The prevalence of infectious diseases among intravenous drug users is rocketing because the fear of stigma and poor support services are discouraging users from seeking help. Political instability, low literacy levels, poor awareness and a lack of voluntary counselling and testing services mean infection figures are only likely to increase.

Among drug users in Nepal, 61.4 per cent inject drugs, 29 per cent of whom share needles. An estimated 6,557 intravenous drug users (IDUs) are living with HIV or AIDS, which is about 10 per cent of the total 70,000 people living with HIV/AIDS, according to UNAIDS.

In Kathmandu, about 30 per cent of all people living with HIV/AIDS inject drugs. They are also vulnerable to the incurable Hepatitis C, for which 94 per cent of drug users in Kathmandu have tested positive. The market for heroin and opium is also on the rise in Nepal with most narcotics being smuggled over the border. The Narcotic Drugs Control Law Enforcement Unit seized 105.6 kg opium and 10 kg heroin last year. In the first six months of this year it has already seized 225 kg of opium and six kg of heroin.

The prevalence of HIV among IDUs in 2003 was 51 per cent. Given the limitations of Nepal’s public health surveillance system, the actual number of infections is thought to be much higher.

Although Nepal was the first country in Asia to establish a harm reduction program with a needle exchange service for IDUs, it has failed because of limited coverage and a short supply of syringes. A survey conducted by Central Bureau of Statistics in 2007 reported there are 46,309 hard drug users in Nepal with around 50 per cent of them aged 15 to 29.

Sky high

CLOUDS, BUT NO RAIN: The evening sun breaks through clouds in the mountains of central Nepal as a parched land waits for rain. Meteorologists say the monsoons arrived in eastern Nepal this week, but precipitation throughout Nepal has been 50 per cent below normal.
They like to poke fun at Gandhi these days. His philosophy of ahimsa is deemed outdated even in India, which now has an arm full of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. Gandhi preached against materialism and selfishness, but greed is good these days.

The economic inequality that this perpetuates has political repercussions. India’s Maoist insurgency that now touches 13 of its 28 states is fed directly by the neglect, indifference and exclusion, especially of the advisors and low castes in India’s poorest states. The police’s counter-insurgency operations have actually helped Maoist recruitment.

A Naxalite recreation is now taking place in West Bengal, that bastion of India’s moderate left where the CPI-M has ruled uninterruptedly for 25 years. (See p. 4). The new Congress-led government in New Delhi (now uneventfully by a communist partner) has responded by sending in the central paramilitary CPRF.

In both India and Nepal, it is poverty, inequality, injustice and discrimination that drives Maoism. And on both sides there is a temptation to meet violence with counter-violence. As long as the roots of conflict are not addressed, however, there cannot be long-term peace and reconciliation.

After the resignation of Nepal’s Maoist-led government in May (with a little bit of help from friends down south) there is loose talk in military and rightwing circles in Kathmandu of “doing a Sri Lanka” on the ex-guerrilla. What is forgotten is that Nepal’s terrain and geopolitics makes prohibited guerrilla war unwinnable for both sides. Maoism here has degenerated into criminal wildcardism, and is probably headed towards violent self-destruction. What we have to prevent is it turning ethnic in the process.

Gandhi said violence can never be ethical, that it is counterproductive to those who start it. Nepal is the living proof. The lesson for both India and Nepal is that without resolving the structural inequality in our societies, creating jobs and lifting living standards there will be a million other mutinies even if we solve this one.

After the Chauri Chaura killing of 22 policemen in 1922 near Gorakhpur, Gandhi suspended his anti-British activities. This is just one story, there must be so many all over Nepal.

Amit Thapa, email

DEMOLITION

I was moved to tears while reading CK Lai’s piece on how the country is moving from one shutdown to another (“Mutually agreed demolition,” #456). It is a true reflection of the reality we are living in. Basic channels have stopped working altogether. There is no communication, no one is open to talk.

Kamal Kishor, email

GOOD EXAMPLE

It would be fantastic to hear more stories of ordinary Nepalis saying no to big money (“The power of good example,” #458). Such stories may make a positive impact in the national culture, which we are in dire need of in these difficult times. It will also encourage many to start their own campaigns. I recently visited a village of Barpak in Gorkha and met Nepalis who had managed to bring economic and cultural change in their local community. One example that stood out was how the local public toilets were kept so clean in such a remote village through cooperation and coordination. This is just one story, there must be so many all over Nepal.

Amit Thapa, email

CASTE AWAYS

Impunity, patronage, politics and caste make an explosive mix

RABARAJ - the campus incident in this stagnant Tarai town brings together all the elements that best describes the state of Nepal today: institutional degeneration, patronage, factionalism, party politics, partisan bureaucracy and a plausible judiciary, impunity, violence.

The overwhelming role of the brutal assault on campus chief Devi Dutt Sah. There are the facts of the case: there had been a two week stand-off between the administration and a part of the student union. The newly elected union president Ram Chandra Yadav (belonging to a faction of the NC) had put in a dozen demands, ranging from an enquiry into allegations of corruption.

On the morning of June 8, a student called up the local SP who promised to send forces but said they would need permission from the CDO to take action. Sah then headed to the college, but only after having spoken to the CDO. Ram Bhatti Ray, who promised to give the required orders. The CDO however disputes this, stating there was no way he could have given orders because Sah had not put in a formal request.

Once in the college. Sah was surrounded by 15-20 students, some of them from the administration and others whom he did not recognize. They locked him inside a room, and told him to resign immediately. When Sah refused, he was stabbed and hit with fists. Sah claims he heard union president Ram Chandra Yadav say: “How dare you think a Tell (Sah’s caste) can become campus chief in Saptari or Siraha?”

Sah finally gave in and wrote a resignation note. All this while, the police were right at the campus gate, either misled into believing that the campus administration and students were having talks, or waiting for the elusive CDO orders that never came, or unwilling to take action. After four hours, according to Sah, a group of students and the SP of the ACF camp rescued him.

When Sah was appointed campus chief two years ago, he superseded more senior colleagues in the campus. Key appointments in educational institutions across the country were divided among parties who could choose their own. The town grapevine has it that Sah was backed by one faction of the Saptari NC. Since then, some in the teaching faculty (predominantly Yadavs, backed by another faction of NC) had ganged up to oust him.

