More insecure

Public Lynchings, Campus Shootouts. What next?

- Two Indian tourists traveling from Kathmandu to Pokhara got stuck in a banda near Abu Khaireni two weeks ago. They walked to a nearby village. Villagers, thinking they were kidnappers, beat them up. The police, instead of rescuing the tourists, locked them up.

- Two groups of students had a fight in Thimi on Tuesday. Rumours flew that it was an abduction attempt. Hundreds of people poured out into the streets and lynched two of the students to death.

- Two student unions affiliated to the ruling NC and the UML, both wanted to bag a contract to extend the chemistry lab of Tri-Chandra College in the heart of the capital. One side brought in armed goons. Shots are fired, injuring two students. The war ended three years ago, but its violent legacy continues in a national epidemic of crime, extortion and kidnappings. High profile murders like that of Khyati Shrestha got wide play in the national media, feeding the public perception of a society drifting to the edge of anarchy. The new government, preoccupied with its own formation, seems oblivious. The police is powerless to stop the rot, and the public gets daily reminders of this on the streets.

The human rights watchdog, INSEC, says there were 38 murders nationwide between January-March. 10 by the police, nine by various Madhesi groups, two by the YCL and 27 by unknown criminal gangs. In June alone, 16 people villagers, suspected of being kidnappers, were lynched or burnt alive in the Tarai. Most were innocent. There have been a slew of strong editorials in the national media in the past weeks calling on the government to act urgently.

INTERESTING TIMES

Vanguards of Vigilantism

‘More worrying than the rise in crime is the citizen’s killing trust in the state,’ wrote the Naya Patrika on Thursday. Kantipur wrote an equally apocalyptic editorial. ‘The state is incapable of protecting its citizens. The security administration needs to find out why it can’t control the spreading lawlessness. Otherwise the flames of anarchy will spread.’

State security is paralysed because of the criminalisation of politics, say some analysts. When two journalists in Phidim were abducted and beaten last week by the YCL, the police refused to register their complaint, saying it was a “political matter”. Police say they know the gunmen who entered Tri-Chandra, but can’t arrest them because they have political patronage.

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Next week’s budget will grab the headlines, but people throughout the country will be more concerned about the worsening security.

See also: EAST-WEST with Kunda Dixit travel blog on www.nepaltimes.com.
It is just as well that the new government's budget will be delayed.

It will give Finance Minister Rajendra Pandey enough time to digest India's budget presented by Pranab Mukherjee in Delhi this week. Mukherjee showered goodies on India's poor, the farmers, the salary class and small entrepreneurs. Like it or not, India is Nepal's largest trading partner by far. It is the destination of last resort for most unemployed Nepalis. India's economic policies cast a long shadow over Nepal's agriculture, industry, taxation and employment. Pandey may have got the country's best brains to advise him, but he has little room to manoeuvre.

In keeping with the tone of the Indian budget, Pandey has no option but to pay more attention to agriculture and jobs. India's heavily subsidised farmers have already made rice, wheat and sugarcane cultivation in Nepal uncompetitive. We can't afford to dole out incentives like the Indians do. So what do we do?

Pandey must follow through with improvements in irrigation and set up higher-value cash crops so our farmers can benefit from the huge and increasingly-affluent market south of the border.

Nepal is reeling under double-digit inflation at a time when India actually recorded deflation this year. The reason this happened despite the open border were highway disruptions, smuggling and weak enforcement in Nepal.

With deficit financing proposed in India, prices there will shoot up and this will impact on Nepal. Since Nepal imports almost all consumer goods from India, pumping money into the market has little effect in boosting employment here.

The new government is so ridden with existential angst that it doesn't see the game for our crisis. The macro-economy may be fine, but Nepal can't eat the macro-economy. This year's food crisis is an emergency. Nothing has been done since the 18-hour power cuts last winter, so next winter is bound to be worse.

Pandey will be tempted to promise the sky. But a heavy capacity of state machinery is so weak that it's best to be too optimistic. VDCs and DDCs which used to have more accountability have been corrupted by the criminalisation of politics, and there is full-scale looting of the district development budget going on. There is little point pouring money into that leaky budget. Alternative delivery mechanisms have to be found.

What is holding the country back is an absence of politics where the will to lift ourselves up from this morass. We have heard enough speeches, the budget must succeed in giving the message that this government is determined to govern.

GENDERNING FAILURE
Serai Tamang is wrong to assume that the women can't be confident to go out. And the defense and foreign ministries, even if they are dominated by men ('Genderning failure', #458), is to be sure, very weak concerning the defense, compromising to a higher caste or being richer or older than their underlings in these ministries. Plus, in Kathmandu, indeed in Nepal where so few are rich and so many poor, rich women are probably far better positioned than poor men. Name withheld, email

GUERRILLA TRENDS
It struck me after reading your article ‘Guerrilla trends’ (#458) that this would be a great way to generate employment in rural areas and uplift parts of Nepal that have been ignored by the state for so long. We should just make sure that the exploitative trekking wallahs in Kathmandu don’t pocket all the profits leaving little for the villages along the routes. The Rukum trek would be a great attraction because of its history, its untainted character and the great scenery. This may be the best area to test out a new model: ACAP-like trekking where the benefits accrue directly to the people, with the emphasis more on development than conservation.

