establish peace, you must work accordingly.” ●

*Dhruba Kumar is a political science professor in Tribhuvan University. This piece is excerpted from Naya Nepal, Gyanko Nepal' series published by Social Science Baha in Himal Khabarpatrika*





PICS: HIROYUKI KURAOKA

# The bright side of Everest



**H**igh Crimes, Dark Summit, Mountain without Mercy, Left for Dead. These are all titles of books about climbing the world’s highest peak. I have just come back from climbing Chomolungma, and I saw the mountain in a very different light. Times have changed since the

mountain was first climbed in 1953. This year around 40 expeditions from all over the world settled down at Base Camp on the Khumbu Glacier at 5,400m. I was among the hundreds of Everest aspirants. I reached the top on 21 May and even though the summit push was extremely hard,

Mount Everest often gets bad press for commercialisation and the lack of morality of its climbers. However, *Nepali Times* mountaineering correspondent and climber, Billi Bierling, saw a different side on the way to the summit this spring.

**SUN IN MY EYES:** The sun comes up as climbers near the summit of Chomolungma on 21 May (above) and Billi Bierling poses on the top.

probably the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, I was very lucky because it was perfect weather, an extremely competent and safe expedition leader and I was in good health all the way through. Not everyone was as fortunate. Lhakpa Nuru from Thame died in an serac fall in the Khumbu Icefall when he was descending to base camp from Camp 2, and Sergey Lavrov from Kazakhstan, who was attempting to traverse from Lhotse to Mt Everest, was also swept away in an avalanche on the Lhotse Face. There were sometimes long waits at bottlenecks such as the Hillary Step, the notorious rock climb at about 8,760m. “We had

to wait at the Hillary Step for two hours and I got slight frostbite,” said Gerry Moffatt, who reached the summit on 19 May. Teams climbing Mt Everest receive a lot of criticism because climbers don’t help each other. But I was amazed to see how climbers, Sherpas, doctors and expedition leaders worked together. At Camp 3 at 7,200m during my summit push, I heard on the radio how two Argentinean climbers helped an Irishman, who had run out of oxygen and had troubles coming down. As the Irish climber was suffering from oedema and frostbite several doctors at the base camp advised the climbers what to do with the sick man. About 10 people were involved in that rescue and thanks to all the joined forces they brought the man down alive. On 22 May, two mountaineers

from Austria and the Netherlands, found an American climber sitting at the Balcony, just above Camp 4 at about 8,400m. He was clearly confused, and he had taken off his gloves and parts of his down suit. Had these two climbers not helped, the man would have died. Several doctors saved the life of a Sherpa, who nearly died after he had consumed a bottle of whiskey adulterated with methanol. There are gruesome books about Mt Everest: the commercialisation, greed, selfishness and crime. This season, I saw none of that, only humanity, generosity and courage. If I were to write a book about Everest (which I promise I will never do) I’d probably call it ‘The Bright Side of Everest’. ● Billi Bierling, Everest Base Camp



ROLAND HUNTER

## Mick Parker, 36

**V**eteran Australian climber, Mick Parker, died in Kathmandu on 4 June due to dissipated pulmonary and cerebral oedema, two weeks after climbing Makalu, the world’s fifth highest peak. Two weeks earlier, Parker had summited Makalu with British mountaineer, Roland Hunter. “I probably would not have made it if he hadn’t gone ahead and broken trail,” Hunter said. “He was a very strong climber but never talked much about his mountaineering achievements.” Parker had been climbing in the Himalaya for about 10 years and scaled five 8,000m peaks, including Cho Oyu and Manaslu in Nepal, and Gasherbrum I and Broad Peak in Pakistan. “Mick absolutely loved climbing and he focussed on climbing in

good style—small teams, no gas,” said Andrew Lock, a fellow Australian and accomplished Himalayan climber. “With his recent successes, Mick was probably one of the more successful Australian high-altitude climbers but he never made a big fuss about it,” recalls Neil Bosch, who climbed on Manaslu with Parker. Parker had become quite an institution in Kathmandu. Once you saw Mick wandering around the streets of Thamel you knew that the climbing season had started. The mountaineering world has lost a truly committed and dedicated mountaineer, who shall be greatly missed. ● Billi Bierling





ALEX TREADWAY

THE LIGHTS OF EVEREST BASE CAMP ON THE KHUMBU ICEFALL IN MID-MAY.