Certain decisions taken by the chief, like the recent move of teachers, gave them enough ammunition to all allegations. The Maoists, keen to get a
BIRGUN--Like relative deprivation, there is something called comparative sense of relief. Here, in Birgun, the kidnapping capital of Nepal, entrepreneurs have begun to take bleak satisfaction in the fact that they are no more or less insecure here than they would be in Blantyre or Kathmandu.

The communal dimensions of crime need to be played down to prevent a backlash. The Indian media appears to be stoking the fire of hatred by stressing Biren’s Darjeeling origins. The worst way to approach a murder case is to portray the killer as a psychotic. Yet that was just what the investigators did. Biren Pradhan was a compulsive gambler with a perverted mind. Declare him a deviant, and society can then sleep well with clear conscience. The Bhandari sisters came from an elite Kathmandu family. Yet, the tragedy was soon forgotten. Surya Bahadur Sen Oli was the CDO of Kathmandu at the time. The police closed the case during the reign of king Gyanendra. Neera Parajuli. The triple murder of the schoolgirls remains a mystery.

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Lawlessness and disorder

Biren Pradhan, the accused in the Khyati abduction and murder case, exhibited the callousness of an amateur. But people fear that the wide publicity given to the case may give ideas to future first-time abductors for copycat crimes. Ironically, the sadistic brutality of the murder case in Kathmandu has rekindled minor armed groups in Tani who are reputed to treat hostages with due respect. The Bhandari sisters came from an elite Kathmandu family. Yet, the tragedy was soon forgotten. Surya Bahadur Sen Oli was the CDO of Kathmandu at the time. The police closed the case during the reign of king Gyanendra. Neera Parajuli. The triple murder of the schoolgirls remains a mystery.

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Revolution without borders

Implications for Nepal of a Maoist resurgence in India

KUNDA DIXIT in NEW DELHI

The Indian government’s ban on the Maoists this week, and a Congres-led government that has shed its leftist partners, is expected to bolster the swing to the right in Nepali politics. The rout of both the BJP and the CPI-M in April’s election represented setbacks to bolster the swing to the left in Nepali politics. The rout of both the BJP and the CPI-M in April’s election represented setbacks to the Hindu-right and the leftist partners, is expected to bolster the swing to the left in Nepali politics.

KUNDA DIXIT

NATION

TIMES

26 JUNE - 2 JULY 2009 #457

by a surge in the activity of India’s restless Maoists, prompting the federal government on Monday to ban the party. The Naxalites are now active in 163 of India’s 604 districts, mainly in the mineral-rich forests of eastern India populated by indigenous people. Fifty-one of these districts in Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Assam are said to be “highly affected”. And in the past few months, the Maoists have returned to West Bengal where they started out as a peasant movement in 1967 and were later ruthlessly crushed by the Indira Gandhi government. After more or less prevailing it didn’t exist for decades, India’s national media has suddenly started giving prominent space to the insurgency. The occupation of the Lalgarh area of West Bengal and the effort by security forces to retake it displaced even cricket as the main news in India’s tabloid tv news which carried sensational bold banners that said ‘Red Terror’ in big crimson letters. The Indian media has also stopped calling the rebels ‘Naxalites’.

How India’s state governments now deal with their Maoist insurgencies will have a bearing on Nepal because the Indian revolutionaries have often said they want to “liberate everything from Tirupathi to Pashupati”. Similarly, the future political trajectory of the Maoists in Nepal will be keenly watched by both India’s ultra-left as well as the central government. Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has characterised the Maoist insurgency as “India’s greatest security threat”. The Indian security establishment was also closely following the Sri Lankan Army’s defeat of the Tamil Tigers as a case study of a successful counter-insurgency operation.

Seem in this light, it is not a surprise that India’s military-intelligence establishment took a dim view of the attempt by Nepal’s Maoists to sack Gen Kalavat and infiltrate the Nepal Army. “That was the last straw, we just couldn’t allow that,” said one Indian source.

Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon, on returning home after his Nepal visit, denied there were any links between the Nepal Maoists and their Indian comrades. However, there seems to be close solidarity between the Naxalites and the hardliner bloc among Nepal’s Maoists.

After April 2006, Indian revolutionaries sharply criticised Pushpa Kamal Dahal for having ended the armed struggle, and in recent interviews they have regressed on hardline ideologies in Nepal. There is also new evidence that the Indian Maoists not just trained their Nepali comrades but even planned and took part in some of the attacks on police stations and army bases in Nepal during the war. On Tuesday, Bihar Police claimed it captured two truck loads of dynamite and detonators in a truck carrying buddies from Nepal.

India’s moderate communists were the architects of the November 2006 peace process when they were in a UPA coalition with the Congress. They were hoping to set an example of “taming ultra-left adventurism” by bringing them to the mainstream. The central government now seems to have abandoned that path by banning the Maoists.

West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharji had actually started calling Maoists “terrorists” after an attempted assassination in Lalgarh last November. His police then unleashed a crackdown in the area, and villagers rose up against excesses capturing three districts. The central government mobilised its paramilitary CPRF last week to quell the rebellion and retake the territory.

West Bengal police appear to have behaved much the same way as the Nepal Police did in 1967-68 with its brutal Operation Kilo Sierra, and ended up increasing local support for the Maoists. “Mass anger was waiting to burst...and the Maoists were waiting in the wings,” wrote Aditya Nigam of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in a column this week. “In Lalgarh we are in it for the long haul!” Other Indian commentators have been warning the state and central governments that the only solution to India’s Maoist insurgency is to address the concerns of the tribal and other marginalised groups whose anger and poverty the Maoists are tapping. But with the ban on the Maoists, the Indian state seems to be getting ready to use strong arm tactics.
Nepal may have had free and fair elections but the so-called representatives have no connection at all with the people.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal included eight more ministers into his month-old cabinet. That raised the total number of ministers to 38. For a small country of about 30 million people, a cabinet this size is already big. But press reports indicate that the PM is set to add more ministers from different political parties, making it unlikely to be the largest cabinet in Nepal’s history.

A first correction to the existing system is needed. Perhaps the answer lies in changing the initial conditions, so to speak, by making a shift in the basic assumptions that underpin the political system. Leading to both elections and governance are the two key processes in any democracy. Elections are the cornerstone of democracy, while governance is the output of the elected representatives.

