

# NEPALI Times

#485

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16 pages

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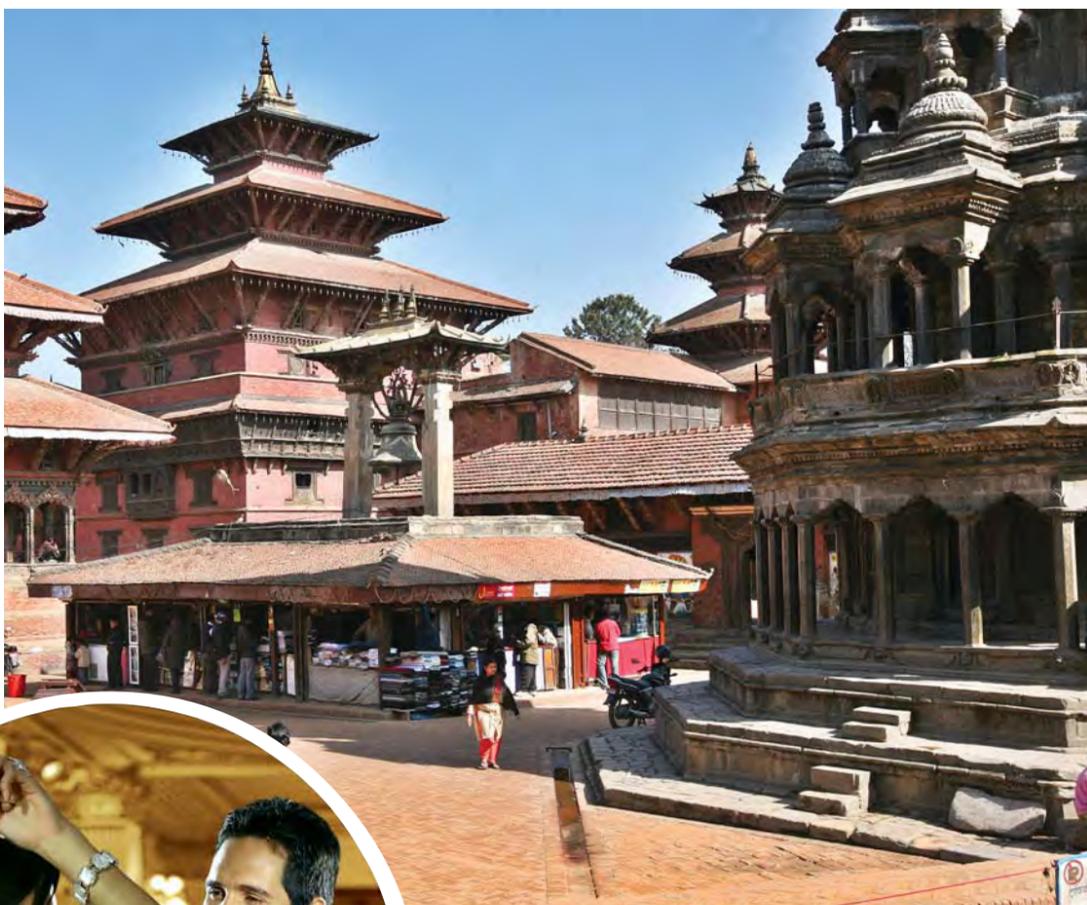
## Haiti calling

If the pictures of Haiti's wrecked presidential palace remind us how futile human endeavours are in the face of nature's brute force, it won't be the first time. The earthquake of 1934 caused similar damage to the Kathmandu Valley, and the relatively low number of casualties (by today's standards) shouldn't deceive us into thinking our capital will get off with anywhere near the level of punishment. As we remember the victims of the Haitian quake in the run-up to Earthquake Safety Day on Jan 16, we'd do well to assess our own risk and consider how we can prepare for the inevitable.

Full story p6



BEFORE AND AFTER: Patan's Darbar Square bounced back from the 1934 earthquake, but what of the rest of the Kathmandu Valley?



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p7-8



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## TRUE NATIONALISM

In the space of one week, some political pressure groups closed down the country in support of ethnic federalism, others did the same to protest federalism. Another political party shut down the nation to protest federalism. The Maoists fanned out to border hotspots to shake angry fists at India, while in Kathmandu activists rallied at the statue of King Prithvi Narayan Shah.

One of the offshoots of the 2006 Andolan and Nepal's transition from monarchy to republic is the ongoing debate about the symbols of our nationhood. In this great churning, accepted beliefs are being challenged, traditional values questioned. There is a genuine and understandable desire on the part of many groups that have historically been marginalised by Kathmandu from decision-making to have their grievances addressed.

The tragedy is that it is all coming at a time of

political instability, which means even moderate political leaders have been forced into radical posturing to keep their flocks together. Some donor-funded NGOs have now gone from being development organisations to political pressure groups with incendiary ethnic, racist and separatist agendas. Their views are now so extreme and rhetoric so radical that their political hothead mentors look moderate in comparison.

Things are made worse by a rigid, exclusionary state burdened by politicians who seek to compensate for slipping support by raising slogans of ethnic autonomy without really meaning it. And beneath it all is the volatile substrate of a crumbling economy, the lack of jobs and opportunities, and over-centralised decision-making by unaccountable politicians.

Nepal's neo-republicans love to vilify Prithvi Narayan Shah, but that king showed more foresight, vision and wisdom than any of the leaders of this supposedly 'new' Nepal. Prithvi Narayan didn't conquer Nepal militarily; for the most part he coopted principalities and allowed them self-governance and autonomy. Even when the

Valley fell after a military siege he was way ahead of his time in merging his kingdom into Kathmandu rather than the other way around. Prithvi Narayan was much more of a federal democrat than today's sloganeers on the streets.

Prithvi Narayan's gaudily painted statue in Kathmandu may look like a caricature, but it reminds us what true nationalism is. True nationalism doesn't consist in going to Susta, Kalapani and Khurdalautan to deliver xenophobic and paranoid tirades but in being more self-reliant, having more self-respect, and cultivating a sense of unity and nationhood. If we want to reduce Indian influence in Nepal, it is more important to reduce our trade gap through prudent use of our natural resources, and make India dependent on Nepal rather than the other way around. True nationalism is celebrating our diversity, not using it to divide us.

# Reaching out



**PLAIN SPEAKING**  
Prashant Jha

**Susta:** A rough road track with fields on one side and a river on the other; Bhojpuri-speaking villagers, many of them Muslims; a single decrepit police post; the winter fog; and a border where you can cross into another country without even realising it – to anyone who has travelled in the Nepali Tarai, this would sound like just another of the hamlets that mark our southern plains. But Susta stands out, for in the Nepali nationalist narrative, it is seen as a 'wound', and an 'attack' on territorial integrity.

To get to Susta, you have to cross the Narayani River. It takes a ramshackle boat more than half an hour – after getting stuck in the middle – to travel across little more than 20 metres. Like in other cases of what's termed 'border encroachment', the river lies at the heart of the issue. Its shifting course has led to the fluidity of the boundary.

On the other side, three tractors are loaded up with Nepali Maoists and onlookers

who have arrived to inspect 'Indian expansionism' first hand, and driven deep to the village. Some residents complain that they have land certificates, but the land itself has been 'taken away' by India. Others point out that they are surrounded by Bihar and UP on three sides, and have to go to market in India even for basic purchases – where they are harassed. They cite clashes that have occurred over the last four decades.

When asked about their demands, most residents present the following list. Give us citizenship, for more than 60 per cent of villagers are not legally Nepali. Construct a bridge so we can cross to the Nepali mainland more easily. Give us full VDC status so we don't have to travel to Triveni for every small thing. Build a health post. And demarcate the border with India.

Notice a pattern? All these demands have more to do with the utter failure of the Nepali state rather than grand Indian hegemonic designs. The lack of penetration of the state in its own territory; its diplomatic laziness and ineffectualness; its administrative failure to provide basic infrastructure; and the



ADITYA ADHIKARI

## The tribulations of Nepalis on the border have more to do with the Nepali state than with India

tendency of politicians to opportunistically whip up passions, these are at the root. India can only be blamed for its pettiness, and lack of diplomatic magnanimity. Instead of allowing such issues to fester, India would earn significant goodwill if it were willing to make certain concessions.

Residents in the deep south seem to understand this. It is an emotive issue, but the Madhes is not prosperous or strong enough to whip up nationalism geared against the Indian state. Perhaps

that is why mass presence at a Maoist rally in Nawalparasi's Beltari – held right next to an India-constructed campus building – was not as strong as expected.

But the entire campaign served a purpose. The Maoists were addressing not just border residents, but a larger national constituency, many of whom regard India with suspicion. They were also reinforcing their message about a 'remote-controlled' government in contrast to their own government, which took pro-

people measures like waiving farmer loans, creating employment schemes, and increasing budgets for VDCs. Political communication is all about repeating themes innumerable times in different public settings to create mass awareness.

Crucially though, it was one more step in strengthening the organisation, energising the party cadre, and sending the message that the leadership remained committed and united.

Being embedded with the Maoists illuminated the working culture and commitment of the whole-timers that sustains the party. A large group of Maoist-affiliated students from TU came to Susta, cheerfully chanting slogans. YCL from adjacent districts were present in full force. Regional state committees were activated. Party members and sympathisers provided shelter and food. Mass meetings were organised, where martyrs were honoured, local leaders got a platform, and the Maoist position on the national political situation was explained. Other contingents replicated the pattern in different parts of the country.