HIROYUKI KURAOKA

CAMP 2 IN THE WESTERN CWM, WITH LHOTSE GLOWING IN MOONSHINE.

# Khumbu after nightfall



ALEX TREADWAY

THE NIGHT LIGHTS OF NAMCHE BAZAR WITH THE KWANGDE PEAK I IN THE BACKGROUND.



ALEX TREADWAY

THE SLANTING GOLDEN RAYS OF THE SUN SPOTLIGHT (FROM L TO R) CHOMOLUNGMA, LHOTSE AND MAKALU IN THIS PICTURE TAKEN FROM GOKYO RI.



# After surviving war, Achham battles AIDS

KONG YEN LIN in ACHHAM

Eight years have passed since the battle that night during which the Maoists over-ran the army and police bases at Mangalsen and Sanfe. But for constable Prem Chand the memories are so vivid, they may as well have happened yesterday.

"We were completely outnumbered and outgunned," Chand recalls, "they had assault rifles and machine guns and mortars, and we just had .303s." The 33-year-old policeman saved himself by jumping over a perimeter wall. His comrades were not so lucky: 40 of the 80 policemen guarding Sanfe airport were killed that night. All 55 soldiers in the Mangalsen barracks and 18 others were killed. Maoist casualties are not known, but an estimated 150 people were killed that night in Achham—one of the bloodiest during the ten-year-war.

What followed was abandonment by Kathmandu, as the security forces confined themselves to their barracks. "They couldn't even protect themselves, let alone protect us," recalls a shopkeeper in Mangalsen.

Three years after the conflict ended, there is a palpable sense of relief. But while people are not being killed by war, they are dying of HIV/AIDS. Achham,

with its large migrant male population in India, is Nepal's AIDS hotspot with an HIV infection rate of 10 per cent, which is double the national rate.

Most transmissions occur between married couples, as infected migrant labourers returning from India pass on the disease to their wives. There is also a worrying increase in child infections. "The people here are already poor, the disease is creating additional burden to the families," says district health officer Purshottam Shedain.

Because of its high infection rate, Achham has attracted many non-government groups. But the service is restricted to the main towns. "It's hard to reach all 75 VDCs in Achham, where there are no roads and even the ones that exist are not passable during the monsoon," explains Shedain.

Mangalsen is a 16 hour bus-ride from Dhangadi, and it is this remoteness that makes Achham so neglected by the government in faraway Kathmandu. Schools here started a new semester on 16 April, but still haven't received text books. There is only 15 minutes of electricity a day, if at all. The long winter drought means there is virtually no water supply in the district capital.

"It's so hard to work here," says Jhapat Thapa at Sanfebagar's primary health care centre. The power and water shortage makes even basic services difficult to provide. Last month, the situation was worse because diesel supplies had run low because of a prolonged shutdown of the Tarai.

Principal Kiran Kunwar of Deepika Academy in Mangalsen remembers the battle eight years ago. "There were bullets flying through the windows, and the children and teachers were hiding under the beds. Fortunately no one was hurt," recalls Kunwar.

But now, having survived the war the school battles apathy. Loma Sharma is concerned about the quality of education in Achham. "There's an exodus of talented teachers to the cities," he says, "no one wants to stay and teach here."