Elections, of course, are primarily about who wins and who loses. The same is true of governance, in which it is about who grows more prosperous and who ends up worse off. In a democracy, elections are supposed to happen on a regular basis. But in contemporary Nepal, those have repeatedly failed to stick to the priority of drafting a national Constitution by an agreed-upon deadline, what purpose does it serve to keep on expanding the cabinet as if there were a mandate to create an unlimited government?

The answers are found in two parts. First, if it’s instructive to look at the governance of the political process in Nepal; and, second, on ways to fix it. A accountable governance: The UK press has recently been dominated by revelations of how many of the 646 Members of Parliament have abused public funds and paid for personal indulgences that ranged from cleaning up a privately-owned boat to buying fertilizers to paying for flats for their children. The revelations sent a shock wave through the British political system, leading to both the ridicule and resignations of guilty politicians. Those who have refused to go on air and continued to go on air with a tampered reputation and diminished stature.

Though Nepal follows a Westminster model of parliamentary democracy, the gap between the public and those who are elected to serve the public remains immense in this country. This is partly because intermediary institutions that check the expanding power of the government are either weak or do not exist. As such, it often looks as if our political system is composed of two spheres—the first one containing the 640 representatives, and the second one containing the population—with the first having little connection to the second once elections are over.

For illustration, consider this example: Khat 山 a local village in Kathmandu, a few days ago. Here was not only the murder of a woman who has taken place in recent times. Given the alarming rise in the number of children who have been kidnapped and then murdered, you’d think that our representatives would put pressure on the Home Minister to uphold law and order. You would also think that they’d like to signal they are doing all they can to allay their voters’ palpable fears.

But no! In this case, several days after the murder, politicians of all stripes, elected from Biratnagar or elsewhere, have made absolutely no noise in support of the Shrestha family. The family is left to fend for itself to push for justice. This sort of silence from those elected to represent our interests has happened in many other cases. A bridge breaks down near a temple, like one did last year. Hundreds of pilgrims are killed. Not a word comes from any member of Parliament. Similarly, press reports of food shortages in the hills of Western Nepal. Again, not a word of support, let alone actions that help deliver the goods from the politicians elected from that region. When these examples add up, you start to wonder: when your representatives do not speak up for you who are affected in times of crisis, what is the point of going through the motion of elections?

True, holding free and fair elections on a regular basis is one feature of democracy. And on this account, few fault Nepal’s present democratic regime. Despite reports of Maoist intimidation at some polling stations in the hinterland, most accept that present representatives were elected in what seemed to be a fair and fair elections last year.

But problems become clearer when we examine the mechanics of how representatives have subverted the election process so it is not responsive to the public’s concerns. Here is how it works: parties decide who they want to send as candidates to a district. Party cadres fight with one another to curry favours from the leaders to receive the election ticket. Those who receive the election tickets need rather be to provide jobs to their countrymen. All these provide jobs to the political executive to trickle down to the political memory for several years, reduced as they are to be mere spectators. Those who complain about the inaction of our large-size government should stop expecting unified output, that is, all the individual party leaders to push for the interests of others. For instance, a political party that has to a district, the more likely it is to listen to the voters’ concerns. This simple change in the initial conditions is also more likely to connect national parties with influential local politicians who, in many cases, would not have the expertise to be independent and to speak for their own parties. In this manner, voters, and much to gain by making his leaders happy, lest they not give him the ticket in the next round of elections?

When you have a parliament full of democratically elected representatives who have every incentive to toe the party line, it’s only a matter of time before horse-trading starts, before the cabinet is expanded to accommodate every disgruntled party, and before commissions are formed to fix their problems. The candidates are fielded to the public during elections. The more tangible connection with the public. Is it any wonder that he has little to gain by voicing the concerns of those voters, and much to gain by making his leaders happy, lest they not give him the ticket in the next round of elections?

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Herbs worth gold

Pradip Kafle in Himal Khaharpatrika, 15-29 June

Leaving behind the buzz of city life in Kathmandu, KB Gurung quit his job as a government official in the department of agriculture and opted to forge a business growing herbs in Damauli, Tanahu.

The Agricultural Science graduate who studied in Kanpur, India under the Colombo Plan, was determined to cultivate and preserve the endangered herbs of Nepal, and has managed to turn that ambition into gold.

He has grown more than 150 species of herbs on his 15 hectares of land in Patan, Tanahu. The sales of red sandalwood and ginseng, among others is known to bring him hefty profits.

Now, following studies in China, Gurung is planning to start cultivating bamboos that can be used to manufacture photocopy paper. ‘Abundant agro forestry could be a major source of income for Nepal,’ said the 70 year old Gurung.

Seeds of disunion

Bishnu Bahadur Manandhar in Nepal, 28 June

Many different communist revolutionary ideologies evolved around the world from 1960, including within Nepal. In Nepal the Darbhanga Plenum—a meeting of the central committee of the communist party in 1961—is of particular importance.

In the meeting, three courses of action for the party emerged, a pro-constitutional monarchy line led by Keshar Jung Rayamajhi, a line that wanted to restore the dissolved parliament and launch broad mass movements led by Purna Lal Shrestha and a third line which favoured a constitutional assembly and an armed struggle, led by Mohan Bikram Singh.

When an election was held, the majority voted in support of Singh’s line. However, the central committee refused to accept the result preferring the restoration of parliamentary democracy.

Right then party chairman Keshar Jung Rayamajhi was alleged to be close to the king. Rayamajhi was dismissed but a three-member committee was formed to hold the party convention within nine months. This case ended with a compromise among the members and the fight for power within the party also diminished. At that time I was elected a central committee member.

The party was banned in 1961 and most of the senior leadership stayed out of the country. Zonal committees were formed to operate it, although there were no provisions for this in the party constitution. A convention was held through an inter-zonal meeting, which was again against the constitution of the party. The trend of over-writing the constitution continued.

Already there were signs of the party splitting, but the key leaders ignored it. Kamar Shah, another party leader, and I tried to convince the senior leaders against division. Shrestha even went ahead to call for the next convention. But the chairs at the convention were empty. Some leaders were jailed while others boycotted it because of the clash of ideologies. This was the starting point of the party’s split.

By the fourth party convention, the party had divided into two, with Rayamajhi heading one of the factions. I was appointed the general secretary. But there were allegations that Rayamajhi had helped arrest Sambhu Ram Shrestha and so his supporters left the party. At that time a demo had been called by pro-Panchayat leaders against Congress’s BP Koirala. Rayamajhi agreed to join but I was against it because being against Koirala meant we were against democracy. He did not go but lobbied against me in the party. His proposition against me received only two votes and he was kicked out from the party.