Whether the Maoist 'national awareness' campaign is appropriate or will succeed is debatable. But there is little doubt that it has strengthened the party machinery further on the ground, and helped the Maoists reach out directly to multiple constituencies.

### ON THE WEB

www.nepalimes.com

#### IN MEMORIAM

Dear Mr. Jenkins, it is indeed wonderful to see you paying tribute to our grandfathers, fathers, uncles, and brothers who lost their lives in WWI & WWII (Unsung heroes, #484). One of my uncles who was only 18 years old died in WWII and our family doesn't even know where he died. As our parents and grandparents were neither educated nor had the benefit of today's technology and computer world they could not locate his cemetery or place of death. So by your kind gesture you have at least given my mother's family some peace. Once again, thank you very much and a hearty Gurkhalhi namaskar

to you and the fellow WWII veterans of the UK.

**D. Rai**

#### TV BOOM

I beg to differ with Mr Lal in that his insight into the Nepali media (Lohani's legacy, #484) seems to be heavily influenced by comparisons to the Indian media. I believe Nepali television channels are quite crude, but that's because they are unseasoned, not because there isn't enough investment in media. Besides, what else would you expect in a country like Nepal? In fact, I think Nepali television channels have grown more than any other sector in the last decade. Also, it doesn't have much to do with the fact that Nepali journalists are paid

less, considering ever-growing investment and the increasing number of channels.

**Sandman**

#### MISSING AGENDA

This article is powerful and has good analysis (Missing justice, #484). International community and support-based INGOs must reach the victims' families and family associations directly, not through peace agents based in Kathmandu. NGOs have been playing to divide and mobilise innocent victims for their own agendas, not for victims' rights and justice. Our leaders, who have encouraged impunity, aren't helping.

**Seemankan**

● Ramji, your article is a missile for victims' struggle for justice. It is very difficult in Nepal to end impunity and provide truth and justice to disappeared families and thousands of conflict victims, when activists like you are not and every party is trying to break the spirit of justice. The dollar organisations and so-called NGOs are not interested in victims, but peace projects for the sake of money and fame in the market. Maoists are not interested in this human rights business because they are scared to face the courts and punishment. This is why they aren't being more proactive with regard to the Niranjana Basnet and Major General Toran cases. I salute your bravery.

**Raktabej**

# Maoists, masters of media



**FOURTH ESTATE**  
**C K Lal**

The Maoists have once again shown they are masters of media manipulation. Just as it appeared that they were on the verge of going off the publicity radar, they have managed to hog the headlines and monopolise primetime.

Ever since their scuffle with UML in the mid-nineties for the control of a blank wall to paint party slogans near Ratna Park, the

Thapa of Dailekh illustrates. When Maoist leaders were forced to take shelter in India, they had to come up with a strategy to deflect attention from their dependence on that country. So they directed their cadres to begin digging trenches on the Nepali side of no-man's land. In a country where the middle class has turned a besieged mentality into a nationalistic virtue, this turned out to be a failsafe strategy to promote the agenda of armed insurgency.

The response of the mainstream parties to the propaganda onslaughts of the Maoists was often incoherent,

counterproductive. So they decided to play along and be as spectacular a target as possible.

Journalists have since discovered that we can love them or hate them, but we cannot ignore the Maoists. It seems the moment Dahal is removed from the headlines, there is nothing to report on. The wily supremo uses his indispensability to make the media magnify the Maoists' conceited posturing. To pander to the prejudices of hypernationalists in UML and the fronts of former Panchas, all

one needs to do is call for the revision of the Nepal-India Treaty of 1950 and vociferously oppose 'expansionist' encroachments at Susta and Maheshpur. In fact, Dahal probably overdid his 'dialogue with masters' rhetoric.

More useful has been the reported rift between Dahal and his alter ego Baburam Bhattarai. No matter whose side the media takes, the Maoists reap the publicity benefit.

The best way to counter

Maoist propaganda is to deny them the oxygen of publicity. Even when Dahal's buffoonery is ridiculed in print, he still emerges a winner in front of his core constituency – the masses in the countryside that deeply resent the holier-than-thou attitude of the urban middle class. In the art of deception, the Maoists have proved that they have no equals in Nepal. ■

## All publicity is good publicity for the Maoist propagandists

Maoists have dominated media coverage. The favourable press that the most violent political group in Nepal's modern history continues to get is a mystery worthy of exploration by media studies scholars.

When they began their violent campaign in the mid-mountains, the Maoists had little access to the mainstream media. The commentariat in Kathmandu bristled with UML-types who would jump at any chance to attack the NC. The idea of Nepali nationalism was still based on kneejerk anti-Indian rhetoric. The Maoist media strategy took advantage of these absurdities of the popular press.

The Narayanhiti Massacre provided the Maoists with an opening to run their disinformation campaign. The press, including the most popular Nepali daily of the time, became their mouthpieces. With the escalation of armed conflict, the Maoists forced the media to do their bidding. Those that dared to hold independent views were threatened, attacked or killed, as the case of Dekendra

limp and self-defeating. Commentators close to NC claimed that Maoist guerrillas were merely UML cadres in mufti. UML footsoldiers in the media responded that the guerrillas were maiming and killing only class enemies. Former Panchas in rightwing parties were happy that communist guerrillas had declared them nationalists. In this confusion, all that Chairman Prachanda had to do was spread the rumour that Pushpa Kamal Dahal did not exist, and the media left him free to travel between New Delhi and Lucknow.

The only time the Maoists' disinformation machinery faltered was when they joined the coalition government. It did not get any better when Dahal led the ruling alliance and tried to strengthen his hold over state institutions.

When Dahal had to resign under duress, his propagandists realised the Maoists would now be targeted by the mainstream media. Resistance would have been pointless and even



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# Smarter reforms

SUVAYU DEV PANT

In recent years, the government has instituted a series of education reforms that aim to make schools more responsive to the needs of individual students. However, there are signs that this policy shift, detailed in the School Sector Reform Plan of 2009, may be frustrated by the persistent problems of large class sizes and inadequate teacher training.

Two key policies the government has warned to are the Liberal Promotion Policy (LPP) and the Continuous Assessment system (CAS), which relax promotion requirements while assessing students more regularly throughout the school year. The point is to reduce dropout rates, ensure that all students keep up with the syllabus, and lessen the immense psychological pressure that attends the conventional examination system.

"Many students who fail during the early years of schooling never return to school. These policies will help to check that trend," says educationalist Tirtha Khaniya of the National Planning Commission.

Variants of these policies are



## Education reform may backfire without calculated investments

practiced widely in the west and have shown impressive gains in southeast Asia with regards to access to and quality of education. In Nepal, LPP has been in operation for several years from Classes 1-3, and was recently extended up to Class 7. While it may be too early for a conclusive judgment, the early signs aren't all positive.

"Access to education has improved but the impact on the quality of education in the lower classes has been mixed," says educationalist Mana Prasad Wagley, Dean of the Kathmandu University School of Education.

At Shree Janakalyan Higher Secondary School in Hungi, Palpa, it's clear why this may be so. The school has over 1000

students but only 11 classrooms, which means about 100 students must be packed into classrooms designed to seat only 30. Under these circumstances, the kind of individual student attention that LPP and CAS demand is next to impossible.

English teacher Drowna Raj Nyupane complains, "I can't interact with my students and supervise what they are doing, so I don't even know if they are learning anything. With over 100 students in a class, what can I do?" Additionally, teachers haven't been adequately trained about the proper implementation of these policies. As a result, many teachers have misinterpreted them as an outright prohibition on failing students.

"Too many teachers think the policy means you can't fail anyone. But, that just isn't the case," says Wagley.

This, along with large class size, has led to cascading problems. Some students are less motivated to study, and the classroom environment has deteriorated as the higher pass rate has raised the student retention rate and subsequently class sizes. Teaching has also grown more difficult as classes have filled up

with students of varying skill-levels, since they are passed regardless of their exam scores.

The consequences have been felt outside of Hungi too. In 2004, a study on CAS by the Department of Education found that schools with CAS performed worse than those without, and concluded that the policy had failed.

"This is the most absurd result I've ever seen," erupts Wagley, "these aren't bad policies, they have just been poorly implemented."

Absurd or not, it isn't a surprise. There have been problems with teacher training and supervision for a long time. In the 1990s, two donor-funded programs worked separately to revise the academic curriculum and improve teaching practices. But the teachers weren't trained about the curricular changes, so the programs couldn't be implemented properly.

"It reflects a broader point: although everyone knows what's necessary for education reform, not many are clear about what's sufficient, like teaching teachers how to deal with children," concludes Khaniya.

Until these extra investments are made, the future of school children like those in Hungi hangs in the balance. ■

*If you would like to make a contribution to Shree Janakalyan Higher Secondary School, contact Janak Raj Pandey at [janapan@gmail.com](mailto:janapan@gmail.com)*

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**Specials**

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- **Wednesday** - Campus Plus - collegiate life ; Appointments - careers and jobs
- **Thursday** - School Times - everything kids should know
- **Friday** - Green - environment matters
- **Saturday** - Property Plus - weekend two pager focusing on real estate

## Winners

Dabur Nepal's 'Hajmola khau, Harke lai hasau' contest winners were announced earlier this month. The lucky winners were Nitesh Nepal, Sagar Guragain, Raju Shrestha, Sahara Shrestha, Anil Prasad Baskota, Bhismaraj Dahal, Prahlad Kharel and Manisha Shrestha. The contestants, who won for the best jokes submitted, each won a free 'Petful Dinner' for two at the Hotel Annapurna.