Frank Collins, email

BACKSIDE
It brought tears to my eyes (laugh as well as shame) reading ‘Pants without pockets’ (#458) by your illustrious Ass. The donkey is right on the button: the only news about Nepal to appear in the New York Times about Nepal for the past six months was the story about airport staff housing their pockets confidently in the Ass. The only way to tackle the extortion by policemen on security duty is to not just remove their pants, but remove their pants as well. Rajan, USA

Right shift
The army and president are over-stepping their bounds

A day after Gen Rukumkant Katwal issued circular to all regional headquarters to stay on high alert this week, he met President Ram Baran Yadav. The two reportedly discussed the security situation, the political turmoil, and the proposed promotion of certain army officers.

Why were the two meeting in the first place? Yadav may be the supreme commander of the forces but this is in theory a ceremonial position.

PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

Occasional briefings, purely to fulfill formalities, may be necessary. But when there is an executive prime minister and defence minister, what is the need for Yadav and Katwal to discuss the army's operational and administrative details? Even but raising such a concern is naive in these 'extraordinary times'.

The incident is merely a reflection of the reckless disregard for rules that has characterised politics of the past few months. Paul O'Brien

The army and president are over-stepping their bounds because it shows Yadav has not been able to detach himself from party politics. He is not someone who sees his role as a passive guardian. He is active, in evidence, a statesman. And like with any politician, factional interest can easily overwhelm national interest.

And it is this ambition that the right-wing hopes to play on, in their desire to disrupt the process and engineer a 'Bangladesh model' (of army-backed civilian façade) with a bit of ‘Sri Lanka’ thrown in (escalating security offensives).

The opening of the parliament has opened up the space for the left to play up its manipulated sense of consensus. Gen Katwal thrives when the parties fight each other. He has further said that if there is consensus, the Defence ministry, what is the need for Yadav and Katwal to discuss the army's operational and administrative details? And it is this ambition that the right-wing hopes to play on, in their desire to disrupt the process and engineer a ‘Bangladesh model’ (of army-backed civilian façade) with a bit of ‘Sri Lanka’ thrown in (escalating security offensives).

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In Hajar Bigha, ethnic tensions are just beneath the surface

SARLAHI—A dirt road juts into the jungle from Naya Road on East-West Highway. After a 14km bumpy ride past buffalo herds, through the remains of Charkoshe Jhadi on both sides, a sprawling settlement comes into view. Welcome to the middle of nowhere.

If Local Development Minister Purna Kumar Sherma has his way, this will be one among 41 new municipalities that will be added in the next 100 days. This certainly qualifies to be a town: it has a petrol pump, a direct night-bus service to Kathmandu, half-a-dozen private schools, a physician’s clinic with an attached drugstore, and at least two new temples under construction. But does that make it a municipality?

The news stall is actually a stationary shop-cum-ticket counter for ‘express’ buses to the capital. There are no ‘national’ newspapers. With a straight face, he explains that there is little point in selling newspapers which treat Sarlahi as if it were Somalia.

Unlike strained relationship between Pahadis and Madhesis in Lahan, the two communities appear to be at peace with each other here. In some educated Madhesi households, parents continue to talk to their children in Nepali. Pahadis can be seen tending to their bullocks in lungis tucked at the waist. But neighbours have started harbouring suspicions about each other. The distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ crops up repeatedly in casual conversations. A Yadav says that his friends across the fence have bought a house in Hetauda, but he has nowhere to go.

The acrimony between the ruling and ruled communities has a long history. In the early sixties when DDT made the Tarai safer for Pahadis by removing malaria, King Mahendra settled retired soldiers in a forest clearing that came to be called Hajar Bigha. Some 25,000 of the royal family were granted large tracts of farms. Primarily, it was to raise the productivity of these new settlements that the Manusmara Irrigation Project was built. Most Murtiya grantees of government largesse remained absentee landlords. Over the years, many moved north to the highway where they have turned Nawalpur into the national capital of Chure Bhawar Unity Society. Distinct relatives, indigent cousins or trusted retainers look after their possessions for most of the year. Since the property market has shot through the roof after the remittance boom, some of the original landowners have sold their holdings. In normal circumstances, this would hardly have raised any eyebrows. But in these ethnically charged times, when even an accident on the highway acquires communal colour, land transactions are being interpreted as “ethnic cleansing” by one side and retreat of “exploiters” by others.

Media reports of Pahadis fleeing the Tarai are exaggerated. Only Pahadis that had acquired land for free, or built houses with bribes, are leaving as awareness levels rise. No Pahadi plough-holder, cowherd, teacher, shopkeeper or mechanic has left the Tarai under duress. But the runaways are giving entire Madhes a bad name. Perceptions, however, are ghosts impossible to banish. A Sah professional slyly admitted in private that he hasn’t built a new house in the hope of buying “escapee property” on the cheap. Ethnic friction in today’s Tarai-Madhes can still be resolved. But if the hatred is allowed to incubate there could be horrendous consequences because the grievances on the ground are genuine. The loss of privilege of the ruling class is raw. This is a chasm that only intense politicisation can bridge.

Clashes at Tri-Chandra Campus in Kathmandu over a construction contract were extremely unfortunate. But it had Pahadis, Madhesis, Janajatis, Dalits and women on both sides of the barricade. It is when the polarisation becomes ethnic that things spin out of control. That has to be prevented at all costs.

In Hajar Bigha, ethnic tensions are just beneath the surface
Vanguards of vigilantism

Mob psychosis is taking over the country

Last week, two Indian tourists were beaten up by locals in Tanahu because they were taking pictures of children. The locals thought the tourists were kidnappers.