Differences in opinions and ideology have continually threatened the unity of the communist party of Nepal, culminating in countless communist parties that actually started as a single group.

Insecurity

Editorial in Naya Patrika, 24 June

The security situation in Kathmandu is deteriorating. While reports of abductions and manslaughter cases are on the rise, the government is doing little to address them.

The abduction of industrialist Mahesh Sarada took place in broad daylight. Afterwards a special police cell was mobilised to look into it and the case was also discussed at the Home Ministry. But their efforts amounted to nothing and Sarada returned home having paid a heavy ransom.

The high school teenager who was abducted was murdered and her mutilated body was found in Kathmandu although her parents paid Rs. 100,000.

Every time there is a case of abduction the police pay lip service to wanting to bring about justice and to punishing the guilty but they achieve no more than that. Another reason why these abductions persist is because the abductors, even from their prison cells, manage to keep forming new gangs to perpetuate their crimes.

It seems as if the court is providing them with a form of ‘shelter’ inside jail from where they can pursue these crimes and remain protected. Unless the Home administration deals with this issue there is no hope of Kathmandu becoming a peaceful and secure city.
Baglung speaks

Baglung is concerned about the delay in constitution writing. The district is dominated by Rastriya Janamorcha leaders. Janamorcha has been against Nepal becoming a federal state. At a Himal Khaharyatika discussion, civil society and political party leaders admitted that there is no other alternative to Nepal becoming a federal state.

Harihar Sharma, Nepal Student Union
The writing of the constitution is taking place at an exceptionally slow rate. Issues like federalism, state restructuring, framework of the administration and other issues have not yet been discussed. The leadership is not at all serious about constitution-writing and is not concerned about what the people want.

K.B Rana Magar, Parents' Organisation Nepal
We hear that the suggestions put forward by the people of Baglung have been shelved in some corner of the district development office. Indeed CA members are attempting to write the constitution irresponsibly.

Durga Datta Acharya, Nepal Press Union
CA members visiting rural Nepal is just paying lip-service. Constitutions have been written in the past, it is now important to evaluate how much they addressed people’s grievances. If the leaders are sensitive towards what Nepali people want, they have to deliver on their promises.

Man KC, Nepal Teachers’ Union
The fact that the CA members visited rural areas to seek the opinions of people at the grassroots level has been more fruitful. There is a lack of female participation in law enforcement. There is also a lack of female participation in law enforcement. There is also a lack of female participation in law enforcement.

Netra Bahadur Biata, Aikhi Nepal Teachers’ Union

Raju Gautam, President, Nepal Bar Association
At the recent National Bar Association conference, I urged the CA members to decide the clauses. Those CA members who were collecting suggestions took no responsibility for the complicated questionnaires they were carrying.

Ram Sharma, advocate
The questionnaires that were taken to the people were hard to understand. Until just a month ago the suggestions from the people of Parbat were not taken to the right place. Whose responsibility is that? It is not too late if we unanimously push for democracy the new constitution will be written on time.

Mukesh Chandra Rajbhandary, journalist
The draft that the political parties put forward has not yet reached the people, who doubt that their views will be represented.

Shukhatala Sharma, Inter Party Women’s Alliance
The majority of women never received these questionnaires. All groups are appealing to be represented in the new constitution. In such a situation, are issues relating to press freedom, rule of law and human rights just not being prioritised?

Dharm Bahadur Thapa, vice chairman
Taking locals who speak the language to interpret questionnaires would certainly have been more fruitful. There is a possibility that the country may be divided along linguistic lines. To prevent this division issues regarding languages must also be tackled.

Dharm Bahadur Kunwar, Rastriya Janamorcha
Federalism is not the only option. If the CA members really wanted positive feedback they should also have suggested alternative frameworks to federalism. This could have been reflected in the questionnaires. No space was given to the fact that federalism divides a nation and its ethnic groups and destroys camaraderie amongst communities.

Should the constitution be based on ethnicity, language, culture, or region?

Anju Lamichane, women’s rights activist
Federalism should not be formed on the basis of language or ethnicity. It should include all sections of society. There’s fear that a federal structure may encourage separatism. Political parties should not thwart constitution writing.

Pren Prasad Sharma, social worker
There is a process to writing the constitution of a country. That process involves every citizen being involved in discussions so as to help decide how Nepal must become a federal state.

Ami KC, activist for the disabled
Special rights must be given to marginalized communities. Leaders have to study the geography and understand the psychology of the Nepali people. If some communities do not think that Nepal should be a federal state, it is their right to think so.

Sunita Gauchan, social worker
There is a tendency to use young people for political purposes and abandon them when the political interests have been fulfilled. The need of the hour is to provide employment to the youth of Nepal.

Bharat Poudel, COD
Unless we Nepal change our intrinsic behaviour, democracy will only remain in slogans. Democracy has given the people the opportunity to voice their opinions. We must cherish the diversity while addressing issues related to ethnicity and not point fingers at each other.

Baglung speaks

Thoughts on the constitution writing process

The questionnaire developed to ask for suggestions for the new constitution was complicated. More outrageous is the fact that the CA members did not prioritise the rights of the underprivileged Dalits. There is a risk of Dalits being left far behind in the new constitution.

Raju Gautam, President, Nepal Bar Association
All the dilly-dallying in constitution writing only proves that the CA members are not serious about it. There’s a fear that this new constitution will be passed like the interim constitution, where a handful of CA members decide the clauses. Those CA members who were collecting suggestions took no responsibility for the complicated questionnaires they were carrying.

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Two Muslim sisters show it is possible to fight for rights in the Tarai’s conservative society

Since the lack of education is such a barrier for Muslim women to be financially independent, Fatima has started a skills training centre to teach Muslim women how to sew and paint. “This makes them less dependent on the family and gives them confidence,” says Maimoona, a 45-year-old mother of three from Gorakhpur University.

Six years ago, Mohammad Siddiqui’s husband died 17 years ago, the mother of three children had to struggle to take care of her family. She had spent most of her married life within the confines of her house, doing a bunka in her rare trips to the market. But a supportive mother-in-law encouraged Mohammad to work as a human rights activist, especially to empower fellow Muslim women.