## Golfers' aid

Dinesh Prajapati, Sanjiv CK and Sonam Lama, the top three players selected from the Surya Nepal NGA Youth Golf Coaching Program, were



awarded with golf sets last week. Surya Nepal Khelpariyatan and Surya Nepal have been organising the event with the objective of identifying and mentoring golfing talents in Nepal.

## Traffic gifts

Hansraj Hulaschand and Company, the sole authorised distributor of Bajaj two-wheelers in Nepal, donated three Pulsar 180cc motorcycles to the regional traffic police offices in Biratnagar and Itahari last week. The company had previously gifted the Kathmandu Metropolitan Traffic Police Office with six Pulsar motorcycles for use by its Quick Response Team.

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**ECONOMIC SENSE**  
Artha Beed

In the age of multiple TV channels and abundant FM stations and instant noodles brands, the sheer number of vapid discussions and wrongheaded analyses about the liquidity crisis should come as no surprise. The Beed of course has been swamped with questions. So where has all the money gone?

First off, real money isn't actually leaving Nepal, since the Nepali rupee is not convertible outside Nepal. This means it has museum value outside Nepal, barring some generous and particularly homesick Nepali offers to exchange it. To be sure, a good sum of funds always moves out of Nepal each year. However, the shortage of currency is really due to the long term view and efficiency of the Nepal Rastra Bank, since it takes it so long to decide when and how to print currency notes.

There is little research done on liquidity issues, so anyone says anything they want. Here is the Beed's take: the money transacted between co-operatives is probably half or one-third of the total inter-bank transactions. These co-operatives are not regulated, so no one knows where their customers have invested. The co-operatives then lend cash to individuals who buy real estate who continue to deal in cash (in order to avoid paying taxes). The co-operatives do not require clients to present their KYC (Know Your Customer), so anyone can be a client and do anything with their money. Some people wonder if this is how the dance bars in Kathmandu are funded!

The co-operatives have mushroomed since banks are too busy focusing on missionary lending against collaterals and personal guarantees. Banks do not like to take risks, so no project finance stuff, no non-recourse lending, no cash flow lending. Perhaps, as one banker friend confided in this Beed, the bankers themselves are going the chamber route, aspiring to be better at

# Where has all the money gone?

doing politics than becoming ace bankers. How else can one explain an addition of a Vice President position in the Nepal Bankers Association (NBA) to ensure that they can do away with elections? So if you have to spend so much time converting one of the most professional associations in Nepal into a political one, then where is the time to think about liquidity?

Nepal Rastra Bank's directives on real estate came late and call to mind directives during the royal regime, which, to take one example, sought to resolve internet problems by cutting internet connections altogether. Real estate lending has to be looked at from the perspective of quality and everyone cannot be put into the same basket. NRB, a couple of years back, issued a directive to cap marginal lending against shares at 50 per cent for six months. So if you had blue chip shares or just a piece of paper it did not matter. Similarly, you cannot club all the real estate players into the same category. There are genuine developers and there are people who are selling river beds. There are customers who can pay their mortgages and



## Liquidity crisis and what more...

there are families of four with twenty mortgages to service.

The issue is really to look at whether the liquidity crisis is a seasonal one that runs between October and January, when taxes and bank loans have to be paid, or whether it is a larger, more serious concern. Have remittances really gone down? Are people not remitting in expectation of a dollar appreciation, or they are remitting through informal

channels? Has the opening of branches and the installation of a plethora of ATM machines led to more idle cash lying around at branches and machines? Does the NRB really know how much currency is required in a country of 30 million people? These are the questions that must be answered, and one hopes we don't need another high-level mechanism to do so. [www.arthabeed.com](http://www.arthabeed.com)

## VACANCY



### POSITION DESCRIPTION

POSITION TITLE : Senior-level technical and professional staff  
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REPORTS TO : Senior Program Officer; Enterprise & Agriculture Group

### BACKGROUND:

Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to increase economic opportunity, sustain natural resources and protect the environment. Winrock matches innovative approaches in agriculture, natural resources management, clean energy and leadership development with the unique needs of its partners. By linking local individuals and communities with new ideas and technology, Winrock is increasing long-term productivity, equity and responsible resource management to benefit the poor and disadvantaged of the world.

### PROGRAM SUMMARY:

Winrock International is seeking applications from highly qualified Nepali senior and mid-level component managers, project officers and professional staff for possible positions in Nepal. We are recruiting for both long-term and short-term assignment opportunities in Kathmandu and district-based offices. **Women and candidates from ethnic minorities and other socially marginalized groups are encouraged to apply.**

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- Women and candidates from ethnic minorities and socially marginalized groups are especially encouraged to apply.

### SKILLS:

Winrock seeks applications from technical and professional candidates with experience working with marginalized groups on international development projects in the following sectors:

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Candidates should send a cover letter that describes their experience and ideas on how to work with traditionally marginalized groups (women, janajati, marginalized castes, conflict affected) and their CV to [bthapa@winrock.org.np](mailto:bthapa@winrock.org.np) by January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.

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# Do or die

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

Despite being at high risk from earthquakes, Nepal's lack of preparedness makes a mockery of Earthquake Safety Day

Last Tuesday's 7.3 Richter earthquake devastated the island nation of Haiti, and alarm bells rang on the other side of the world as it emerged that thousands were dead or missing. There are approximately 1300 Nepali peacekeepers stationed in the country.

They may have been declared safe, but Nepal has plenty of reason to worry on its own account as it prepares for Earthquake Safety Day on January 16. Nepal ranks 11<sup>th</sup> on the list of nations at risk from earthquakes. Experts note that major earthquakes occur here every 80 to 100 years. The last catastrophe to fit this bill occurred in 1934, when 80,000 houses were destroyed

and 8,518 people died in an 8.3 Richter quake, half in the Kathmandu Valley. But preventative measures are proceeding at a snail's pace.

Following the earthquake of 1988, during which 721 people lost their lives, the state did begin to look into such measures. The 2005 Nepal National Building Code was to be enacted in 58 municipalities and 121 peri-urban VDCs in two years. Between 1994 and 2009, 7530 engineers, overseers and masons were trained in earthquake-resistant construction. Similarly, the National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET) has provided training to 206 members of the security forces and the Red Cross on earthquake impact minimisation.

But implementation is virtually absent. Though Lalitpur, Dharan and Surkhet have enacted the building code, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Thimi and Kirtipur have only adopted piecemeal measures. Amrit Man Tuladhar, National Program Manager for the Earthquake Risk Reduction and Recovery Preparedness Programme for Nepal, says, "There are laws, we've provided training, but if it isn't implemented what can we do?"

The problem stems in part from the lack of a separate government authority and national strategy for disaster management, such as exist in many Asian nations. Implementation has also suffered due to weak support from local administration, which in any case is hamstrung by the absence of elected representatives in the last decade.

More recently, the cabinet passed the Disaster Risk Reduction Management National Regulations. Though the regulations were much delayed, NSET National Program Manager Amod Dixit asserts they could play an important role in disaster management. It incorporates the provisions of the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) adopted by 123 nations in Japan, chiefly the formulation of relevant legislation, risk and damage assessments, public awareness and risk reduction measures. Dixit quips, "Easy if you do it, hard if you don't want to."

If the government wants to, the Disaster Risk Reduction Management National Regulations could be passed in parliament and put into action immediately. Shankar Koirala, Joint Secretary of the Central Natural Disaster Relief Committee at the Home Ministry, claims a relevant draft law is almost ready to be submitted to parliament. The enactment of this law, under the aegis of a National Emergency Work Coordination Centre to be set up in Singh Darbar in coordination with multiple state organs, will be a major achievement. But according to Dixit, it will take 20 years for Nepal to reach the level of Japan's preparedness even if the strategy is implemented tomorrow. Time is of the essence. 

## Capital risk

There are some 150,000 houses in Kathmandu Municipality, and 4000 are added every year. But the metropolitan municipality responsible for issuing certificates for land sales has not been able to estimate to what extent the Nepal National Building Code has been adhered to. In fact, Head of the Physical Development and Planning Department of Kathmandu Municipality, Bimal Rijal, reckons not even 40 out of these 4000 houses are monitored for earthquake safety during construction.

The situation is similar in the other municipalities of the Kathmandu Valley, though engineer Pravin Shrestha claims in Lalitpur, carpenters have been trained to build earthquake-resistant houses and the municipality does conduct regular checks.

It's not just old residential houses that are at risk: administrative centres such as Singh Darbar are equally insecure. According to NSET estimates, an earthquake on the scale of 1934 could destroy 70 per cent of the Valley's buildings. Eighty per cent of casualties would occur as a result of people being crushed by buildings. With most open spaces here being encroached upon by residential and commercial complexes, the inhabitants of the Valley would have nowhere to go in the event of another earthquake. The human costs are almost unimaginable.



### THIS WEEK

#### Dangerous game

Maoist leaders visited key points of the Nepal-India border on Monday as part of their campaign for 'national independence' and angrily denounced Indian encroachment upon Nepali territory. Baburam Bhattarai said internal and foreign reactionaries had teamed up to undermine Nepali sovereignty. But at the same time, the Maoists were at pains not to estrange Indian authorities, whom, recent reports suggest, they have met with secretly over the past several months. Mohan Baidya and Pushpa Kamal Dahal said they weren't trying to sour Nepal-India relations, but simply pointing out obvious injustices. All eyes are now on a high-level Indian delegation including External Affairs Minister SM Krishna that begins with a three-day visit Friday.