In Chapagaun, a 10-hour curfew had to be imposed to restore calm after police rescued two people being mercilessly beaten up after being falsely accused of trying to abduct children.

This week, Gongabu was closed off after locals descended on the streets accusing police of protecting people who had beaten up on suspicion of being kidnappers. All week, reports came in of locals supposedly thwarting kidnapping attempts in Kirtipur, Malighat and Bag Bajar.

But worst was yet to come. Two students were lynched to death by locals in Bhaktapur after a fight between two groups of students. The police is often seen to be blocking the road. The fear of punishment that acted as a deterrent is no longer there. The police is often seen to be more for their apathy, for being mere bystanders.

Our society lost faith in the police after the politicisation of the force after 1990 and its involvement in the dirty Maoist war. The distrust is still so deep that individuals are willing to take the law onto themselves rather than report incidents to the police.

Vigilantism is taking over the country. and locals suspected the attackers of being abductors.

Two were beaten up but survived, and gave a statement to the police saying that they were not in Thimi area to kidnap children.

In all the above incidents, innocent people were lynched or killed on mere suspicion of being kidnappers. These violent incidents, coming after the abduction and murder of student Khyati Shrestha last month by her kidnapper, have left deep scars on the Nepali psyche, especially among parents and their children.

The fear is turning to paranoia and, fed by rumours, is leading to mob violence. The locals who beat two students to death on Tuesday were probably parents themselves who were so terrified and angry that they took the law into their own hands without thinking about the consequences.

Laxmi dreams of flying

A 16, Laxmi Rai is a big girl for her class. Her classmates in the single room school in Gairi Gaun, Sunsari are 8-14 years old. Like her friends for whom regular schools were too far to walk to, Laxmi is also in this non-formal school so that she can complete her accelerated primary level education in three years.

She squats at the back of the small classroom, chatting all the time with the teacher and her classmates. She stirs rhymes along with them, chimes in the classwork and draws pictures with equal finesse.

Seeing a camera pointed at her, Laxmi deliberately pushes away the hair falling over her eyes with her right toe. Stricken with polio as a baby, Laxmi uses her feet to do the things her friends use their hands for. Writing, drawing, unwrapping candy and pushing it into her mouth, she does all that with her toes.

“I was born prematurely at seven months... a tiny, weak baby,” Laxmi says in her halting speech, “then when I was less than a year old...they say I fell very ill...they see me then when I grow up...I want to be a litterateur...a famous director to turn into a blockbuster movie. “It’s a... love tragedy,” she confides

Laxmi often dreams that her legs are ok, “I see myself moving about normally...I often dream...I am punching and bullets and fighting them running around with knives.”

Although she does not wish a knife in real life, Laxmi says she is pretty tough with boys who tease and bully her friends.

Living in Thimi, Laxmi flips through the pages of her thick diary in which she has scribbled poems in her neat handwriting. “There are hundreds of poems: about friendship, life, the country, and love.”

Laxmi has even written a story that runs like a script of a film, which she says she would like to hand to a film director to turn into a blockbuster movie. “It’s... love tragedy,” she confides

with a shy smile.

Laxmi lives with her 67-year old grandmother Dhnamaya Rai in the house next to the classroom. The land for the school was donated by her family. Her father, who is a cook at the BH Kotnali Hospital in Dharan, wanted his daughter to stay with him. But Laxmi, who is very attached to her teacher and friends, wants to stay on in Gairi Gaun.

She says: “I will first...complete my education, that is most important for me, then when I grow up...I want to become a litterateur,...a famous one.”

There is no other way to explain what happened in Thimi on Tuesday. As a society, we have become divided, angry, bitter people. What started out in the Tarai has now spread to the capital.

The desperation and frustration is so strong that it is manifesting itself into the kind of terrifying and unpredictable rage that led to the lynching of two innocent boys in Thimi this week.

And at the root of all this is the chronic political instability, the uncertainty, impurity and the lack of moral authority of our rulers. Unless that is addressed, just improving law enforcement is not going to reduce the crime wave and the vigilantism with which a disheartened public is responding to it. Otherwise we are going to turn into a society where anarchy is considered normal and the law of the jungle will hold sway.
Information and communication technology (ICT) based tutorials and new schools under the brand name CG – Manipal and provide impacts of Climate Change on the Himalayas.

Boon

Asian Paints has launched Royale Play, which is touted as being special effect paint. Along with painting walls, users which can now give textures and patterns using their application tools like brush, roller, comb, spatula, colour wash and more.

Go to Rome

Purchase a bottle of Carlsberg and get a free entry pass for two, to tour popular bars in Rome.
New budget

A way out

Khem Bhandari in Nepal, 5 July

The decisions taken at the recent Maoist Politburo meeting show that the party is still committed to the peace process, but that it is struggling to reconcile internal differences. The Politburo wisely chose to lack the formation of a national government, and this shows maturity and a desire to transform into a mainstream party. They could have easily taken a step towards another “people’s revolution”, but didn’t.

The Maoist’s proposal is a way out of the mess the UML-led government has landed us in. The Maoists are not only the biggest party in the CA, they are also the key to the transformation of the country. The constitution will not be completed with the Maoists on the sidelines. The other parties should resign themselves to this fact and assist the Maoists.

By insisting on national consensus the Maoists have shown they can be flexible with their demands, which promises a way out of the present impasse. The NC and the UML would do well to end their selfish bickering and hand over responsibilities to the Maoists.

Although the Politburo meeting was promising, it revealed friction within the party. Chairman Prachanda has maintained that the party will struggle peacefully, but he hasn’t totally renounced a “people’s revolution”, which Kiran Baidya’s faction of the party supports.