Despite all odds, there are efforts to address the district's huge health and education backlog. A community-based Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission treatment for HIV is available at health posts. Rural sanitation conditions are also improving. Ten VDCs were declared open defecation-free zones after the construction of latrines, but the shortage of water has made it difficult to make a dent on water-borne diseases. ●



A rare policeman in a far-flung district tries to do good

KUNDA DIXIT in ARGHAKHANCHI

There is hardly anyone in Sandhikharka who doesn't remember the night of 8 September 2002, when the district capital of Arghakhanchi lived through a fierce night-long battle.

Some 4,000 Maoists, some walking for more than a week from Piuthan and Rolpa in the west stormed government buildings and security bases in the town. Nearly 70 people, mostly soldiers and policemen were killed.

"They came down from the surrounding hills," recalls a local shopkeeper, "you could see their torches. I hid in my house, there was gun fire and bombs all night."

September 2002 was one of the bloodiest in the 10-year war with more than 500 deaths, including 50 policemen who were slaughtered in an attack in

Sindhuli the day before in Sandhikarka.

As usual, attack helicopters flew out from Kathmandu and overflowed the town. But they could do little because of the terrain and the fear of killing civilians in the close combat. The fighting continued till morning and the victorious Maoists marched out of town singing revolutionary songs.

Seven years later, there are signs that Sandhikarka is being rebuilt. A new City Hall is being built, and donors have put up a new building for the district education office. The army moved its base to the hilltop overlooking the town after the attack and is still there. However, it is the police who bore the brunt of the attack in 2002, who have since been neglected.

"Look at the state we are in," says district police chief Krishna Hari Sharma, pointing to

# The power of a



ARPAN SHARMA





TRIPLE SETBACK: 50-year-old Jamuna Buddha lost her youngest son, a civilian police, during the conflict period in Achham when he died in battle with the Maoists. Her husband has also passed away and she was discovered to be HIV positive about two years ago.

KONG YEN LIN

# good example

**GOOD COP:** District police chief of Arghakhanchi, Krishna Hari Sharma (*left*), poses in front of vehicles destroyed during the Maoist attack on the police station in 2002. The base was never rebuilt and policemen live in tin sheds.

corrugated metal sheds where policemen resting after night duty are trying to catch some sleep in the searing heat.

The only consolation for Sharma is that there are districts that are even worse off. For example, in Mangalsen, policemen still sleep in bunkers because the base destroyed during the battle there were never rebuilt.

"We've had to start from scratch here, after the attack all the documents, citizenship and land records were destroyed," says Sharma. The Land

Revenue office has got a new 15-room building for only five officers, but Sharma's office is a godown that still has bullet holes from the battle.

Being in the middle of nowhere, Sandhikharka seems to fall between the cracks when it comes to post-war reconstruction. Bam Dev Gautam, when he was Home Minister, flew in by helicopter and spent the night here recently but that was only because he was on his way from Surkhet to Kathmandu and the helicopter developed a snag.

Sharma, however, is not the complaining type. Although it is not his brief, he has tried to galvanise the CDO and the political parties to improve the quality of education in Arghakhanchi. He has got the youth wings of the political parties to visit VDCs and got

local businessmen to donate Rs 6,000 per year for 10 years for the education of underprivileged girl children.

"There isn't much crime here, and instead of sitting around doing nothing, I figured it would be better to help the district," says Sharma who started a similar education scheme during his former posting in Dailekh.

Sharma says he is worried by the negative image that police have of being corrupt, violent drunkards. A non-smoker, non-gambler and teetotaler, Sharma wants his work with improving education to help restore the people's respect for the force.

"Everywhere I've been I've tried to see what else I can do besides being a police," he says. Sharma's initiative will benefit 11 students in remote VDCs of Arghakhanchi in the first year and another 24 in the second. ●

# Lounging around

If you are tired of Kathmandu's seedy airport, wait it out on the upper deck

**K**athmandu Airport wasn't voted the world's worst airport in a recent Business Traveller Poll, but it should have been. The flight delays, and there are many, become unbearable because the grandiosely named Tribhuban International Airport (TIA) is a seedy, smelly dungeon.