#### Smoking guns

Two local leaders were killed in Parsa in the past week. On Monday, gunmen allied with the Joint Tarai Mukti Morcha shot at Assistant Chief District Officer Bal Bahadur Malla as he was getting into his car, killing his bodyguard, Ananta Raj Khadka. On Tuesday, unidentified gunmen killed Rajesh Mandal, second-in-charge of the Maoist party in Parsa. The violence comes after several Tarai-based armed groups pulled out of talks with the government, which they say is indifferent to their demands. In response, the Maoists called a bandh in Bhojpur on Thursday and are demanding greater government security for party cadres and government employees. Meanwhile, locals have hunkered down, fearing another wave of violence is imminent.

#### A grudging welcome

Just days after the High Level Political Mechanism was formed to end the current political impasse, it has already run into difficulties. UML leader KP Oli said it lacked legitimacy since it was formed on the basis of interactions between three party leaders, not the parties themselves, and warned the Maoists were gearing up to capture state power. Baburam Bhattarai also said the HLPM lacked a clear purpose. The week also saw a drawn-out public spat over whether to invite Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal into the group. Dahal thinks Nepal, whom he labels the "main cause of the political impasse", should be left out. Girija Prasad Koirala and Jhalanath Khanal decided to make Nepal a 'permanent invitee-member' on Thursday. Needless to say, Dahal isn't happy.

#### Slowly but surely

There is progress on the constitutional front. The Constitutional Committee submitted its draft report and concept paper to the CA on Sunday. The Committee on State Restructuring and Distribution of State Power announced it was putting the final touches to its concept on Monday. The Committee still has to work out names and boundaries of provinces, but has agreed to grant to ethnic communities the right to preserve languages and culture, to participate in politics and commerce, and manage land within their provincial boundaries. It also envisions special rights to protect Dalits and women. The Committee on Form of Governance submitted a compilation of three different concept papers, after the NC, UML and Maoists failed to resolve their differences.



FOO CHEE CHANG

# New age high tech

AHMAD ISKANDAR  
and FOO CHEE CHANG

In the age of connectivity and community, making do without all your technological flotsam and jetsam may seem like sheer insanity. Hold on to that thought.

Technology continues to dazzle, in the process rendering obsolete whatever gadget was the talk of the town only yesterday. But

the song remains the same – more and more functions are being integrated into unified devices. The mobile phone is a prime example, with most models today featuring internet connectivity and entertainment on the go among other things.

With applications such as Skype to make your calls, hardware such as the TV adaptor bringing breaking news to your desktop, and all the rest covered by your personal computer, the concept of an integrated work and entertainment system is gaining

popularity by the day.

Not just in the west, either. This year's Computer Association of Nepal (CAN) Infotech began its six-day run on Wednesday. Sudesh Kumar Karna, president of CAN, expects a turnout of around 300,000. *Nepali Times* reviews some of the best digital devices and solutions that money can buy at the country's biggest IT show so you can put together your very own home integrated system.

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**२०६६ पौष २९ - माघ ४ गते सम्म**

# Desktops

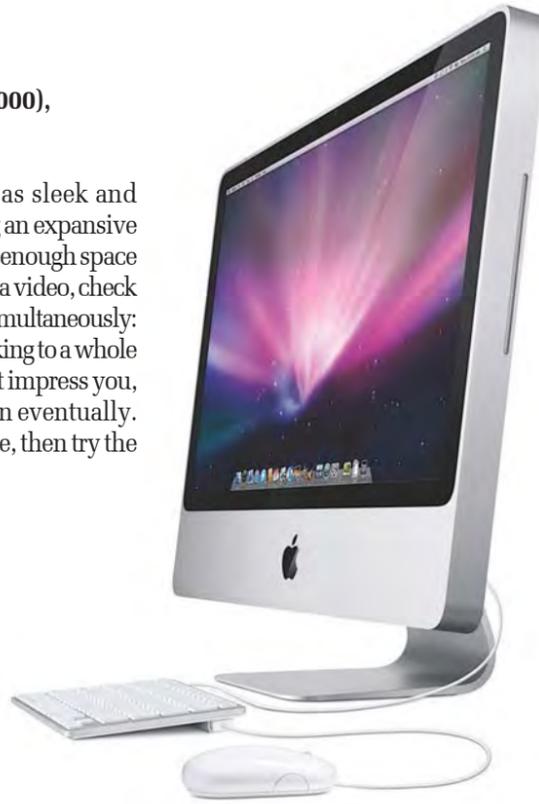


**Acer Aspire Z5610**  
(Rs 105,000),  
Mercantile Office Systems

Keeping it simple, the Acer Aspire Z5610 is an all-in-one desktop. While it might not be on par with the iMac, its price belies its performance. The screen is as big as it can get at 23 inches, ensuring enough space for work and decent movie viewing. However, what makes the Acer Aspire Z5610 stand out is its seamless fingertip experience. That's right, you can use touch screen technology to perform various tasks and commands. Just be sure to wash your hands before getting down to work...

**Apple iMac**  
(21.5", Rs 122,000; 27", Rs 160,000),  
Neoteric

The new iMac, unsurprisingly, is as sleek and beautiful as its predecessors. Sporting an expansive 27-inch screen, it gives you more than enough space to run multiple work windows. Watch a video, check your mail and browse the latest news simultaneously: the iMac takes the concept of multi-tasking to a whole new level. If its practicalities still don't impress you, it's likely the design will draw you in eventually. And if you can't afford a 27-inch smile, then try the smaller version.



# Sound systems



**Logitech Z-5500 Digital**  
(Rs 38,000), Neoteric

Comparable to the Creative Gigaworks G500, Logitech takes the audio experience one step further by indulging our lazy genes. Aside from THX-approved sound quality, the Logitech Z-5500 Digital is blessed with a wireless remote to do all the work for you. Couple it with other wireless components and proximity will be a redundant word.



**Creative Gigaworks G500**  
(Rs 34,500), Multronics

With certification from THX, Creative's Gigaworks G500 is a made-for-movie masterpiece. With a 5.1 speaker configuration, the sound is of superlatively crisp quality, ensuring that your movie experience is as good as being in a theatre. Music enthusiasts aren't forgotten by the G500, which accepts MP3 players such as the iPod. Don't forget to check if you're home alone before blasting the neighbourhood.

# Peripherals



**Logitech Dinovo Mini**  
(Rs 16,500), Neoteric

The Logitech Dinovo Mini is a multi-talented little wonder that takes bulk and boredom right out of the equation. While fulfilling the basic role of a keyboard, it also has a ClickPad that allows you to use it as a mouse. Flip a switch, and it becomes the perfect remote. The ClickPad turns into a directional pad for you to scroll on DVD menus. Be it to stop, play, fast forward or rewind, the Dinovo Mini seems to do it all. Don't take your eyes off this beauty if you want to keep it for yourself.

**Creative HS-1200** (Rs 12,500),  
Multronics

While not as visually appealing as those seen in sci-fi movies, the HS-1200 makes up with practicality and performance. Its wireless capability ensures maximum freedom, while the noise-cancelling microphone delivers clear quality sound. Call friends and family while playing the guitar or sipping a cup of tea. The HS-1200 makes conversations easier and personal once again.

## HIMAL Khabarpatrika

16 January-1 February



**COVER:**  
Extremism Threatens Peace  
Left and right extremism  
has polarised the country

**Army integration**  
Neither army wants  
integration

**Interview:**  
BABURAM BHATTARAI

**Economic Chain Reaction**  
A drop in the remittances  
that prop up the Nepali  
economy

**Earthquake!**  
Lessons of Haiti for Nepal

**CONSTITUTION  
SUPPLEMENT**  
Ramesh Dhungel on the  
relevance of Prithvi  
Narayan Shah  
Report on state  
transformation  
Bhairahawa Interaction

**Times** nepalnews.com  
Weekly Internet Poll # 484

Q. If there were elections today, what percentage of votes would the Maoists secure?

Total votes: 3,965

More than 50%: 28.6%
More than 30%: 8.3%
Less than 30%: 63.1%

Weekly Internet Poll # 485. To vote go to: [www.nepaltimes.com](http://www.nepaltimes.com)

Q. What should be the highest priority for the nation?

## WEEKEND WEATHER by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

It has been cold and cloudy all week, with the temperature in Kathmandu plummeting to 0.2 degrees, the lowest it has been all season. Satellite images show that low pressure in the South Himalaya Zone is drawing in clouds from high pressure regions north of Nepal. The cloud cover lacks moisture so will only cause light drizzles, but will lower temperatures as it blocks out sunlight. Expect partly cloudy skies and fluctuating temperatures over the weekend. Overall, it's a decent time to travel.



<b>FRI</b>  18-2	<b>SAT</b>  19-3	<b>SUN</b>  23-3
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**EVENTS**

- ❖ **'In the Eye of the Storm'**, exhibition of drawings by Manuj Babu Mishra, till 21 January, Siddharth Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, Sunday-Friday 11.00am-5.00pm, Saturday 12.00pm-4.00pm, 4218048
- ❖ **'Politics Without Guarantees'**, lecture series XXXVI by Vinay Gidwani, 18 January, 4pm, Nepal Tourism Board, Bhrikuti Mandap
- ❖ **People After War**, permanent photo exhibition, every day 11am-4pm, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoka, for bulk school bookings call 5521393



**MUSIC**

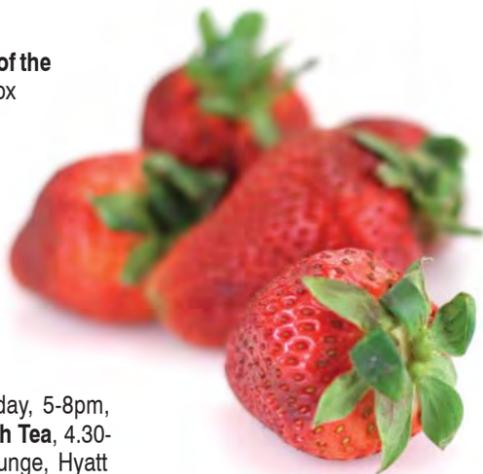
- ❖ **Celebrating Diversity: A Musical Caravan**, travelling series of concerts by Kutumba and Minap in Lahan (Siraha) Jan 16 and Phidim (Panchthar) Jan 19. Performance in Kathmandu at the Garden of Dreams on 1 Feb and Basantapur Darbar Square on 2 Feb.
- ❖ Live music from **Inner Groove** on Fridays at the Rox Bar and **Sunday Jazz brunch** at The Terrace from 12-3.30pm, Hyatt Regency, Boudha.