Maoists.

There is no way the NC and the UML could form a government without the Maoists. They could have easily taken a step towards another “people’s revolution”, but didn’t.

Intellectual deficiency

Nanda Kishor Pun (Pasang), PLA commander in Janadesh, 7 July

The political small-mindedness of the leaders in the government disgusts us. It is our duty to take the peace process to its logical end and form a national army. Although we are angry, we are committed to carrying out our responsibility to the country.

The Army Integration Special Committee, which will be reconstituted, will make an official decision about the integration of the PLA. We will forge a consensus, regarding the committee’s shape, at the political level. We have not said anything yet and will speak only when needed. We are waiting to see the kind of special committee that will be formed. Until now, we have just been spectators as the new prime minister and defence minister have gone about their business.

We will only accept the decision of the special committee. The recent comments made by the prime minister and defence minister are irrelevant.

Student violence

Editorial in Nagarik, 7 July

The violent dispute between the NC-affiliated Nepal Student’s Union and UML-affiliated All Nepal National Free Student Union over constructing a new building in Tri Chandra College, has highlighted the divisions between the two governing parties. It’s a sign of the country’s political turmoil that the students are demanding roles in issues other than education.

Political parties often quarrel, but they are not justified in burning down offices and using weapons inside college premises. The police have not yet captured the guilty, pointing suspicions that the culprits enjoy political patronage.

The police have not yet captured the guilty, raising doubts about their competence and increasing concerns that the culprits enjoy political patronage. Student leaders must understand that the politicisation of student unions has now degenerated into criminal activity.

Neelam Timsina in Kantipur, 7 July

The government should modernise and commercialise agriculture by allotting it at least 10 per cent of the budget. It should consider establishing a fund for rural entrepreneurs.

The budget must focus on developing the industrial sector by guaranteeing security and the rule of law, encouraging private sector and public investment, developing clear economic policies, increasing capital expenditure, banning strikes, addressing the energy crisis and instituting an industrial security force.

A separate body should be formed to supervise infrastructure development and maintenance. The budget should fund alternative roads connecting Kathmandu with Tarai, a Mechi-Mahakali electric railway and rural roads.

Concrete plans to attract foreign investments in hydropower are imperative. Focus should also be on subsidising alternative energy and the import of diesel plants to address the current power shortage.

The budget should continue past provisions that facilitated revenue collection and checked leakage. The government should reform the VAT scheme, which offers two rates, that only complicates things and reduces revenue collection.

The inflation rate is soaring in Nepal. An ineffective supply mechanism is to blame. Besides checking cartels and black markets, an automatic price adjustment mechanism to adjust the price of petroleum products in consonance with international market prices must be established.

If this is done, the GDP growth rate can be expected to be 5 per cent and the inflation can be restricted to 6 per cent with revenue flexibility ratio 1:15 next year.

A budget between Rs 275 and Rs 300 billion could achieve all this.

EXCHANGE OFFER: UML's Chairman, Jhal Nath Khanal, inducts a former Maoist into the party on Monday at the party office at Balkhu (left). Only a day earlier, Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal had inducted a former UML party worker into his party at a special program at the Academy hall (right). In total, 39 former Maoists defected to UML while 359 party workers from various parties switched to the Maoists.

Focus should also be on subsidising alternative energy and the import of diesel plants to address the current power shortage.
Residents of Doti talked about what kind of constitution they would want and the kind of structure that would work best for them at a discussion program last month.

Doti speaks

How do you view the constitution writing process?

Pradip Deuba (NC): There should have been a national consensus on specific points regarding the constitution. But how can they be achieved when there are disputes, even within the parties, about what portfolio each party will get? It is uncertain whether the constitution will be written on time.

Beni Madhav Joshi (National Janamorcha): This is the result of ignoring opinions from small parties and letting the big parties do what they want.

Gopi Nepal (Rastriya Prajatantra Party Nepal): Perhaps the Maoists could have done something, but they weren’t allowed to work. Unless the king is included in the process, Nepal’s constitution is incomplete.

Keshab Pariyar (social worker): The pace at which the constitution writing process is progressing is encouraging ethnic and regional conflicts and pushing the country into utter chaos.

Raju Nepali (NGO worker): There is no need to lose hope. We can still expect that the constitution will be written on time. The question here is on the issue of federalism and what shape it will take.

What sort of federalism do the people of Doti support?

Padam Singh Bom (NC): The people of Doti should have the power to decide on issues regarding the development of their own region.

Mukunda Rana (NGO worker): Federalism hasn’t yet been discussed with us. However, federal states should be made keeping in mind the needs for development, education, food and social transformations in the far west. The whole region should be a single state.

Sashi Shob (Dalit Women’s Organisation): Just because Nepal becomes a federal republic doesn’t mean all our problems will be solved. We should have the right to be a part of the process when our resources are being allocated. We should also be able to use them. The basis for federalism should be geographic.

Dil Bahadur Bom (NCP-Seti): bakery and Mahakali should be a single state and Doti should be its headquarters.

Keshab Pariyar: No system will work unless we change our attitude.

Pradip Deuba: There is a need to address ethnicity and regional identity. If the sentiment of everyone is taken into consideration, there will be no danger of disintegration.

Sapana Bohara (Nepal Student Union): We need federalism so that Nepal’s regions do not have to be dependent on Kathmandu for everything. Decisions regarding federalism should be made on the basis of population, geography and economic issues.