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Fatima is trying to prevent child marriages and has set up a watchdog community operating under cover on tip-offs. Fatima recently conducted classes for women from 23 VDCs of Banke to educate them on their constitutional rights. “Awareness is the first step towards reform and equal participation,” says Maimoona.

The sisters have survived threats and intimidation from some male members of their community and mullahs. “At first even my brothers-in-law disapproved, now the mullahs have written letters recognising my efforts,” says Mohammad with a smile. She is now a CA member, and recently completed her Bachelor degree in Sociology from Awadh University in India.

Mohammad is excited about the new constitution: “Finally the laws of the land will pave the way for greater participation of women from different castes and ethnicities.”
Captain Bhawana Pant gently pushes the throttle on the starboard engine of her Beech 1900D, scans the dials carefully to ensure everything is ok. To her right is co-pilot Rita Pyakurel who takes instructions from air traffic control and looks out for ground traffic, as the plane with its all-female crew takes off. The aircraft is cleared for takeoff from Runway 20 and Capt Pant guns both engines as the plane takes off with an all-female crew.

What is unusual is how routine flights with women on the flight deck and cabin have become in Nepal’s domestic aviation.

Buddha Air and Yeti Airlines are the only two that operate flights where the captain, co-pilot and stewardsesses are all women. But as more and more women opt for careers as pilots, this isn’t so rare anymore.

“I used to watch my father wear his pilot’s uniform and I knew right then that I wanted to fly too,” says Pant, who has been flying for 12 years. “When I took my first flight I felt like I had achieved a big victory.” Pant became a captain three years ago at the same time that Buddha Air introduced all-female crews to take charge of their flights.

Co-pilot Pyakurel says there is just too much to do in the cockpit to think about breaking stereotypes. “But,” she admits with a smile, “I feel a tinge of pride when the captain is also a woman.”

Both Pant and Thapa are now also licensed to fly Buddha’s new and bigger ATR-42 twin turboprops. Komal Basnyat and Yashodhara Thapa are two other female pilots with Buddha Air. Komal says the comfort level is higher when she works with a female captain and says the women crew send a positive message to the public about gender equality. Pant adds: “Although one’s gender doesn’t really make a difference when you work together to control a flight, it’s very encouraging that things are changing.”

The first step towards all-women crews taken by Yeti airlines in 2006 when, on the occasion of women’s day, Capt Sabina Thapa and co-pilot Jeena Ligden flew together. “It was a wonderful experience,” recalls Thapa who now flies BAe Jetstreams for Yeti. “You have to prove yourself here to gain respect. This is not a profession where women get concessions simply because they are women. You have to show what you are capable of.”

Although things have come a long way since Sony Rana (now the only woman flying 757s for Nepal Airlines) became Nepal’s first woman pilot in 1988, female crews are still very uncommon than their male counterparts. Of the 300 or so certified pilots in Nepal, only 10 percent are women. Of the 69 pilots in Yeti, there is one woman captain and five co-pilots. Of Buddha Air’s total cockpit crew of 42, there are two female Scaptains and four co-pilots.

Nearly all women pilots fly domestic routes, regarded as the most challenging flying terrain in the world. So the experience Nepal’s women pilots are earning will give them an advantage over others. With more women pilots returning from training abroad, passengers will soon become familiar with the sight of women in crisp pilot uniforms in the cockpit.
the whole sky
Sniff or inject?

Confessions of a former drug user

International Drug Day on 26 June reminds me of the past that shaped my present, and the present that is so different from my past.

It reminds me of my youthful days as a drug addict wandering the streets of Kathmandu. In the mid-1990s, I was about 20 and had been using drugs for four years. My first drug was something that was available in the local pharmacy for just Rs 20: the then-famous cough syrup, Phensydyle. Many people my age in the 1990s probably tried Phensydyle. For me it represented the beginning of a long and treacherous journey, the life of a junkie.

The rest of the world believed that it was me and only me who was to be blamed for what I became. Since the rest of the world believed this, I believed it too. However, at the back of my head was always the conviction that it wasn’t just my fault.

For four years I did Phensydyle and similar codeine-based syrups. When new policies went into effect to control these drugs, the law enforcement agencies tightened their grip on narcotic drugs. Phensydyle and Heroin were the ones worst hit. Phensydyle was sold in 200ml bottles, and therefore too bulky to sneak through the southern border. The supply may have been cut off, but the demand hadn’t reduced. The demand shifted to other drugs, namely Fudigic; buprenorphine injections were available once again in the local pharmacy for as little as Rs 12 for a 2ml ampoule. One dose could cost as little as Rs 6 and was enough for a whole day. A clean syringe cost Rs 5.

Ironically, government crackdowns resulted in an introduction of more lethal drugs into the market. The result was that HIV prevalence among injecting drug users in Kathmandu rose from zero in 1994 to 70 per cent in 1998. That figure includes me.

We had the tools, we had the knowledge and yet we failed to prevent HIV infections among injecting drug users during this period. We lacked the political will to admit that there was a problem and, therefore, to do something about it. Brave outreach workers entered the netherworld to distribute clean syringes, but were often harassed by the law enforcement agencies. The Ministry of Health approved needle exchange as an effective means to ward off HIV, but the more powerful Home Ministry still believed that distributing needles would encourage drug use. When the drug was cheaper than a syringe, who cares about using a clean syringe?

It was as simple as that.

To see the Home Ministry’s mistake, consider how an abuser would think: one doesn’t buy a new lighter to light a new cigarette. So, should I keep the syringe in case I need it later? Well, no, because I could easily get caught carrying a syringe.

The Home Ministry thus systematically fuelled the epidemic.

The government succeeded in wiping out the 200ml Phensydyle, but they couldn’t do the same to the 2ml Fudigic; that is still being smuggled across the southern border.

Today I am out of drugs and leading a healthy life. Ten years of HIV and 19 years of drugs has taught me many important lessons. One that I think is important to share on International Drug Day on 26 June is about being socially excluded, but when he began to witness the death of friends and his own deteriorating health, he quit.

He joined the Richmond Fellowship Nepal, a rehab centre for substance users and gradually overcame his addiction. “I regained respect and recognition from a society that despised me as a drug user,” he recalls. Ghale now works as a director at the Mother Tongue Centre Nepal that develops a local language curriculum and also as a counselor for drug users.