But it has a little-know secret: the upper deck where there is a spick and span restaurant with a view out to the tarmac and the mountains beyond. A visit there leaves you wondering why if the restaurant can be managed so well upstairs why the lower floor is such a dump. The answer: downstairs is run by the Government of Nepal and upstairs is run by the Oriental Hotels, which also operates Radisson Hotel, with its new Executive Lounge and Airport Restaurant.

With reporting time at TIA now moved forward to three hours before departure because of security, a traveller has plenty of time once he's checked in. Thank goodness, there is now the business lounge and the restaurant.

"Our objective is to provide quality services to our customers," says Iswori KC, manager of Radisson's airport services. "We wanted to fill a gap in the airport's facilities."

Before the lounge opened in early 2008, the only lounge at the airport was the one operated by Thai International. The 10,000 sq ft upper floor had been empty for about seven years. Passengers were forced to spend time on the uncomfortable plastic chairs in the chaotic departure area.

The restaurant and lounge is in partnership with 11 airlines including Jet Airways, Nepal Airlines and Etihad. The restaurant and lounge also has a membership option for frequent travellers. Passengers of other airlines are charged \$44 to use the lounge and more airlines are being added.

The restaurant and the lounge have been stylishly designed with comforting mind. There is a great view, there is wi-fi and even a quiet room with reclining chairs.

"This place is very good for Kathmandu, although it compares to about an average with lounges in other international airports," say Ross Lyman, an Australian who has been working in Nepal. Adds Tad Fetting, a tourist from the US: "The service is great." ●

Paavan Mathema



KIRAN PANDAY



# Worlds apart

## The pitfalls of meddling with fans

There's a delicate balance that producers have to strike when taking up an existing piece of popular culture with a dedicated fan base. They have to bring it mainstream but also keep the core fans happy. The belatedly released *Fanboys* (two years in the vault), directed by Kyle Newman, is about Star Wars devotees who throw themselves so profoundly

**CRITICAL CINEMA**  
**A Angelo DiSilva**

into that universe that it seeps into their everyday world. When Linus (Marquette) learns that his three trekkie friends have kept the secret of a terminal illness among their fellowship, he convinces them to take to the road, break into George Lucas' ranch and steal Episode 1. Did I mention it is set in 1998, before the release of the three prequels to the original Star Wars trilogy? If you are lost already, you've hit upon the problem with this movie. It is terminally self-referential, uninviting to outsiders and overly dependent on viewers caring as much as they do about the material. It is not altogether



without its charm—there are a few head-turning cameos and some amusing shenanigans on the road. But there are also frequent queerphobic (homophobic?) put-downs, in-jokes that would fly over the heads of the uninitiated (while not being that funny to begin with) and a reverence to George Lucas that leaves him unscathed (probably so the movie could get distributed). Adaptations of children's fantasy novels are still enjoying success and have a dedicated fanbase too thanks to the overbearing success of the Harry Potter movies. Production houses are willing to loosen their purse-strings to replicate the formula.

The much-loved *Chronicle of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis has made that jump, to mixed success. Adaptations of Philip Pullman's excellent children's novels have not fared as well, their status in limbo after the disappointing *The Golden Compass* (2007). The star of that latter film Dakota Blue Richards plays yet another precocious girl chasing adventure to her peril in *The Secret of Moonacre*, another adaptation of a popular children's fantasy novel, directed by Gabor Csupo. Csupo's directorial debut was *Bridge to Terabithia* (2007), a largely successful adaptation of the poignant children's novel by Katherine Patterson, which