But Doti hasn’t been able to utilise its natural resources or the budget received from the centre.

Mukunda Rana: The people of Doti do not have even the basic facilities. The government investment in health, education and employment is managed. Why would anyone want to stay here? No one wants to invest here. The budget for the entire far west Nepal is equal to that of one district in the east. Those who have migrated to Kathmandu from Doti don’t want to invest two per cent of their earnings in their district.

Shashi Shob: Leaders come here only to ask for votes. And the state and the politicians in Kathmandu say.

Keshab Pariyar: We always blame the centre and do nothing. There isn’t a single hotel in this district because people fear that they will have to touch Dalits. Donor agencies are sent away if they come here. Everything is politicised. We have to change our attitude to bring development.

Beni Madhav Joshi: Once people are educated and no longer poor they will ask where all the development funds are going, which will make it hard for corrupt leaders to pocket them.

Bhus Raj Joshi (businessman): Doti is stricken with poverty. People do not have the resources to invest here and those who do don’t want to. How will autonomy work in a place that has not had a local body for the last seven years?
Where has the zebra gone?

We see manifestations of Kathmandu’s malignant urban growth all around us: buildings that flout zoning ordinances, unplanned housing, crumbling infrastructure and a city that has exceeded its limits to growth.

But the most glaring aspect is the daily clash of pedestrian and vehicular traffic on Kathmandu’s streets. Automobiles are supposed to make life easier, but they vie for urban space with the majority who are on foot and the two are often in conflict in the streets they share.

The municipality and the road authorities are supposed to manage this conflict through zebra crossings, overhead bridges, footpaths, designated pedestrianised streets and an awareness campaign among road users about their rights and responsibilities.

Zebra crossings are the simplest way to manage the conflict between walkers and riders. But zebras, even where they were painted, have now vanished from the streets. This has led to jay-walking, vehicles that don’t give right of way to pedestrians, resulting in a rising number of traffic accidents. Kathmandu’s city managers have neglected the fact that walking is the primary mode of travel after public transport. The result is that we have a city that is becoming more and more pedestrian-unfriendly.

A compact city where commuting to and from work on foot has always been the norm, fewer people walk because it is dangerous, polluted and inconvenient in the absence of proper footpaths. During frequent traffic jams motorcycles climb on to the sidewalks, adding to the pedestrian’s woes.

Those streets with pedestrian walkways are poorly designed...
have all
gone?

OVERHEAD SHOPPING: The overhead pedestrian crossing at Jamal has become a shopping centre. There are no signs showing the way, the legibility of the space is lost and it is prone to crime.

SOMETHING MISSING: A whole section of the sidewalk at the busy Baneswor intersection is missing.

and badly maintained with protective railings and street furniture missing. Street lights stopped working long ago, making walking at night even more perilous.

Even the sidewalks that exist are too narrow because there are just too many people and because they are encroached upon by vendors and garbage dumps. Pedestrians therefore have no option but to spill over into the road, where they compete with the cars and motorcycles.

The pedestrian overheads and one subway in central Kathmandu were supposed to make it easier for walkers. But most people rarely use them. This happens when interventions designed for pedestrians are inappropriate and difficult, and the safety and comfort of road users are not considered. Walking on the sidewalks is unpleasant and chaotic because they are unattractive, non-vibrant and have no active building edges.

Move by the Traffic Police to improve flow and safety of the Valley’s roads should not be confined to vehicles but also to improve the ease and comfort of pedestrians.

When push comes to shove (literally) and the question arises, who has the right of way, the answer should always be: the pedestrian.

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The return of the Pilatus Porter

After 50 years, a legendary aircraft returns to the Nepali skies

Fifty years after the first Pilatus Porter made the long journey from Switzerland to Nepal, the rugged single-engine aircraft is staging a comeback in the Himalaya. By a happy coincidence, that first aircraft was nicknamed ‘Yeti’, and it is Yeti Airlines that has just taken delivery of two brand new latest model Pilatus Porters to re-open roadless areas of the country.

The single-engine aircraft are ideal for Nepal’s mountains because they can land and takeoff on dirt runways not more than 350m long.

“The Pilatus Porter has a proven record of performance for flying to remote areas of Nepal, it has shown it can do the job anytime and almost anywhere,” says Yeti’s Ang Tshiring Sherpa, “it fits nicely between a helicopter and a Twin Otter and we want to use it to open up the far west.”

The first ‘Yeti’ set the world record for the highest-ever landing by a fixed wing aircraft at 5,700m when it was used by the Austrian-Swiss Dhaulagiri expedition in 1960 to ferry supplies from Pokhara to base camp. That record still stands, and the ‘Yeti’ is also still there because on its 17th flight it crashed while trying to takeoff in high wind.

Emil Wick, who was one of the pilots of the original ‘Yeti’ when it crashed on Dhaulagiri, stayed on in Nepal to train Pilatus pilots for Royal Nepal Airlines. He died in 2000, leaving a list of legendary flying feats like landing downhill in Lukla, flying at 16,000ft in the unpressurised PC-6 to climb over clouds, and landing transverse to the runway at Kathmandu airport in a 40 knot crosswind. (See box p11)

Hardy Fuerer, another Swiss pilot who flew the blue-tailed Pilatus for the UN in the 1970s and 80s, was involved in the construction of nearly 40 short-takeoff and landing (STOL) fields. Some, like Phaplu, Jomsom, Jumla, Bara and Jufal have been upgraded, while others like Langtang and Dhorpatan are not used anymore.