4489362, 4491234

- ❖ **Live band** every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288
- ❖ **Some like it hot**, every Friday BBQ and live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds, Rs 899 at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, 7pm, 4479488
- ❖ **Happy cocktail hour**, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7pm
- ❖ **Nepali Ghajals** at D'Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30pm, 4468589
- ❖ **Rudra Night** live fusion music by Shyam Nepali every Friday, 7pm at Gokarna Forest Resort, 4451212
- ❖ **Jazz evening** at Delices de France restaurant every Wednesday, 11am-2pm, 4260326

**DINING**

- ❖ **Famous stews of the world**, at the Rox Restaurant, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, from 6.00pm, 4491234, 4489362
- ❖ **Wine and cheese**, every Friday & Saturday, 5-8pm, **Strawberry High Tea**, 4.30-6.30pm, The Lounge, Hyatt Regency, 4491234, 4489362
- ❖ **Arabian Nights** for Middle Eastern specialities every Friday from 6.30pm, **Oriental Nights**, flavours and specialities of Asia every Wednesday at The Café, 6.30pm, Hyatt Regency, 4491234, 4489362
- ❖ **Chez Caroline** for French and Mediterranean cuisine, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4263070
- ❖ **Live continental BBQ Fiesta**, exclusive BBQ Dinner at Splash Bar & Grill, Radisson Hotel, from 6.30-10.30pm everyday
- ❖ **The Corner Bar**, 5-7pm, 3-11pm, Radisson Hotel Kathmandu, 4411818
- ❖ **Lavazza Coffee** and **Baskin n' Robbins**, at Blue Note Coffee Shop, Lazimpat, 4491234
- ❖ **A cafe's café**, Dhokaima Café, Patan Dhoka, 5522113
- ❖ **Jazzbell Café**, TGIF, 10% discount all day, happy hour 6-8pm, Jhamsikhel, 2114075
- ❖ **Al Fresco**, for homemade pasta, steak and freshwater trout, **Kakori**, for biryanis, curries and kebabs, 7-10.45pm, Soaltee Crown Plaza, 4273999
- ❖ **Teppanyaki** meat items and garlic rice at Le Restaurant, Gairidhara, 4436318
- ❖ **Reality Bites**, The Kaiser Café, Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika's Group of Hotels, 9am-10pm, 4425341
- ❖ **Starry night barbecue** at Hotel Shangri-La with live performance by Ciney Gurung, Rs 999, at the Shambala Garden every Friday 7pm, **Plat Du Jour** at Hotel Shangri-La, Lazimpat, Rs 600, 4412999
- ❖ **Himalayan Rainbow Trout** at Hotel Yak and Yeti, Darbar Marg, 4248999
- ❖ **Tiger for Breakfast**, breakfast everyday at 1905, Kantipath, 4215068
- ❖ **Gokarna Forest Resort** for a variety of sizzlers at Tripti bar, 44512126



**GETAWAYS**

- ❖ **Relax Package** at the Hyatt for Rs 6200 plus taxes for one night accommodation for two, including breakfast at The Café. Package valid till Feb 20, 2010, only for local residents and Nepalese citizens for a maximum of 3 nights stay. Please call 4491234 or 4489800.

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ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH COUNCIL

Living With Environmental Change  
**Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA)**  
Announcement of Opportunity

The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) programme is a partnership that brings together the Department for International Development (DFID), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC) to provide funding for a planned seven year interdisciplinary research programme, with a total budget of £ 40.5 m.

ESPA is launched under the umbrella of the Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) partnership.

ESPA seeks to generate the evidence on ecosystem services, their full value and links to sustainable poverty reduction, so as to equip end users and decision makers with the knowledge on how to manage ecosystems better.

Practical Action Consulting are assisting the ESPA partners in the launch of the programme, and are pleased to announce the research funding opportunities for the South Asian region.

The announcement of opportunity invites proposals for the first substantive ESPA call. This first call is split into two funding streams with three submission opportunities.

Funding Stream 1 is a one-off opportunity for shorter-term, innovative, conceptual development type projects submitted as a Programme Framework grant.

Funding Stream 2 has two submission opportunities:

- i. One to win catalyst funding through a Partnership & Project Development grant, in preparation for a
- ii. second submission opportunity for a larger Research Consortium grant (AO call to be issued September 2010).

**Closing dates:**  
For notice of intention to submit a Programme Framework grant – **29 January 2010**  
For registration with Je-S – **8 February 2010**  
For final applications for both streams – **3 March 2010 16:00 UK local time**

The complete Announcement of Opportunity can be downloaded at <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/programmes/espa/events/ao4.asp>

**For more information please contact:**  
**South Asia ESPA Help Desk**  
Practical Action  
Pandole Marg, Lazimpat  
Email: [paciasia@practicalaction.org.np](mailto:paciasia@practicalaction.org.np)  
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KIRAN PANDAY

**HOMECOMING:** Ex-King Gyanendra at Tribhuvan International Airport on Wednesday after returning from five weeks in India.



KIRAN PANDAY

**WHIZ KID:** Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal presides over the inaugural ceremony of CAN Info-tech 2010 at Bhrikuti Mandap on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**FULL-TIME:** Part-time teachers demand permanent teaching positions outside Singh Darbar on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

**HISTORY:** Men dressed in traditional military attire hold up the national flag beneath a statue of Prithvi Narayan Shah in front of Singh Darbar on his birth anniversary, Monday.

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# Taking Nepal out of the Nepal Valley

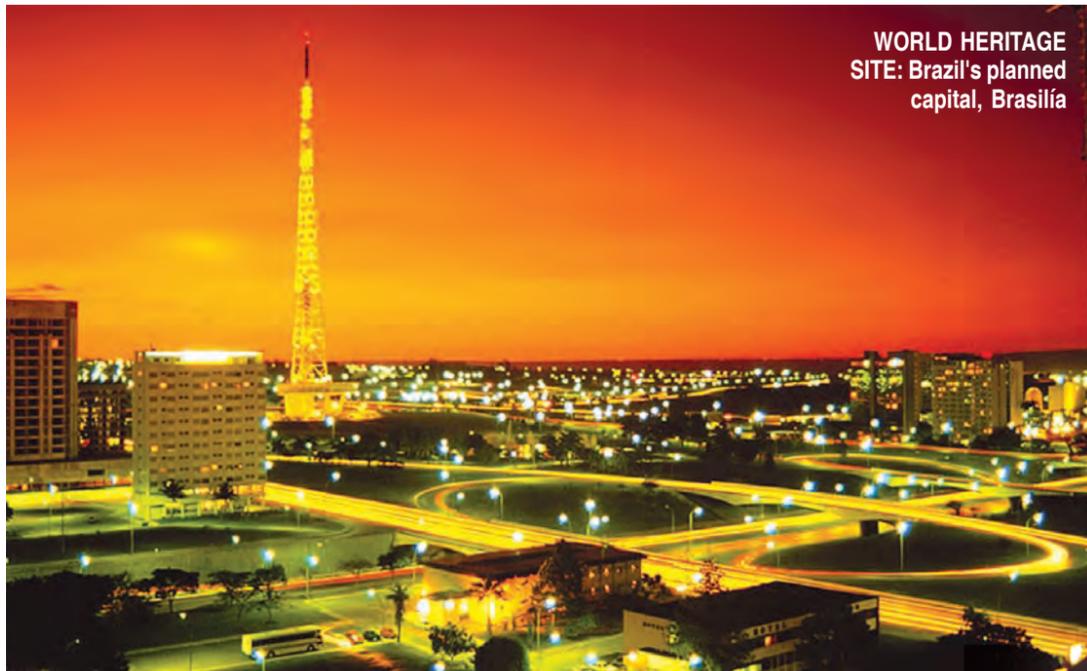


**KALAM**  
Rabi Thapa

I've lived most of my life at the northern end of the Kathmandu Valley, in the shadow of the Shivapuri massif. My views of the Himalaya were thus limited to seasonal glimpses from Patan or further afield. As a youth, however, I was not particularly enamoured of the mountains in any case. With the passage of time, I came to appreciate the Himalaya for their singular beauty and embarked on treks whenever I was back in Nepal. But my assumption was that as the valley choked, the mountains, save for an ever-narrowing window in spring and autumn, had really disappeared into the smog.

This season has been a real eye-opener. From where I live in Mangal Bajar, and cycling down to Hattiban, I've been treated to fantastic panoramas from Ganesh to Gaurishankar for days on end. They're just rock, ice and snow, of course, but the Himalaya never cease to charm. Imagine my delight when they reappeared in the new year, albeit with their nether regions obscured by a grimy layer of smog.