He is celebrating his fifth birthday on 26 June marking his fifth year since quitting drugs. “The life I am living is my second birthday,” he says.

Jeevan, a 5 feet 6 inch man, was 38kg when he joined the centre. He now weighs 74kg and is married with a daughter.

He had started smoking marijuana at school, switching from marijuana to nitrazepam tablets and then injecting buprenorphine within a year. He is one of the lucky ones to not be infected with HIV.

Among drug users, 61.4 per cent inject drugs and among them 29 per cent share needles. An estimated 6,500 intravenous drug users (IDUs) are living with HIV or AIDS, which is about 10 per cent of the total HIV/AIDS cases according to UNAIDS. In Kathmandu, about 30 per cent of all people living with HIV/AIDS are IDUs.

There is a 100 per cent chance of transmitting HIV by needle sharing,” says Rajiv Kafle founder and coordinator of rehab organisation Nawa Kiran Plus. HIV prevalence among IDUs in 2003 was 51 per cent. Given the limitations of Nepal’s public health surveillance system, the actual number of infections is thought to be much higher. Kafle says many of the users don’t even know about the disease.

Nepal was the first country in Asia to establish a harm reduction program with a needle exchange service for IDUs. However, the program has been ineffective due to limited coverage as well as a short supply of syringes. The problem is especially acute in rural areas where the potency of drugs has significantly deteriorated, moving users to take bigger doses. “A drug user might need more than the two needles a day that they offer,” Kafle says.

Bishnu Sharma, program manager of Richmond, says drug users are also highly likely to transmit Hepatitis C. He added that about 94 per cent of drug users in Kathmandu have tested positive for the incurable disease. “Effective prevention interventions need to be scaled up among IDUs,” he says.

Political instability, low levels of education and literacy and a lack of voluntary counseling and testing services mean infection figures are only likely to increase.

A survey conducted by Central Bureau of Statistics in 2007 reported there are 40,309 hard drug users in Nepal with 1.2 per cent of them being under 15 years of age. But the problem mainly lies within the age group of 15 to 28, to which half the abusers belong.

The major drug abuses in Nepal are cannabis and codeine which is found in cough syrup, nitrazepam tablets and buprenorphine injections. glue and opiates. Heroin is the second most prevalent drug in the country says SSP Hemantra Mall, chief of the Narcotic Drugs Control Law Enforcement Unit.

According to him, the drugs are mainly smuggled from across the border or sold in pharmacies.

The government drug regulatory body, the Department of Drug Administration, has to get approval from the International Narcotic Control Board to import the drugs that the country needs but this has done little to control the abuse of prescription drugs. “Treatment is not seen as addiction. The rate of relapse is about 65 per cent in our country while new drug users appear every year, increasing the total number of drug users,” he says.

The unit seized 105.6kg opium last year while 225kg opium has been seized in the first six months of this year, a significant rise from the 4.5kg of opium first seized by the police 15 years ago.

The largest haul in this was the 22kg seized in 2003, while an average of 10kg is seized each year.

But the size of the raids is not indicative of the magnitude of drug abuse in the country. It simply reflects the effectiveness and failure of law enforcement, he says.

There are four measures to be considered in controlling drug abuse: control on production, supply, demand reduction and treatment, rehabilitation and detoxification. “We cannot make a drug free society but, we can curb drug abuse,” Mall says.
INTERESTING TIMES
Malika Aryal

Although the ratio of 33 per cent female representation was stipulated in the interim constitution, many feared the political parties would not adhere to it, but the women’s lobby was so strong that they would not settle for anything less. Not all of the women elected were political party leaders. Some were war widows and others had no training in politics. Some experts worried that since the process of constitution-writing involves a lot of legal matters those lacking the right education, experience or training may not cope.

The challenge for the veteran political party leaders and the women’s lobby groups who fought so hard for greater representation to prove the skeptics wrong was a big one. But just because there are more women in the constituent assembly does not exactly mean the struggle for women is over. The main agenda of the political leadership was not to get distracted from the constitution-writing process. There is no doubt that issues surrounding federalism, inclusion, ethnicity and representation of minorities are of great importance in the new constitution, but so are issues relating to women and children’s rights.

Despite their initial victory the women CA members still haven’t been able to discuss and channel their issues through the 11 committees, though each has at least one female member. Women CA members also claim they haven’t forgotten what they promised and assure that their fight is still for 50 per cent representation in all sectors. So why is it that at a time when women’s voices regarding equality in judiciary and administration should be the strongest that we do not hear them at all?

There are not new questions and women CA members have recognised their weakness in raising their voices in the CA. This is perhaps why a caucus has been formed in the assembly which will discuss and push these issues through but that alliance too is still very weak. Women CA members were not elected to voice only women’s issues in the assembly but it is important to keep it in mind that there is no one else who is going to do it for them. Asking for 50 per cent representation is not an unreasonable demand. Women make up 51 per cent of the total population of Nepal so why should they feel any sense of discomfort in asking for 50 per cent representation in the assembly?

Nepali society is not going to change overnight. Waiting for the patriarchy to end is a waste of time. During the collection of suggestions for the new constitution, CA members were warned by people all over Nepal not to repeat the mistakes of the past, to think beyond the Valley and speak up for the people who put their future in the hands of the elected members.

It is not too late for the caucus in the assembly to gain in strength. The women’s movement all over Nepal must understand that the fight for equal rights is not over just because more women are in the CA. And it is important that the CA members do not forget that they are responsible for the women in the far west who die of sicknesses that are so simple to cure, of the women who live with a prolapsed uterus for most of their adult lives because they do not have health facilities, of the young brides in the Tarai and the hills who are beaten up and kicked out of their homes because they did not bring in enough dowry, or of the young girls who are burnt because they are ‘witches’, of the widows of war who are waiting for reparation, and of the wives who wait every day for their husbands who were disappeared during the war years to come back.
PARIS – Since the arrival of President Barack Obama in the White House, there has been an undeniable rapprochement between Europe and the United States. But on the deeper and more fundamental level of emotions and values, is it possible that the gap between the two sides of the Atlantic has widened?

Today, there is much more collective hope and much more individual fear in America in the wake of the global economic crisis. But the reverse is true in Europe. Here one encounters less collective hope and less individual fear. The reason for this contrast is simple: the US has Obama, and Europe has the welfare state.