Indeed, it was impressive to see just how little of the runway Yeti’s second Pilatus Porter used at the end of its 40-hour ferry flight to Kathmandu from Luzern on Wednesday. “The beauty of this plane is that Pilatus hasn’t changed its basic design in 50 years,” said Michael Alb at Kathmandu airport after a seven-hour last leg of the flight from Ahmadabad.

Yeti Airlines, which flies to more destinations than any other airline in Nepal, bought the two Pilatus Porter PC-6s to extend its reach to airfields which can’t take Twin Otters.

“We are hoping to extend this service to tourists who don’t have time for a long trek, and want to go up to Syangboche for brunch and be back by afternoon,” says Yet Airlines’ Pradeep Shah. At $950 per hour, the Pilatus is half the cost of renting an Ecuriel helicopter and will hiring it out at short notice as an air ambulance, specialised sight-seeing flights and cargo charters.

In the past 50 years, Pilatus Porters have been flown by the United Nations, the Swiss development agency and Royal Nepal Airlines. In those years, PC-6s have done just about everything: they have dropped live goats by parachute for mountaineering expeditions, carried text books and vaccines to remote villages in western Nepal, ferried grain to Humla during the 1982 food crisis, flown orange saplings for orchards in Jumla and taken international celebrities for New Year parties at Syangboche.

For many, the familiar drone of the Pilatus Porter’s turboprop engine has brought back memories of a past that is now a part of the future of Nepal’s aviation.

See also: ‘Emil Wick’s adventures with the Pilatus Porter’, Nepali Times, #9
‘Looking for the Yeti’, Nepali Times #9
‘Expedition locates crash below Dhaulagiri’, Nepali Times #13
‘Flying into the past with Hardy Fuerer’, Nepali Times #24

For video of Yeti Airlines Pilatus ferry flight:

NEW ARRIVAL: The second of Yeti Airlines’ brand new Pilatus Porter lands at Kathmandu airport (below) after a 40-hour ferry flight from Switzerland on Wednesday, with Capt Michael Alb at the controls (top). The first Pilatus to fly in Nepal was also nicknamed ‘Yeti’ and seen (above) at Pokhara airport in 1960, and later crashed on Dhaulagiri.

For video of Yeti Airlines Pilatus ferry flight:

KUNDA DIXIT

KUNDA DIXIT
Ron Faux of The Times of London flew with legendary Pilatus Porter pilot, Emil Wick, to right below Mt Everest in 1978, and writes about his experience:

During the 1978 Austrian expedition to Everest, on which Reinhold Messner and Peter Habeler planned an oxygen free attempt on the mountain, I flew with them in the Pilatus Porter with Emil Wick (pictured) from Syangboche airstrip. Wick strapped us into the aircraft, gave everyone an oxygen mask and placed a cushion on his seat. He was of short stature and without elevation from a cushion, what lay beyond the instrument panel was a mystery to him. I remember his very positive, cheerful and enormously self-confident manner. He was the only pilot the Nepalis would allow to fly "into the hole" as he called the Western Cwm.

We first flew towards Nuptse and skirting the northern edge of the ridge, tracked the edge of the Cwm towards LHoutse, swinging left about level with the South Col. The air was completely still but Wick announced that we were unable to fly beyond the South Col for fear of a Chinese missile and that reaching summit level was not possible on that particular day because the pressure was too low and the air insufficiently dense.

The single turbo-prop engine did not have the grunt to go higher that day. Instead we flew to 400m of the south-west face of Everest and we had a close-up view of the route that Bonington and Co had climbed three years previously. Wick then flew the aircraft above the LHoutse face and said: "OK, we dive the bastard" and yanked the controls into a spiral dive. He had to use maximum input on the controls to make the Porter do anything. We then swooped down the LHoutse face over the heads of two Austrians climbing towards the South Col. They could not have been pleased after spending two months manoeuvring themselves into a position of Biblical loneliness and danger when out of the sky plunges an aircraft whose wheels almost took their hats off. If the noise and shock wave alone did not terrify them the subsequent risk of avalanche on a 50 degree snow and ice slope would.

Down the Cwm we plunged over the lip of the Khumbu Icefall and the startled upturned faces at base camp. Whilst Wick was clearly master of his element and enjoying every second, his passengers were too stunned to speak. We flew down the valley to Syangboche, renowned for its turbulence, but the air remained perfectly smooth. Interesting to note that Reinhold Messner insisted that he make the flight without wearing an oxygen mask. He was well acclimatised and manifestly had lungs that reached his knees but even so he turned a curious shade of blue, his eyes crossed and lost some of their focus but, according to him, he remained fully conscious. As history records, he and Habelaer did reach the top, unmasked.

Emil Wick retired from his job as a trainer for Royal Nepal Airlines in Nepal in 1986 aged 60. In 1989 he co-wrote a scientific meteorological paper entitled ‘Air motions in the vicinity of Mount Everest as deduced from Pilatus Porter flights,’ which gives a fascinating insight into his vast experience of flying in the Everest region. Emil Wick died on September 27, 2000 aged 74 in Geneva, Switzerland.
investment in the health and the rights of girls and women can help economic recovery, civil society groups told G8 leaders who met in Italy this week. They said the big issues on the G8 agenda (food security, poverty, climate change and global health) are all connected to gender equality and added that investment in women is itself a solution. “If we invest in women, many problems will be solved, the economy can stand from the ground,” said Sylvia Borren, co-chair of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP). “We know from microfinance and from many other examples that letting women suffer from the food crisis and the lack of health services means not building the fundamentals of a sustainable economy.”