I'm grateful these views are still available – their capacity to elevate remains undiminished in my eyes, even if their relative



**WORLD HERITAGE SITE:** Brazil's planned capital, Brasília

## There are many things we can do to make Kathmandu livable, but moving the capital is the one sure shot

distance through the prism of pollution makes photos a couple of decades old look like bad photoshop experiments. Despite everything, the Kathmandu Valley is one of the more beautiful parts of the world. It's just too bad we've done so little to keep it that way.

No wonder then that some in the Newar community feel that enough is enough, and that as indigenous inhabitants they must reclaim the valley that through their endeavours alone is a world

heritage site. As a representative of the Newa Rastriya Party put it the other day, "What have we got from 240 years of external rule?" While he insisted this did not imply non-Newars had no place in the capital, his lament that the valley was overburdened in every respect does suggest some Newars feel this way, if we are to view the nose-chopping incident of last Sunday's bandh in a certain light.

But while the world owes a debt to Newari culture, the

Newars don't have more right over the Kathmandu Valley than any other community in Nepal, given the patterns of settlement here (reflected in the rest of the country) and the layers of interdependence that allowed the capital to prosper in the first place. Imagining we can re-establish demographic equilibrium under the guise of an ethnic Newar state is pure tomfoolery.

How then to save the valley from itself? If millenarian

fantasies involving the wholesale inundation of the valley seem far-fetched, then the Great Earthquake that will devastate Kathmandu is only a matter of time. But that is hardly a premise on which to plan a new Kathmandu.

Shall we then wait for federalism to relieve the valley of its status as the hub of all Nepali endeavours? It's hard to imagine designating provincial capitals will achieve much beyond creating more levels of administration, and buildings in which to house them across the nation. Kathmandu will still remain the federal capital,

Is this the problem, then? From 1950 to 1990, 13 countries in Latin America, Africa and the former Soviet Union moved their capitals. Even the Indian capital moved from Calcutta to Delhi in 1911. Why not Nepal?

The rationales for such expensive and risky strategies, as assistant professor of political science at Southern Illinois University Edward Schatz explains, usually stem from nation-building efforts (particularly in post-colonial situations), economic and administrative justifications, or the whims of dictators. Taking Nepal out of the Nepal Valley doesn't quite fit that bill, but that in itself doesn't preclude taking the leap. Has anyone seriously considered moving the capital of the federal republic of New Nepal?

Rome wasn't built in a day. A new capital for Nepal won't materialise overnight, either. But if we don't even begin to talk about it, we may be missing out on a double whammy: the chance to throw the Kathmandu Valley a lifeline, and the chance to give another city a shot at the future. Any takers? 🇳🇵

# Minding our manners



**NEPALI PAN**  
Subodh Rana

There is an anecdotal story of a Western salesman coming to Nepal and showing his wares to prospective buyers. Every time he asked whether they liked something, the Nepalis would shake their heads from side to side.

The salesman soon left very disappointed, never knowing that the Nepalis were completely happy with what they were seeing and their appreciative headshakes meant, "Yes, we like it!" Culture Shock Nepal is littered with such miscues whereby our mannerisms and manners (or lack thereof) serve to disorient, confound or offend outsiders... or vice versa.

Westerners are often alarmed by the habit of Nepalis sticking their tongues out like the goddess Kali destroying the demon Mahisasura, especially if they have been chewing pan. They need not be: it is a simple expression of shock intermingling with relief indicating that a big calamity was averted at the last minute.

In the old days when one sneezed, someone would exclaim "Narayan" to invoke the gods' blessings against a killer flu. It's still pretty common to see people blowing on their fingers religiously if they inadvertently touch their throat (or insisting, if they touch someone else's throat, that the person blow on the offending fingers), thinking this will prevent goitre. And the one I still haven't

## The twain may never meet, but the belching has got to stop



been able to figure out is the snapping of fingers every time someone yawns.

Foreigners riding cabs must notice the number of times the driver touches his forehead with his fingers as he passes wayside shrines or crosses streams and rivers. It is a flying salute to the gods, an acknowledgement of his holy presence en route. It is also a means of achieving quick oneness with divinity before Kathmandu's traffic trials usher in the devil's own sanguinary thoughts.

The slapstick humour of Nepalis can be sometimes annoying to outsiders. We laugh at everything. People even laugh if you nearly mow them down in the chaotic streets of

Kathmandu (although if you do, passersby will set fire to your car these days). No, they are not taunting you, they are admitting guilt for having broken the rules, shame for having put oneself in such a tight spot in the first place.

Foreigners visiting our dignitaries in their offices are aghast at the ubiquitous Chinese bath towel with bold floral prints draped behind them on the chair. They are there possibly to prevent sweat from ruining the original upholstery bought with tax payers' money. Or is it because of the lack of a hook in the toilet?

My friend Mikhail Vinding, who was in the Danish Foreign Service at the time of King Birendra's state visit to Denmark, tells of how at a reception a waiter was about to hand over a glass of wine to His Majesty with his left hand. Vinding quickly intervened and took the glass in his own 'right' hand before serving the king. A faux pas was averted, although having been educated in the west we don't really know if Birendra would have really taken offence.

Rules of etiquette also change with time. At a restaurant you may still be rudely surprised by a loud belch emanating from a nearby table as a diner broadcasts his compliments to the chef. We love eating dal-bhat with our fingers, though like belching, you won't see (or hear) many urban Nepalis doing so publicly these days. I for one stick to spoons because I eat twice as much when I use my fingers.

But there is one breach of table manners that really gets me, and that's our loud slurping when we Nepalis take soup or tea, and our habit of eating with our mouths open. It's fine at home, but could we try not to export such Nepalpan to international conferences? 🇳🇵

*Dedicated to Fr James J Donnelly, SJ (1929-2009) and his Brown Bomber.*

# Traffic travails



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY



DEWAN RAI

**Y**ou don't need to be an expert to see that traffic congestion in Kathmandu is bad. Vehicles clog narrow roads, microbus drivers stop anywhere they want, and traffic police rarely make themselves useful. But without an integrated plan to address traffic problems across the valley's three districts and various traffic regulation agencies, a solution may be beyond our reach.

Under the Local Self Governance Act 1999, local bodies planned and implemented policies independently, according to the needs of their localities. The arrangement served the political parties well, since it enabled them to get votes more easily, but an integrated plan was politically unfeasible. The costs of this arrangement are rapidly

climbing as traffic gets worse. It's clear what needs to be done.

## A lack of coordination among plans and government agencies has contributed to the valley's traffic chaos

The number of cars has increased 10-fold over the last 15 years – largely because banks have had few other viable investment opportunities amid deteriorating security conditions – and only 126km of new roads have been constructed.

According to the Department of Transport Management, there are 444,700 registered vehicles in Bagmati zone, most in the Kathmandu Valley.

And things will only get worse. "If it takes half an hour to cross the Bagmati bridge now, you won't be able to cross the bridge in three years time," says David Irwin, team leader of the Kathmandu Sustainable Urban Transport Project, funded by the Asian Development Bank.

The project will assist the government in defining a sustainable urban transport vision to be progressively implemented over the years to come. It focuses on the dramatic increase in private vehicles in the capital.

"Construction of flyovers and wider roads alone cannot improve the traffic situation as the number of private vehicles increase at the same rate," argues Irwin. He says improving the existing road network and encouraging proper use of roads is a sustainable and doable solution. "Acquisition of land to widen roads is too expensive so the initial solution is to include various measures to reduce the volume of traffic and to improve the quality of public transportation," he says.

The government could raise annual and import taxes on vehicles, and pull unviable vehicles off the road, in order to cut the growth in private vehicles. However, although what is necessary is clear, implementation will be difficult because of a lack of

coordination among traffic monitoring and regulating agencies. The responsibilities are split up among various groups that don't communicate adequately with one another: the Department of Roads repairs city roads, the Department of Transport Management registers and regulates vehicles, the Traffic Police supervise and enforce

traffic regulations, the Ministry of Environment monitors air quality and the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction is responsible for strategic roads and city planning while municipalities construct local roads and parking spaces.

"Naturally, it will be difficult to coordinate with departments that are under different ministries," says Deputy Inspector General of Police Binod Singh at the Metropolitan Traffic Police Division. The Traffic Police fall under the home ministry.

Singh gives an example of the problems this interconnectedness gives rise to: while it is necessary to revise traffic acts and regulations in order to increase penalties for traffic offenders, this is impossible unless roads are widened first, which the Traffic Police don't have the power to do.

It's also unclear how to regulate traffic under a federal framework. Take the Outer Ring Road project, which was first tabled in 2005. While the planned road would be 50m wide, the government must also acquire 250m of land on either side through land pooling.

The project has prepared a detailed report for 32km out of 72km and land pooling began across a 6.5km stretch between Chobhar and Satungal. But the Newa Rajya Committee, a federalist group, opposes the idea, calling it a 'ploy to replace locals with outside people.'

"They asked us to postpone the project until the issue of federalism is finalised," says Dilip Bhandari, Senior Divisional Engineer of the project, "We will soon hold a meeting with representatives of political parties, locals and stakeholders."

Until the powers that be discover a unified theory of traffic management, it seems Point A to Point B will be a long way from just that. 

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नेपाल सरकार  
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय  
सूचना विभाग



# The real fast track

RATNA SANSAR SHRESTHA

It takes about six to seven hours to reach Pathlaiya in the Tarai from Kathmandu, a distance of under 70 kilometres as the crow flies. Although Pathlaiya lies due south of the capital, we detour over 100km to the west to Mugling before heading back east through Narayangarh to reach Pathlaiya. No wonder, then, that the idea of a fast track road has been mooted for some time.