So what can be done to promote an “Americanization” of Europe in political terms and a “Europeanization” of America in social terms? Comforted by a new President who incarnates a return of hope, who inspires and reassures at the same time, Americans are starting to believe that the worst of the economic crisis is behind them. What was at the beginning of this spring no more than “a glimmer of hope,” to use Obama’s phrase, has become a more serious and positive trend. Animated collectively by a combination of natural optimism and deep nationalism, Americans have made their president’s campaign slogan, “Yes, we can,” their own.

Meanwhile US journalists report tragic stories of middle-class Americans losing their jobs and homes, potentially putting their lives at risk without any social protection. “Cities of Tents are Filling with the Victims of the Economic Crisis,” read one headline a month ago on the front page of a mass-circulation American newspaper.

Who will pay for your cancer treatment if you lose the health insurance policy that came with your job? The absence of social protection does not make you stronger. The ambition of a country and a society cannot be to create a people armed to the teeth with guns yet entirely disarmed in the face of illness.

Moreover, in a society that “lives to work,” where one’s job is such a central component of one’s identity, the loss of work is more destabilizing than in a culture where one “works to live,” as in Europe.

In Europe, meanwhile, there is undeniably less collective hope and probably a little less individual fear. Perhaps because they are older and more cynical, European societies seem to bask in a “collective moroseness,” from which they have difficulty emerging.

The record level of abstention in the recent European Parliament elections is further proof of that growing cynicism and alienation.

Of course, it is neither possible nor desirable to “clone” Obama in each of the European Union’s 27 member states. But what is needed is to reduce the deficit of hope that plagues Europe today? The answer is far from obvious. Europe suffers from a shortage of leaders who can speak in its names, from a shortage of ambition (what, after all, is the collective ambition of Europeans now that the EU is perceived more as part of the problem than part of the solution)? But, above all, Europe suffers from an identity deficit, for no one seems to know what it means to be a European nowadays. America, by contrast, seems to have an abundance of all the things Europe lacks.

Formulated in such terms, the European challenge seems even more formidable than the American one. Nevertheless, it is far from clear that the US will find it easier to reform its health and social security system, and thus alleviate the individual fears of its citizens, than for Europe to inspire its citizens with a sense of collective hope.

In reality, Europe and America should represent a source of mutual inspiration that would reduce the human consequences of inequality in the one and restore a sense of hope in the other. • Project Syndicate Dominique Moisi Visiting Professor of Government at Harvard and author, most recently, of The Geopolitics of Emotion.
In one of her poems artist Keepa Maskey recalls her most cherished memories—
as a child in Nepal surrounded by dragonflies, butterflies and flowers, playing with brick dirt and water by herself as her mother cooked and her father gardened. “That was that back then, now it is the memory that fills my eyes with tears,” goes the poem. She went to high school in India and then left for the US. After graduating with a degree in fine arts from Marymount Manhattan College, New York, she spent a decade living and working in the US before coming home to Kathmandu. “I just wasn’t satisfied with the redundant lifestyle I was living”, she says, “I came back for a better quality of life”. She is currently exhibiting a series of predominantly pastels in Kathmandu under the title ‘Concepts in Balance’ based on the theme of motherhood. She reveals that the series is dedicated not only to her own mother, but to everyone who can relate to the complex and intertwined identities that persist within the mother-daughter relationship.

Maskey’s yearning for her childhood days inspires her work at every juncture. She used to watch her grandfather Krishna Bahadur Chitrakar, who was an artist himself, prepare panels of work for national events. She recalls daydreaming of colours and forms throughout her childhood, a tendency that still persists and which she demonstrates in the peculiar way she lays her ideas out on the canvas, always beginning her work with an oval. This play on oval forms and the importance she pays to colour seems to be what sets her apart from the traditional forms of artwork in Nepal, that depict culture or scenery.

Sahayata Timsina

Keepa Maskey’s exhibition on ‘Concepts in Balance on Motherhood’ is being held at The Art Shop, Darbar Marg From 26 June - 2 July

Balancing concepts

Kathmandu is fast developing an eclectic music scene. From jazz music festivals, to reggae in clubs, trance and hip-hop, Nepali classical music and now, opera. American soprano Lindsay Feldmeth and Japanese pianist Ayako Watanabe are in town to give us a glimpse, for the very first time, of opera as part of a two week ‘Music for Peace’ festival. The soprano and pianist, who have been performing throughout the world together since 2001, were awarded a David Projects for Peace grant, allowing them to play here to promote world peace and cultural exchange.

The Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, which is staging the event with the support of Hope Partnership Nepal, is also offering workshops and opera masterclasses with the musicians as well as live performances by Nepali group 1974 A.D., Luniva, Hindustani fusion groups, singer Priti Kaur and others. The aim is to coalesce diverse cultures on the stage and promote a sense of oneness among people from two opposite sides of the world through musical performance.

“Music and peace is indistinguishable,” says Feldmeth, for whom music has been the sole source of tranquility since she was 15. Having played at several countries all over the world—Austria, Japan, Italy, Moscow, the US—they strongly believe that ‘the universal language of music’ has the power to make the world a peaceful home. Feldman will also present peace scholarship awards for talented Nepali musicians to study for a full year at KJC.

The Music for Peace Festival is from 27 June - 3 July. For more information and schedule visit http://www.katjazz.com.np

Pieces for peace

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EXHIBITIONS
- The Locus of Continuity, an exhibition of mixed media art works by Sushma Mahjirin at Hotel de l’ Annapurna ,19 till 30 June
- In a Different Light an exhibition of Photography by Zoe Childerley at Siddharta Art Gallery, Baber Mahar Revisited, 1-18 July
- Nepal Rendezvous paintings from Bangladesh and Nepal at Siddharta Art Gallery, Baber Mahar Revisited 21-26 June, 11AM-6PM. 4263070
- Concepts of balance , an exhibition of artwork by Keepa Maskey at The Art Shop, Darbar Marg from 26 June-2 July.4267063

EVENTS
- Call for entries for Film South Asia till 30 June. documentaries made in and after January 2007 qualified. 5554121
- For inclusion in the listing send information to editors(at)nepalitimes.com