The problem is funding. According to the World Bank, the economic crisis and the new rise in food prices could lead to 2.8 million more children dying by 2015 if no concrete action is taken, and $60 billion dollars are needed over the next five years to fight infectious diseases and strengthen health systems in the developing world.

Last year’s G8 summit made comprehensive recommendations to strengthen health systems particularly, but without allocating funds to that end. Now, 56 women parliamentarians from Asia, Africa, Europe and G8 countries have said in a letter: “Investing in women’s health as part of aid policies has to be considered a priority, as it will give to the poorer countries a better chance to solve their health crises and develop.”

Sexual and reproductive diseases clearly cause a huge economic loss to developing economies. They reduce female productivity by 20 per cent, the parliamentarians said. “Of course it’s about money, and the money is there,” said Borren. “Not even a third of the $30 billion requested at the UN high level meeting on the food crisis one year ago has been forthcoming, when $20 trillion have gone to the corporate bailout and the banks...they have chosen to desperately bail out an economic system that we all agree is broken.”

Experts tell G-8 leaders to allocate more money for gender issues

**SABINA ZACCARO in ROME**

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**Ban on Burma**

**BANGKOK—UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon achieved a rare diplomatic feat during his recent visit to military-ruled Burma; he broke a taboo by delivering a public speech about the lack of democracy and human rights in the country.**

So far, the notoriously prickly regime, has accepted Ban’s verbal thrust without an outburst, but Burma watchers wonder how long that silence will last. “Neither peace nor development can thrive without democracy and respect for human rights,” Ban said over the weekend to an audience of diplomats, UN officials and staff from aid agencies in Rangoon. “Peace, development and human rights are closely inter-related.”

Ban’s speech, on the last of his two-day stay in Burma, also touched on the plight of Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy leader who has spent over 14 years either under house arrest or in Rangoon’s Insein Prison. He called for the release of the Nobel Peace laureate and the over 2,100 political prisoners languishing in Burmese jails. “Aung San Suu Kyi must be allowed to participate in the political process without further delay,” Ban said after being denied a chance to meet the 64-year-old Suu Kyi, currently being held in the Insein Prison.

This is required for the current UN engagement to achieve political reform in Burma, say human rights groups that have exposed abuse in a country that has been under the grip of successive military regimes since a 1962 coup.
Sam Kang Li came to Kathmandu to work at Nepali Times as a photojournalism intern from Singapore’s Nanyang University in December 2007. In the next six months, many of his photographs appeared in this paper. Last week, three of those pictures won awards in the photojournalism category of the Prix de la Photographie, Paris (Px3). Excerpts of interview:

Nepali Times: Was there a lot of tension taking the pictures? You were often surrounded by riot police.

Kang Li: Sam: The pictures of the Tibetan protests pictures were mostly taken outside the United Nations building in Kathmandu. Hundreds of Tibetan refugees had gathered outside to stage a peaceful protest, but tensions ran high. My photos show tension because the situation is one of tension. I was more excited than scared because as a Singaporean who had been used to order on the streets, this was something very different.

What camera did you shoot the winning photographs with?

I was using a normal DSLR, like most news photographers. I usually shoot with very wide lenses because I prefer to get close and intimate, I am mostly self-taught. Exposing myself to the works of other people can be very inspiring. I think it is the thought process that is important, even though photography seems to be very technical.

What was it like working in Nepal during the time of its transition from monarchy to republic?

I felt incredibly lucky to be a witness during such a critical period for Nepal. The political leaders were divided and often disagreed with one another, causing slow implementation of essential policies and frustrating the people. The people had a lot of hope for the new Maoist government after the April 2008 polls, which I covered. I admired Nepalis who continued to smile and go about their daily lives despite the instability, daily 18-hour electricity cuts and diesel queues that snaked for kilometers. One year later, it seems that nothing much has changed.

Was not being able to speak Nepali a problem? Actually sometimes it helped because Nepalis tend to be more hospitable to and forgiving of foreigners. The language barrier was easily circumvented because I received the help of many colleagues who have now become very dear friends. I also learned enough of the language to get by.

Any other themes or subjects which you plan to explore?

I feel that the still image can be a very powerful medium to communicate and connect with people. I don’t hope a lot about what my pictures can do, other than to be able to connect with people and to move people in some ways. Photojournalism need not be confined to the realm of news pictures.

What next for you?

The nice way to put it is that I am a freelancer. The bad way to put it is that I am jobless. But I’m also not rushing into finding a job. The nice way to put it is that I am a freelancer. The bad way to put it is that I am jobless. But I’m also not rushing into finding a job.

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What can your pictures do?
**ABOUT TOWN**

**EXHIBITIONS**
- Our world your move, a photo exhibition by Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in Nepal, Nepal Art council, Baber Mahal, 12 July at 2PM
- Away from town, a photo exhibition of the pictorial book "a people war", Indian International Centre, New Delhi 14 July at 6 PM. 91-11-2461894
- Inside is outside, an exhibition of paintings by Sanj Barrettarya at The Art Step gallery, durbarmarg, till 17 July.
- In a Different Light an exhibition of Photography by Zoe Childrey at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal Revisited, till 18 July at 2PM. 2467963
- More than Ambassadors, a photographic exhibition by the ambassadors of USA, India and Denmark at Indigo Gallery, Gairidhara, 19 July at 9AM-PM. 4413580