The debate got off to a rather ludicrous start, with some proposing connecting Hetauda to Kathmandu through a set of tunnels. Besides tunneling being exorbitantly costly and dangerous given Nepal's fragile geology, it would have been a veritable death trap with the quality of vehicles that ply our nation's roads. This 'tunnel vision' was then supplanted by the proposal to build a fast track road following a feasibility study by the Asian Development Bank.

The hype and assumptions surrounding the North-South Fast Track Project, however, have obscured a much more appealing and sensible option – an electric train service linking Kathmandu to the Tarai.

The first assumption here is that a fast track road really will be fast. But with design speeds of 80km/h (50 km/h in mountainous terrain), it doesn't even come close to magnetic levitation trains that can reach 581 km/h. High-speed trains have already been

in use for a long time: bullet trains in Japan average 262 km/h in Japan, and the train from Beijing to Lhasa reaches 160 km/h on the plains, slowing down to 120 km/h in the Qinghai-Tibet section. Faster and more cost-effective technology is already available in our neighbourhood.

According to a 1995 U.S. Government estimate, the energy cost of transporting a ton of freight a distance of one kilometre averages 337 kJ for water, 221 kJ for rail, and 2000 kJ for trucks. It doesn't make sense for Nepal to go for wheel-based transport when

Trading this carbon offset could be worth US\$3.2 million a year.

Electric trains may seem like a fantasy for a country as impoverished as Nepal. But while the North-South Fast Track Project is estimated to cost Rs 69.11 billion, a study conducted by Shankar Nath Rimal and Birendra Keshari Pokhrel reveals an electric train service connecting Kathmandu to the Tarai would cost just Rs 18.46 billion. While the investment of Rs 69 billion would be just for the road, the costs of the electric train service are inclusive of the track and the

increased costs and risks, electric train capacity enhancement can be achieved by simply increasing the frequency of train services or the number of trains.

What of the customers who are to benefit from the fast track road? Both options save on commuter and cargo time, though electric trains will (as noted above) be significantly faster. Alas, it's assumed road commuters will continue to pay the same fares as now, although service providers will save substantially. It is estimated electric train fares will cost just a third of bus fares. With in-train restaurants and restrooms, travel need no longer be disrupted, and even wireless internet could be installed. And as we know too well, inaugurations of new roads are inevitably followed by a rise in accidents. With electric trains, urbanisation can be planned around stations and driver error can be reduced with automation and remote control, reducing the frequency of accidents.

Nepal's future is electric, given the comparative advantage we have in hydroelectric potential. Unfortunately for us, every time a reference is made to transportation, our policymakers and bureaucrats start digging up roads. We are building a new Nepal and an oxymoron such as the North-South Fast Track Project doesn't deserve the attention it has received, let alone the funding.

Ratna Sansar Shrestha is a senior water resource analyst  
www.ratnasansar.blogspot.com

## We should be looking to electric trains, not another road, to solve our transport problems

we don't produce a drop of fossil fuel, and trains running on fossil fuels could save 89% in costs. Electric trains are an even better proposition, as they would draw on our hydro-potential, reduce our dependency, and eliminate the annual fossil fuel consumption on the Kathmandu-Pathlaiya route of 120,000 kilolitres.

The knock-on effects of cutting fossil fuel consumption, quite apart from the obvious benefits to health and productivity, would be that Nepal would curtail its emissions of greenhouse gases by 321,000 tons a year.

rolling stock to run on it. The savings of Rs 50 billion could be invested in setting up electric train services in other areas.

Land use is another point on which electric trains trump roads. The fast track road would have four lanes with a width of 21 metres. Encroachment on this scale in hilly terrain is inadvisable in view of the high potential for landslides. But a track for an electric train would only be 11 metres wide. Besides, capacity enhancement means totally different things for roads and rail tracks. While roads can only be widened, with

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# Dahal and Bhattarai's journey together

Ganga BC in *Kantipur*, 9 January

कान्तिपुर

"I would rather die than surrender to injustice," is Baburam Bhattarai's motto. Party chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal's allegation that Bhattarai is subservient to India has challenged the latter to defend that belief.

Dahal was accompanied by Bhattarai to his first public appearance in Baluwatar, just before the signing of the CPA, and they have appeared side by side many times since. They even lived together for some time in Nayabajar after they came overground. Their camaraderie was likened to that between a nail and flesh. Over time, a split appeared between this nail and flesh into which Dahal has now sprinkled salt with his assertions that Bhattarai is India's candidate for prime minister. Now it is said they barely talk to each other, and that the clash has more to do with personality than principle.

Here's a brief timeline of the Dahal-Bhattarai relationship:

**1981:** The leaders meet for the first time at the All Nepal Bharat Students Association conference in Benares.

**1984:** They are acquainted politically at the National Conference of the CPN Fourth Convention, though they are in different parties.

**1992:** Dahal becomes the chairman and Bhattarai the coordinator of the electoral front of a new party, the United People's Front.

**1995:** Bhattarai works as a senior leader during the 'people's movement'. Dahal is the chairman and Bhattarai the coordinator of the parallel government.

**1998:** Differences surface regarding the division of authority at the fourth extensive meeting of the party.

**2004:** Bhattarai is labelled an anarchist for a note of dissent he put to the central committee meeting. He is under PLA house arrest for a year.

**2006:** Both leaders appear together publicly in Baluwatar.

# Maoist splits

Khem Bhandari in *Nepal*, 7 January

नेपाल

The Khanna garment exposé has brought party splits to the fore. Mohan Baidya is said to have control over the organisation but Baburam Bhattarai has the vision to lead the party in the right direction. Pushpa Kamal Dahal keeps

shifting his position to play one against another. He does it well. Having successfully portrayed Bhattarai as subservient to India, he managed to get his name put forward for the post of PM at the central committee meeting. This is how he finds an acceptable position between the factions of Baidya and Bhattarai. The politburo is split as follows:

## Mohan Baidya faction

Ram Bahadur Thapa  
Chandra Prakash Gajurel  
Amik Sherchan  
Krishna Bahadur Mahara  
Bed Prakash Gurung  
Netra Bikram Chand  
Hitman Shakya  
Narayan Sharma  
Hari Bhakta Kandel  
Pampha Bhusal  
Lokendra Bista Magar  
Kul Prasad KC  
Khadga Bahadur Biswakarma  
Dharmendra Bastola  
Indra Mohan Sigdel  
Lila Mani Pokharel  
Ninu Chapagain  
Swanam Saathi  
Bishwanath Shah

## Pushpa Kamal Dahal faction

Narayan Kaji Shrestha  
Posta Bahadur Bogati  
Dina Nath Sharma  
Giriraj Mani Pokharel  
Agni Prasad Sapkota  
Haribol Gajurel  
Shakti Bahadur Basnet  
Hemant Prakash Oli  
Gopal Kiranti  
Hit Raj Pandey  
Lekh Raj Bhatta  
Dil Bahadur Shrestha  
Nanda Kishor Pun  
Bhim Prasad Gautam  
Bishwa Bhakta Dulal

## Baburam Bhattarai faction

Barsaman Pun  
Top Bahadur Rayamajhi  
Hisila Yami  
Debendra Poudel  
Chandra Prakash Khanal  
Ram Karki  
Janardan Sharma



KIRAN PANDAY

# Dispensing disharmony

Letter to the editor in *Sanibar Nagarik*, 12 January

नागरिक

Even educated people can be brainwashed into ethnic chauvinism, as proven at a program in Sydney recently. A so-called 'social scientist' from Nepal, Krishna Bhattachan, spread hatred and intolerance towards other communities while promoting ethnic rights. His racist and anarchic remarks, made among Nepalis living in a civilised and developed society, drew widespread condemnation.

Bhattachan had come to Sydney to attend the general assembly of the Janajati Adivasi Manch Australia and lashed out at Bahuns and Chhetris, calling them plunderers who came to Nepal from India in the 13th and 14th century. Bhattachan tried to plant the seeds of division and disturb the solidarity and unity of the Nepalis in Australia with remarks like Bahuns and Chhetris should be treated as foreigners and chased out of Nepal's borders. With these remarks, Bhattachan became a rotten potato in a sack among Nepalis in Australia.

Janajati and non-Janajati members of the audience hung their heads in shame. There are some who are trying to spread hatred and bigotry using extreme racist arguments among Nepalis living abroad. Such uncivilised and shameful behavior shows that we face a great challenge to save future generations of Nepalis from racial intolerance and disharmony.

Dilliram Dhakal, Nepal-Australia Democratic Forum



# Nepal founder's legacy

Dhruba Simkhada, *Nagarik*, 11 January

नागरिक

The contribution of Prithvi Narayan Shah to Nepal, nationalism and the unification of Nepal has little relation to whether the monarchy goes or stays. He was a king of the Shah dynasty but he became great because he was the unifier of Nepal. For this reason it is relevant to view him as a symbol of national unity.

One can see that steps are being taken to fragment the land he unified. Nepali society is under threat from those who are sowing the seeds of ethnic discord. At this time it is appropriate to honour the legacy of Prithvi Narayan Shah.

There are those who say that Prithvi Narayan Shah only achieved a geographical unification, and that true national consciousness that incorporates all ethnicities and languages for a 'New Nepal' is now being led by the Nepali people. Presumably these people feel proud of being Nepali. If this is the case, then why is it so difficult to honour the founder of the nation? Honouring Prithvi Narayan Shah doesn't make one a royalist. Nepalis should not be afraid or embarrassed to honour the founder of Nepal.