ramped up the fantasy element in a story marked by its gritty realism. It's a strategy that he applies here too, with grandiose CGI full of magic but bereft of soul, packed with fantastically-garbed characters but with a tedious unconvincing story (too tedious to repeat, frankly) and dull uninteresting characters. The most important element in the fantasy formula - the drab, mundane existence contrasting with magical reality (Harry Potter's Muggle world, World War II Britain in *Narnia*, even Franco's Spain in *Pan's Labyrinth*), is put aside in an effort to make everything appear fantastical. It is that very same separation that *Coraline* explores, exploits and reverses, a gorgeous, creepy stop-animation from Henry Selick, the director of *The Nightmare before Christmas* (1993) and adapted from the novel by (yes, yet another British fantasy novelist) Neil Gaiman. Again, we see an author benefiting from the doors that Rowling's Potter series have opened with Gaiman's work reaching the screen in two previous (thankfully good) adaptations, *Stardust* (2007) and *MirrorMask* (2005). *Coraline* is (yet another)

precocious young girl whose writer-parents abandon to her own devices in their new home. She discovers a hidden passage to a mirror world where the doppelgangers of her parents lavish her with attention and her neighbours, already eccentric in the real world, put on shows for her entertainment. It is an enticing world that only belatedly reveals its darker purpose. Selick intelligently keeps *Coraline*'s normal world just as visually interesting as the one she escapes to. It is well-matched by the voice talent and the composition by Bruno Coulais whose score is every bit as delightful as the images. *Coraline* is proof positive that just as important as dazzling effects, are the characters that are believable and likable and the story, which is tightly reasoned. ●

**Fanboys**  
Director: Kyle Newman  
Cast: Sam Huntington, Jay Baruchel, Dan Fogler, Kristen Bell

**The Secret of Moonacre**  
Director: Gabor Csupo  
Cast: Dakota Blue Richards, Ioan Gruffudd, Tim Curry, Natascha McElhone

**Coraline**  
Director: Henry Selick  
Cast: Dakota Fanning, Teri Hatcher, John Hodgman, Dawn French, Jennifer Saunders, Ian McShane



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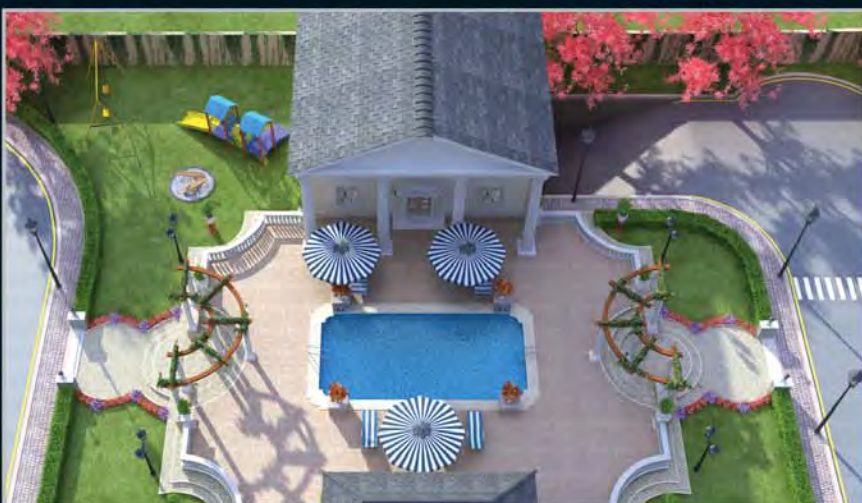


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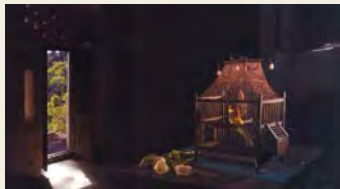
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## ABOUT TOWN

## EXHIBITIONS

- ❖ **The Locus of Continuity**, an exhibition of mixed media art works by Sunita Maharjan at Hotel de li Annapurna, 19-30 June
- ❖ **In a Different Light** an exhibition of Photography by Zoe Childerley at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, 1-18 July
- ❖ **Nepal Rendezvous** paintings from Bangladesh and Nepal at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited 21-26 June, 11AM-6PM. 4218048
- ❖ **Kathmandu Haat** exhibiting festival goodies, boutique items, jewelries at Agrawal Bhawan, Kamalpokhari. 4493003



