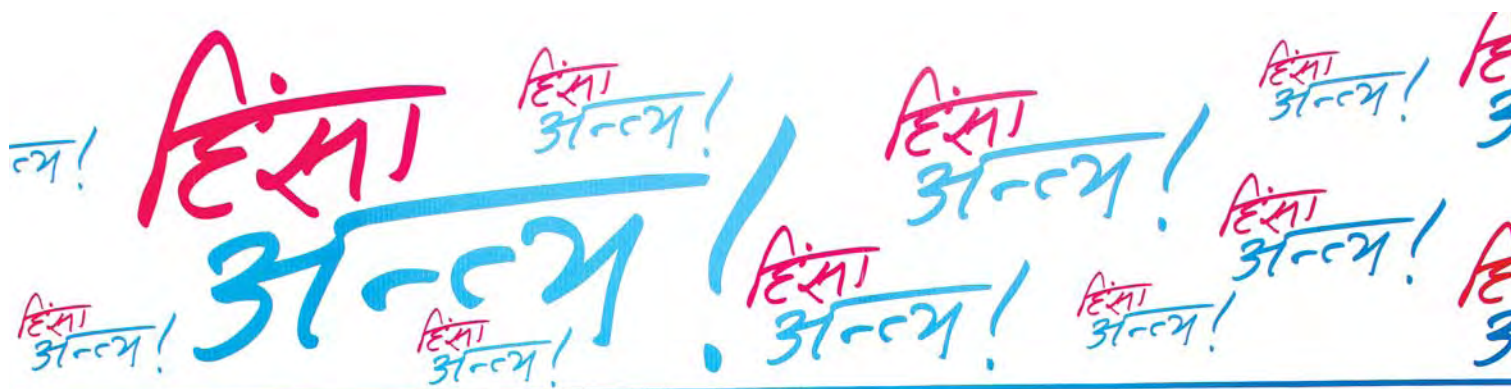


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KIRAN PANDAY

Standstill

With only 90 days to go before the 28 May deadline for writing the constitution, the political deadlock continues.

The Cabinet finally met on Thursday to decide on pending matters. Ministers decided to appoint Yubaraj Khatriwada as the new governor of the Rastra Bank and Bhola Chalise to the National Planning Commission. The UML and NC seem to have divided up the posts among themselves. Former Secretary at Ministry of Commerce and Supplies, Chalise was the head of the committee

that was to provide a shortlist of candidates for the governor.

The Constitutional Council still can't decide on the heads of constitutional bodies because Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal has been absent from meetings. Apparently, Dahal has been absent on purpose because he wants to appoint his former school teacher Ram Kumar Shrestha as the head of the Office of the Auditor General.

The CA committee reports

have been submitted, but there are wide discrepancies among the parties about their content. A new Reports Study Committee is looking at the points of compromise. Since there are fundamental differences about issues like state structure and federalism, the stalemate can't be ended until there is a political agreement.

The High Level Political Mechanism was designed to provide that consensus, but the three parties spend all their time (when they meet) arguing about whether or not the Maoists should be in the government. "The real problem is not between the parties but within parties," explains Maoist CA member Hari Roka, "the parties themselves have to come up with a common stand."

Exploiting this disarray, monarchists and the rightwing have become newly assertive.

SPORTS AVIATION in Nepal



p6-8

Pokhara's spectacular terrain makes it the hub for flying adventures in Nepal, and a big draw for Visit Nepal 2011. Ultralights, paragliding, flying schools: get high in Pokhara.

Another way to fly
 Mark Zimmerman recalls the time he rode a ropeway above Nepal and lived to tell the tale.

p12-13

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DISAGREEING TO AGREE

Reading the daily headlines, this current deadlock is inexplicable. Everyone agrees that there should be a political consensus, there should be a government of national unity, that the political leaders should stop bickering among themselves and within their parties. In fact, going by what they say, there really should be no reason for constitution writing and the peace process to be stalled.

But, as we all know, the behaviour of the political leadership is just the opposite of what they say. One stumbling block, as we see it, is the inability or the unwillingness on the part of the Maoist party to publicly renounce violence and stop the threats to take over the state in every other speech they make.