We need to strive towards social, cultural and religious equality, but also keep history in mind. Those who aim for the former by apportioning ethnic states to different groups, without understanding history, will actually weaken the Nepali identity. Attacking history and destroying statues of Prithvi Narayan Shah will not benefit republicanism, nor will it bring about social equality and inclusion. Rather, it will incur a politics of revenge and give control to New Jangbahadurs only interested in power.



DAMBAR K SHRESTHA

## “Maoists bypassed CA”

Rakam Chemjong, Minister of Peace and Reconstruction, UML

### What's the CA up to?

Meetings are going on but they are behind schedule, largely because of political disagreement. Street protests by the Maoists for 'civilian supremacy' have violated the CPA. This has diluted the CA's necessity and purpose.

### The Maoists unilaterally declared autonomous provinces. What's the purpose of the Committee on State Restructuring now?

If the Maoists are going to make such declarations, then forget the committee, what's the purpose of the entire CA? The Maoists should just say that they're walking a different line, that the CA is unnecessary. They don't say that, but their actions do. Their ambiguous conduct puts the CA and constitution-writing process at risk.

### What is necessary for the constitution to be written on time?

The main thing is political agreement. The Maoists violated the CPA by unilaterally declaring autonomous provinces. Not only that, they have begun to illegally capture land again. They are trampling on the peace process.



### So the constitution won't be written on time?

If the Maoists continue behaving this way, it will be difficult. If they don't follow their own rules, then how will we move the process forward? If the Maoists really support multiparty democracy, then they must follow its rules.

### Will the CA's constitutionality remain after 28 May?

We must ensure this question does not become problematic. Everyone and every party must abandon their selfishness and work together for the country. You can't leave the CA and legislature and protest on the streets.

### Will you still be a CA member after 28 May if the constitution is not completed by then?

First, I will go to the people to explain who was responsible for the constitution not being written on time. I could do so as a citizen or as a CA member.

# “Creating federal units is not like cutting a birthday cake”

*Himal Khabarpatrika's* final constitutional roundtable outside of the Kathmandu Valley was held in Bhairahawa recently. On the whole, participants expressed disappointment at the CA's performance while criticising the flawed logic behind the setting up of ethnicity-based states.

### Are you satisfied with the constitution-writing process?

**Dal Bahadur Thapa (Nepal Magar Association):** The CA members should not have been given dual responsibility for parliament and the CA; that would have prevented them from indulging in power games. They don't act on their words. If they are not earnest, the new constitution won't be written and even if it is, it might not be of much use to the people.

**Narsingh Chaudhary (Tharu Welfare Council):** Political leaders seem confused themselves. They don't have confidence. Their misunderstandings, arrogance and power politics have disrupted the constitution-writing process. Indigenous people, Janajatis, women, Madhesis, Dalits and marginalised communities are worried.

**Badre Prasad Alam (National People's Front):** Political parties ignored the politics of consensus. The constitution can still be written only if consensus is reached. The decision of federalism was taken in haste. I don't think the new constitution will be in favour of oppressed

and marginalised people. However, it is better to have a constitution than not to have one.

**Basanta Shrestha (UCPN-Maoist):** The party leadership failed to internalise the Jana Andolan and the people's mandate. It's now clear who wants to write the constitution and who doesn't, who is only interested in completing the formalities. It's not that we didn't have a constitution already, the question was what kind of constitution and for whom. A new consensus should be reached to complete the historic task. The public should keep prodding them from time to time.

### What kind of federal state suits a place like Rupandehi, where there is a settlement of mixed communities?

**Bharat Pokharel (UML):** The federal state should not be based on ethnicities, as this might lead to ethnic conflict. The interim constitution talks about a democratic federal republic, not ethnic states. National sovereignty should come first in deciding federal units.

**Hemraj Aryal (NC):** We've never supported ethnic or creed-based federalism. Federalism should be based on equality.

**Badre Prasad Alam:** Federalism will ultimately break up this country no matter how the provinces are carved out.

### How have you taken the One Madhes Prades demand?

**Surya Saru Magar (Siddhartha Bus Entrepreneur Association):** My humble request to political leaders is to save this country first. I am not in favour of an ethnic-based federal state. There are 1.6 million Magars living from east to west but the Maoists have restricted them to five districts by announcing the Magarat state. This is wrong, and this is the same for all ethnic groups. It's not rational.

**Narsingh Chaudhary:** Creating federal units is not like cutting a birthday cake. Giving certain communities special rights will curtail the rights of other communities. One Madhes Prades is unacceptable. Tarai Madhes should be autonomous but with multiple states.

### Rupandehi has seen communal unrest in the past. What should be done to avoid it in the future?

**Sanjay Kumar Gupta (Society for Justice of Conflict Victims):** We should expel all discriminatory feelings from our minds. The distinction between Pahadis and Madhesis should be dissolved and there won't be any communal conflict.

**Sun Maya Gurung (Pashupati Multiple Campus):** It's the state's responsibility to cultivate tolerance in society. But political parties have turned a deaf ear to communal violence. The open border makes things worse here.

# “Federalism decision hasty”

Prem Bahadur Singh, Law Minister, National Democratic Socialist Party

### You are directly associated with constitution writing. What have you been doing?

Political disagreements have affected the CA. But it isn't that the CA has done no work. Eight thematic committees have already prepared concept papers, and these have been discussed in the CA. Three other committees are in the final stages.

The Committee on State Restructuring and Redistribution of Resources is preparing



### a concept paper on federalism, while the Maoists are declaring federal provinces. How should we understand this?

They are bypassing the CA. The Committee has the right to say what kind of federalism we will have. If not, anyone can declare whatever provinces they want.

### What difficulties will the declaration of ethnic provinces pose?

The decision to go for federalism was premature. And it was a mistake to declare autonomous provinces without having done this homework. What kind of problems did the old system solve, how will the new system solve them, and what new problems will it throw up? It's possible to

name provinces after ethnicities, languages and so forth, but remember, no single group has a majority so it's not possible to give primacy to anyone. That's why proportional representation on the basis of population is the best.

### Will the constitution be written on time?

If there were a commission on federalism, then the necessary technical work would have been easier. It would have been easy to end this disagreement. The same holds for the legislative system. Right now, we're seeing new problems. But despite all this, there isn't much more of the constitution left to write.

### Do you think you should still be a CA member after 28 May?

First, we must see how much of the constitution can be written by the deadline. Then, we must calculate how much delay political disagreements have caused. After all, for the first six months, we weren't even allowed to write the agenda.

# Going to the dogs

**B**et you've heard many horror stories about Tribhuvan (why haven't they got around to changing the name of this one?) Interaction Airport like the **monkeys on the runway and pickpocket security friskers**. TIA also recently approved a coffee shop in the euphemistically named 'sterile area'. Whether passengers will actually want to partake of coffee@Rs150 a cup in a room that is a cross between a gas chamber and septic tank is anybody's guess. But one thing is for sure: the café will have to be a front for smuggling brown sugar and assorted contraband if the concessionaire is to recoup the kickback he doled out.

But I digress. Even battle-hardened TIA regulars like Tanya Pascual were not prepared to witness a trigger-happy police sentry **shoot a dog** with his double barrel gun the other day at the departure concourse. The fact that he missed was good news for the dog, but could have been very bad news indeed for a couple of tourists who nearly became collateral damage. When they said recently that security at TIA had been 'beefed up', we all thought it



KUNDA DIXIT

was a joke. Now we know they're deadly serious.



To all those who have given up hope that even this HLPM is not going to resolve the political deadlock, the Ass can only say don't lose hope. As long as they're meeting secretly in the Sukehdhara home of a certain eh-

maley sahu and getting drunk together there is hope for this country.

Indeed, the capacity of our comrades to imbibe madeira is now approaching that of the pigs who raided Farmer Jones' cellar. The Maoists have been seen **tossing back mao tais** like there's no tomorrow: probably in the belief that it will be better

than today. After giving his famous Baneswor "I will talk to the Indians directly" speech Awesome, it seems, had a secret rendezvous with Makunay and was in such a stage of inebriation that he spent the entire time talking down BRB. Although Makunay is now a teetotaler and Girja only drinks milk, could it be that the reason Awesome was so keen on the high level mechanism was that it was an excuse to be 'high'?

The very next day, Awesome staggered into parliament after calling off the boycott and gave a two-hour speech. Speaker Subhas Nembang watched keenly as MKN and PKD whispered in the aisles, smiling. Then he noticed Makunay slipping something to Fearsome, who put the object surreptitiously in his coat pocket with a sheepish grin on his face. Turns out **PKD had left his reading glasses on Makunay's sofa** the previous night.



So the six-member committee headed by Nepal's ambassador to the UK Suresh Chandra Chalise, entrusted with drawing up

Girjau's curriculum vitae for his Nobel Peace Prize nomination, has completed its task with a **nine-page resume** that details his extensive contribution to the cause of peace in Nepal. Although the Norwegians had asked for a three-page cv, it seems the committee just couldn't whittle it down.



There was a time during the reign of Gyan Raja when Manoj Gajurel was so good at his impersonation of the king that police in Pokhara would click their heels and salute him, thinking he was His Majesty himself. Since then, the tables have turned with Gajurel's impersonation of the Fearsome One. In Dhangadi the other day, the rumour spread that Manoj Gajurel had arrived on the Kathmandu flight. Even the ricksha wallahs flocked to the departure area to catch a glimpse of the man, but it turned out to be Prachanda who had flown in from Kathmandu to **declare war on India**.



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