**EVENTS**
- The Story of the Weeping Camel, movie screening set in Mongolia’s Gobi region about the adventures of a family of herdsmen, Lazimpat Cafe Gallery, 11 July at 5.30 PM. 4428584

**MUSIC**
- Yala maya classic, a classical music series featuring Sitar Player Dina Shrestha and Tabla player Rabin Lal Shrestha at The Corner Bar, 17 July at 7PM
- Baja gaja, every Tuesday at Maski, 7.30 PM onwards, pundsch. 5526212
- Live band every Friday and rooftop BBQ every Tuesday at Kauzi Kitchen, Durbar Marg. 4272288
- Sunday Jazz brunch and Live music at the Pique nique Cafe, 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. 4479409
- Happy cocktail hour, 5-7PM, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar.
- Live Sensation, performance by Yakney every Saturday, 9PM, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 4491234
- Live Band Sensation performance by Aprush, every Saturday till 11 PM, Ros Bar, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4491234
- Sunday Jazz Brunch by Inner Groove with barbeque, Sunday, 1PM-3.30 PM, The Terrace at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu. 4488362
- Nepali Ghajals and songs at D’Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday, 6.30 PM onwards. 4486589

**DINING**
- A cafe’s cafe Dhoqikama Cafe, Patan Dhoka, 5532113
- Pan Pizza & Risotto – for pizza cooked in pan with various toppings in wood-fired oven at the Rox Restaurant on Sunday, Monday & Tuesday. 4912314
- The Corner Bar, 3-11PM, 7-PM, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu. 4418181
- 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. 4488362
- Weekend Brunch by the Poolside every Saturday and Sunday, at the Terrace at Hyatt Regency Kathmandu, 11AM-3PM. 4272288
- Pizza & Pasta at the Rox Restaurant every Monday & Tuesday, Hyatt Regency. 4488362
- Mediterranean cuisine every Friday from Greece, Italy and the Middle-East at The Cafe, Hyatt Regency. 4491234
- Teppanyaki meat and garlic rice right at Le Resturant, Soaltee Crowne Plaza Kathmandu, 9AM-10PM. 4273999
- Plat Du Jour at Hotel Shangri La, Kathmandu, Rs 600. 4412989
- Reality Bites, The Kaiser Cafe, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with live performance by Giniy Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4412989
- Himalayan Rainbow Trout at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4248999

**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. 4488900
- Feel the Hyatt touch, a 60-minute Ayurvedic massage and access to pool and spa with breakfast or lunch at The Cafe or hi-tea at The Lounge. 4491234/ 4489359

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com,
HAPPENINGS

SLEEPY HEAD: Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal at a program to induct new party members on Sunday at the Academy Hall on Sunday.

WELL GROOMED: An aide wipes off a tika from the face of ex-king Gyanendra at his 63rd birthday celebration on Tuesday.

UNHOLY ASH: Firefighters inspect damages after a fire destroyed a building at Tri-Chandra Campus, following a clash between Nepal Student Union and All Nepal National Free Student Union on Monday.

PEDDLING MESSENGERS: A hand-bike team from the Netherlands, championing for the disabled, arrives in Kathmandu from Lhasa after a 15-day ride on Wednesday.

Party palaces

Two months after the Government of Nepal took over from the Baddies, the only country in the world which is named after its prime minister, is still running like a non-government organisation. Decisiveness has never been one of Makunay’s strong points, so when he promises an end to the peace process in three months, rehabilitating kids from cantonments in three weeks and uprooting crime by Dasain, few Nepalis believe Nepal. The reason is MKN has been busier laying foundation stones and addressing crowds in Kathmandu 2 constituency where he lost the elections than in Singh Darbar attending to matters of state. In fact, listening to him one gets the feeling he is still in campaigning mode. They still don’t get the way to get re-elected is by doing something for the people not by delivering another speech. And now he’s getting ready to jet off for the Unaligned Summit in Egypt the day after the budget is presented in parliament. That means another week down the tubes.

But better late than never, MKN did manage to get a 4-point agreement to resolve a dispute over the 9-point agreement that nearly derailed the 12-point agreement. He got PKD to jot on the dotted line and manoevered GPK to arm-twist Lotus Flower. He (Makunay) also stuck to his guns, and refused Fearsome’s insistence that the Baddies vet his speech to parliament before he delivered it, especially the sentence on “the president’s unconstitutional move”, the issue that has been the reason for the two months of deadlock. Com Chhabilal used a charm offensive and told Com Nepal: “Why are you being so difficult? After all, I read a speech the kangresis wrote for me when I addressed the nation on tv, remember?”

The way in which the E-malaise are installing party faithful to head key govt media and corporations, it looks like they are making up with vengeance for lost time. That’s why it does sound a bit like the pot calling the kettle red when one remembers how the You-ML moaned and groaned about the Baddies turning their ministries into employment centres for cadre in the last govt. So UML apatanik now head all govt media, although over at NTV staff refused to allow a political appointee entry.

Awesome looked rather chuffed inaugurating the new 3 karod Baddie HQ on Paris Hill put together by the Maoist trade union from extortion money. As well he might because this is the swankiest party palace in Kathmandu. The kangres never seem to be able to complete their party office in Sanepa because they’re always diverting money somewhere else, and the UML’s Balikun office looks like a cross between Pashupatinath and the Lenin’s mausoleum.

Now that an ex-royal brother-in-law has become a Mao buddy the Ass’ bet is that it is only a question of time before other royals also embrace Maoism. The only question is will ex-kingji also become Comrade Gyanendra?

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