We realise it is like telling a leopard to erase its spots. Maoists wouldn't be Maoists unless they are committed to a violent overthrow of the state and its

replacement by a totalitarian people's republic. But these aren't ordinary Maoists, they won the elections through the ballot, and not the bullet. And they had to resign because they lost the support of their coalition partners.

It is also clear that the peace process will continue to be deadlocked unless the Maoists are accommodated into the government. Finding a power-sharing formula acceptable to all parties should be the main goal of the High Level Political Mechanism. Unfortunately, the mechanism has a trust deficit, not just among its three main members but also between the members within their own parties.

There are many reasons why we need a new accommodation between the main political parties: to bring the peace process back on track, and to give that final political push necessary for the CA members to agree on, at least, the preamble and main thrust of the new constitution.

In a scenario dominated by politics, we know we are crying in the wilderness to talk about the economy. But even if it is only for economic reasons, this government must be reformatted. The state has no credibility. The

economy is on the verge of collapse. The cost of capital is so high that big projects are not viable anymore. Investors have fled, there is huge capital flight. Even the investors who are here are being harassed, as made evident by the Maoists' extortion of power projects. Businesses struggle to cope with the daily 12-hour power cuts. Corruption has never been worse than it is now.

Along the Tarai, the phrase 'black money' has come to mean the premium you pay for Indian currency because it is in such short supply. Traders are hoarding Indian rupees like they hoard sugar or kerosene. All because the Finance Minister made an irresponsible statement about rejigging the rupee parity with India.

We need an urgent revamp of the government to send a positive message to investors and the Nepali public that there is a government in place.

KD

License to loot

 **PLAIN SPEAKING**
Prashant Jha

The Rana regime was based on a tiny clan extracting resources from the rest of the country for shameless personal aggrandizement. Shah rulers centralised corruption through the Panchayat period. The 90s saw the new power elite ruining the public exchequer and destroying public sector units while making a quick buck.

The post 2006 period has shown how erstwhile Maoist revolutionaries picked up the game, be it through use of ministries or their coercive apparatus to win tenders on the ground.

That Ram Chandra Kushwaha has joined this illustrious company should not come as a surprise. It was a combination of the scale of corruption, the fact that he was so blatant about it, sudden donor hyper-activity and internal TMDP politics that ended his tenure.

But these public revelations come at a time when the town is abuzz with rumours about how the Madhesi ministers are the most corrupt. Rajendra Mahato's politics is based on the premise that national parties have never protected Madhesi interests.

A parliamentary committee decides to ban the export of sand, grit and stone which most experts agree will bring ecological ruin to the Chure and Tarai. He lifts the ban, presumably under pressure or the lure of incentives from key lobbies. Those working in physical works, agriculture, industry, and civil aviation ministries have their own stories to tell about their political bosses, all elected from Madhesi parties.

These leaders are in their present positions today on the Madhesi identity platform which promised change. Their actions need to be held to higher standards. There is no question of condoning or justifying these incidents, but why is it taking place? Politicians misuse

political office and power to make money. Some do it purely for personal benefit, others for their larger constituencies or the party. The anti-corruption wallahs demand a high level of personal integrity. Those who wink at it point to the enormous difficulties that a politician has to undergo to get to a position of power, his struggle, his expenses,

the districts demanding a job for their son, help to go abroad, recommendation for agovernment contract, or cash for their daughter's wedding. This adds to the pressure on ministers, and others, to make money if only to distribute a part of it. Once someone is an MP or minister, party workers and voters behave like he has won a lottery. Madhesi ministers are an offshoot of a movement based on popular resentment against the Kathmandu establishment. As one MJF leader points out, it is rage that defines a Madhesi incumbent, not any positive policy content. There is a strong sense of entitlement without the corresponding sense of ownership of the state. The lack of commitment to public resources, or even the deliberate subversion of institutional norms, is merely a reflection of that.