## EVENTS

- ❖ **Nepa-laya's film tour**, till 20 June, 3.30 PM and 5.30 PM, Russian Cultural Center. 4437893
- ❖ **Tai Chi**, Buddhist Meditation 5-6PM, till 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

- ❖ **Strings Band** live at Rastriya Sabha Griha, Exhibition Road, 21 June, 4PM.
- ❖ **Baja gaja**, every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 PM onwards, Pulchok. 5526212
- ❖ **Live band** every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Durbar Marg. 4227288
- ❖ **Sunday Jazz brunch** barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491234
- ❖ **Jazz evening** at Delices de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-2PM. 4260326
- ❖ **Some like it hot** every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel. 4479488
- ❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar.
- ❖ **Live Sensation**, performance by Yankey every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- ❖ **Live Band Sensation** performance by Aprilrush, every Saturday till late, Rox Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4489362
- ❖ **Sunday Jazz Brunch** by Inner Groove with barbeque, Sunday, 12PM-3.30 PM, The Terrace at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4489362
- ❖ **Nepali Ghajals** and songs at DiLounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30 PM onwards. 4468589

## DINING

- ❖ **A cafe's cafe** Dhokaima Cafe, Patan Dhoka. 5522113
- ❖ **The Corner Bar**, 3-11PM, 5-7PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu. 4411818
- ❖ **7th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival 2009**, from until 15 September, Kilroy, Thamel. 4250440
- ❖ **Mango Etagere** with hi-tea at The Lounge from 4.30- 6.30 PM. Hyatt Regency. 4489362
- ❖ **Weekend Brunch** by the Poolside every Saturday and Sunday, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu, 11AM-3PM. 4273999
- ❖ **Pizza & Pasta** at the Rox Restaurant every Monday & Tuesday, Hyatt Regency. 4489362
- ❖ **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. 4491234
- ❖ **Teppanyaki** meat items and garlic rice right at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara. 4436318
- ❖ **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- ❖ **Himalayan Rainbow Trout** at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Durbar Marg. 4248999

## GETAWAYS

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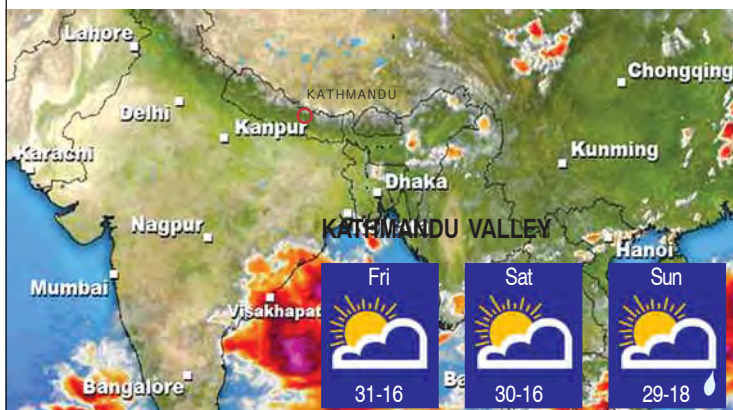
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## WEEKEND WEATHER

by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

This week's dryness extended right across northern India. The Gangetic plains are baking at 45 degrees, and this heat is needed to create the low pressure over northern India that acts as the dynamo for the monsoon. And sure enough, in this satellite picture taken on Thursday morning we see a large circulation building up over the Bay. This may actually intensify into a cyclone when it hits the Bangladesh coast. This will bring moisture into the Himalaya, creating storm systems by Sunday. The more prolonged impact of the monsoon will take another week since the westerlies are still robust and will tend to drive away the outer arms of the system from central Nepal.