MUSIC
- Kathmandu Music For Peace Festival by the American soprano Lindsay Feldmeth and the Japanese pianist Ayako Watanabe, 22 June-3 July
- Baja gaja, every Tuesday at Moksh, 7.30 PM onwards. Pulchok. 5526719
- Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg. 422786
- Sunday Jazz brunch barbecue and live jazz music at the Terrace, Hyatt Regency from 12-3.30 PM. 4491234
- Jazz evening at Galice de France Restaurant every Wednesday, 11AM-9PM. 4215045
- Some like it hot every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, 7PM onwards, Rs 899 at Fusion, Daveka’s Hotel. 4479488
- Happy cocktail hour, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jata Café & Bar.
- Live Sensation, performance by Yankey every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- Live Band Sensation performance by Aprikhali, every Saturday till 11am, 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 D’Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30 PM onwards. 4465898

DINING
- A café’s café Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka. 5522113
- The Corner Bar, 3-11PM, 7PM. Radosin Hotel Kathmandu. 4411815
- 7th Annual Monsoon Wine Festival 2009, until 15 September, Kikyo, Thamel. 4505440
- Mango Etalage with hi-tea at The Lounge from 4.30-6.30 PM. Hyatt Regency. 4498062
- 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. 4498062
- Chez Caroline for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Baber Mahar 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, Soaltee. 4438181
- Pot Du Jour at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412999
- Reality Bites, The Kaisr Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4243241
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Chrye Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412999
- Himalayan Rainbow Trout at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg. 4249999

GETAWAYS
- Relax Package at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu for Rs 5555 plus taxes, for a night on double occupancy with breakfast, complimentary use of spa and, offer valid to Nepalis and local residents only. 4498060
- Feel the Hyatt touch, a 60-minute Ayurvedic massage and access to pool and spa with breakfast or lunch at The Café or hi-tea at The Lounge. 4491234

In Paying Guests, four young and fun-loving boys (Shreyas Talpade, Jaaved Jaffrey, Ashmit Chowdhary and Vatsal Sheth) begin a crazy house hunt which takes them through a series of ultra comical hurdles in a bid to find that one roof that can tolerate and shatter their combined problems. Ballu (Johnny Lever) has just the place for them but he has one condition: he needs only couples and bachelors are a big no-no. The boys now have their work cut out for them. They need fake wives and in a hurry, leading to a whole lot of madness and mayhem later.

Call 4442200 for show timings at Jai Nepal www.jainepal.com

ABOUT TOWN

In a Different Light

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WE SWEAR: Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal administers oath of office to new ministers from Madhesi Janadhatu Forum and Tarai Madhes Loktantrik Party at Shital Nibas on Wednesday. President Ram Baran Yadav was also present at the ceremony.

BLACK IS BACK: Police arrest a member of Revolutionary Left Wing, a breakaway Maoist faction, on Saturday near Tribhuvan International Airport for protesting against ‘border enroachment’ by India in Nepal and showing a black flag to the Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon.

COOL DESCENT: With the delayed onset of the monsoons and rising temperatures, Satdobato swimming pool attracts crowds of locals eager to cool down.

NOT BUDGING: Maoist CA members stage a protest in front of Singha Darbar for hours on Tuesday, obstructing traffic and preventing civil servants, including a disabled singer, from entering the premises.

GRIEF IN COLOUR: UNHCR’s photo exhibition ‘Real People Real Needs,’ showcasing refugee camp images from Nepal, Afghanistan, Australia and the US, closes on Wednesday in Kathmandu.
As the donkey’s ardent fans will tell you, we don’t indulge in idle gossip here. Just the juicy ones. And one of the most intriguing ones doing the rounds these days is that the Baddies just won’t let go of the “civilian supremacy” bone because they want to force Prez Ram Baran to resign to pave the way for PKD to be president. After all, “the First President of the Republic Nepal” was the campaign slogan of Comrade Awe-Inspiring and one he took extremely seriously indeed. Awesome has also moved the party HQ from Buddhanagar to Shantinagar, buying the house for Rs 30 million. The party got a hefty discount from the sau because the house is supposed to be haunted.

But for the time being Ferocious is having a tough time clinging on to even the Chairmanship at the Politburo where he has presented his White Paper. However, the comrades are wondering how a document they hadn’t even seen was already in the hands of some embassies. Comrade Laldhoj, who has no love lost for Chabilal and was going along just to keep the Indians happy, has hinted darkly at the cult of personality that is plaguing the party. BRB’s main gripe is against Kaji Narayan, whom PKD plucked out of nowhere and made #2 in the party hierarchy. Ram Babu is justifiably proud of his achievements at the Finance Ministry and would have liked to see some of his programs through hail the leadership not bungled relations with India so badly.

The guy who was responsible for all this, Comrade Cloudy, meanwhile has been so busy fence-sitting that he doesn’t realise the storm he has unleashed. It was Cloudy who set the cart careening down the mountain with his letter to Gen Cut Wall. But there he is clinging on to the Golden Middle in the Politburo, holding his cards close to his chest, keeping both sides happy and his options open. Smart guy becos the Politburo is split 50-50 between the hardliners and not-so-hardliners and by being coy, Badal gets to keep the swing vote. Smart chap, this is the guy to watch out for. Cloudy is in it for the long haul.

This may not be a jumbo cabinet going by the precedent set by Lionheart in 2002, but definitely comes close. Maybe we should call it a Wide Body Cabinet going by the girth of the individual ministers included in it. At least someone is reading this paper’s back page, because we now see that they’ve bifurcated Irrigation and Energy as well as Tourism and Civil Aviation in order to make way for new collision partners. But the Forum still hasn’t made up its mind, which means we have to quickly come up with new line ministries. So how about: Ministry of Bandas and Hartals, Ministry of Daylight Robbery, Ministry of Highways and Blockades, Ministry of Murder and Mayhem, Ministry of Abduction, Extortion and Kidnappings.

We all poked fun at Girjau when he called the YCL ‘Young Criminal League’ two years ago, saying ha-ha pot calling the kettle black. But it does look like the Old Fox was prescient, given the kind of rackets the young louts are involved with. Having captured Kathmandu’s casinos, it looks like they now control the sand mining business, the Pashupati puja bookings, the sandalwood smuggling, all trade with Khasa, the Thamel restaurant and night club businesses. Name a honeypot and there will be YCL hands in it. Failed your driving license test? Just approach the Young Communist who’s in League with the Dept of Transportation.

The person most troubled by the downward slide of the country is none other than King G, who is apparently working on a “deshbasi ko nam ma sandesh” timed 7 July, his 63rd birthday.

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