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KIRAN PANDAY

**FLORAL TRIBUTES:** Former deputy prime minister Shailaja Acharya passed away at the age of 65 last week. Those who paid their last respects spanned the political spectrum and included Foreign Minister Sujata Koirala (in dark glasses).



KIRAN PANDAY

**SHAKE UP:** US Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert O'Blake made a two-day fact-finding mission to Kathmandu this week.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**BORDER PATROL:** Pulchok Engineering Collge students protest outside their campus on Wednesday against "border encroachment" of Nepali territory by India.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**TANGLED:** Pultalisadak gets a facelift as workers try to separate the phone lines from tv, internet, and electricity cables on Wednesday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

**ELECTRIC CITY:** Nearly 35 electric vehicles of all sizes took part in a rally from Kathmandu to Banepa on Saturday to raise money for the Spinal Injury Rehabilitation Centre. Participants urged the government to reduce the tax on electric vehicles.

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# A psychedelic Prithbi Narayan

That was one helluva successful bund. One of the most successful we've had in **donkey's years**. Monday's YCL bund was in fact so effective that even Maoist Politburo members couldn't get to their conclave at Buddhanagar, and the important meeting had to be postponed.



Comrade CP, however, did make it to the Reporter's Club to deliver his tirade on Thul Dai, but only because he was travelling in a van with a large laser-printed 'Press' sign pasted to the front. Good thing he came through that unscathed because his guerrillas were beating up journalists and doctors out there. Speakers from the other parties didn't want to take any chances and **hoofed** it to Putali Sadak, while Comrade Pumfa Devi was seen on Bagmati Bridge as her bodyguards choked on sewage fumes.



Since the 'Press' sign doesn't protect us hacks anymore during YCL bunds, one media org took its staff to work with a 'Subha Bibaha' sign in red out in front. Apparently **jantis** and marriage parties are exempted from band rules, and so are funerals. Ambulances are not allowed but hearses are. So, in a way, the already-dead are better off during a band than the nearly-dead. People seem to have got wind of these changed rules because a large group of easy riders were seen at Teku on Monday cruising the empty streets with the word 'Malami' emblazoned to the front of their motorbikes. The only thing that didn't quite fit was that they all looked like they were in high spirits.



Meanwhile, 500km away in Kalikot Maoists beat up the entire UML district committee for having the temerity to oppose them, injuring 15 **moderate commies** who had to be choppered out to Kathmandu for treatment. And guess what the Maoists did the very next day to protest their own atrocity? Yup, they called a Kalikot Bund.



The Ass ain't complaining. At least they didn't actually kill anyone, so that is a vast improvement from the war years. And in a lot of ways, the baddies are just following the example set by the kangresis and the e-malaise who during the 1990s unleashed an epidemic of hartals on us. And they're still at it. On the day that the Maobuddies had shut down KTM, kangresis in Chitwan violated their own declaration of Chitwan as a Band-free District, and forced the district to close by getting hired goons to patrol the **bazaar**. While their district cadre was doing all this, the NC top brass issued a statement saying the bund didn't have the support of the central leadership. Fat lot of good that did them.



What is emerging from the Politburo meeting is a sharp polarisation between hardliners and even-more-hardliners about whether the party's future strategy should be outright rebellion or a consensus govt. Stung by the cascade of events that led to his downfall, Comrade Awe-Inspiring is reportedly leaning towards sleeping with the enemy. But the hardcore ones led by Dr Baidya and Com Biplop with the YCL providing **musclepower** have been holding secret **nocturnal meetings** to plot ways to pressure Terrifico. The reason for Monday's band was therefore a show of force not so much against the new government, but to show the softies in the Politburo who's boss ahead of this week's meetings.



Laxman Khadka finally got arrested after being caught pink-handed while giving the Grandfather of the Nation's index finger a new coat of paint. By doing such a **psychedelic job** with Prithbi Narayan, Laxman should have been allowed to do the same to the assorted Rana-era statuary on Tundikhel. Alas, this country just can't respect talent.

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