Many leaders who are implicated had little to do with the Madhes movement and are entrenched in the 90s political culture. They joined the bandwagon much later for purely electoral reasons, be it Kushwaha or Bijay Gachhedar or Sanjay Sah or Mahendra Yadav or Mrigendra Yadav. Others like Karima Begum or Kalavati Paswan are products of the democratisation of Madhesi society. They were active foot-soldiers in the Madhes movement, but they lack any experience of basic statecraft, working with the bureaucracy, or skills and patience required in government.

Leaders will only curb their natural instinct of misusing the state if there are strong institutions which hold them accountable. Nepal has none, and even the existing ones have got weaker in the transition.

There is little accountability to the PM (a pre-requisite in a cabinet system) or to their own party bosses once appointed. And holding public office is seen as a license to loot the state. No surprise then that democracy has democratised corruption? 🇳🇵

Corruption has got little to do with ethnicity or the political system

the lack of state financing, and the inadequate salaries. This applies to all netas, and Madhesi are no exceptions.

In fact, they are under even greater pressure to dispense private patronage to constituents, many of whom have access to state power for the first time through political representatives. At every Madhesi parliamentary party office in Singha Durbar there is a queue of people from

ON THE WEB

www.nepalitimes.com

BACK TO THE JUNGLE

Ironically, the insurgency was good for wildlife since few dared to venture into the jungles ('Back to the jungle', #490). But the post-war security vacuum and rise of criminality has been lethal for Nepal's biodiversity. The tigers cannot be saved (let alone doubled) unless Nepal is first better governed with accountable, far-sighted leaders. If we continue with the current crooks, it's not just the tigers, we're all doomed.

Johann

CONGRESS CONUNDRUMS

I actually agree with Prashant Jha ('Congress conundrums', #490) on one point. Though I'm not a NC supporter myself, I agree that Nepali democracy

needs a strong NC but also an accountable, non-corrupt, serious and dedicated NC. It is the only party which actually has the ability to bring all the other different political parties and denominations together. It is no coincidence that when there is a weak NC the democratic situation in Nepal weakens as well.

Rishav

- I'm happy about the work Gagan Thapa is doing. He is smart, clever and knows his stuff. They have rallied around 25 CA members, it is good. But I wish the young leaders would do more. Why can't they force more change internally? But real change is going to require more than anti-Maoist rhetoric and warnings of state capture.

Nirmal

LOOKING FOR A HOME

There are always more orphans than parents willing to adopt, even if one includes international adoption ('Looking for a home', #490). How would a suspension turn out for the children currently in Nepalese orphanages? They will remain there for an indefinite time, and suffer irreparable psychological damage. International adoptions should be continued, while in-country adoptions and foster adoptions develop. That is in the best interest of the children living in the orphanages. If there were enough Nepalese foster homes or adoptive parents, those children would not be in orphanages. An end in international adoptions would be a disaster for the Nepalese orphans.

Justine

On the blogs

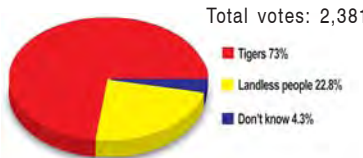
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Q. Should the Tarai forests support tigers or landless people?



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KUNDA DIXIT



GUEST COLUMN
Chong Zi Liang

I never knew how famous my country was until I lived in Nepal for five months last year. Everyone, from a bespectacled high school principal to a battle-hardened Maoist guerrilla, seemed to have heard of the tiny island state known as Singapore. “Good economy, very clean,” they all said approvingly. Some would even mention Lee Kuan Yew

(whose party has ruled Singapore for 50 years and counting).

Friends later told me how turning Nepal into Singapore was a standard election slogan. Evidently such talk was a hit with the masses, and it certainly boosted the fame of a country only roughly the size of the Kathmandu Valley.

But a good economy and clean streets doesn’t quite sum up the Singapore I know. As someone born and bred in this tropical nation, I feel compelled to tell Nepalis who want their country transformed into mine: be careful what you wish for.

Be careful what you wish for

Imagine a bunch of Singapore’s brightest minds taking over Nepal from here on. Initially, things look good. An army of municipal workers cleans out rubbish and filth on the roads. A new fine on spitting and littering is imposed and enforced; many Nepalis get a ticket and grumble about it. But because everyone is so happy about the newly clean streets they accept it and move on.

Meanwhile, employment is rising as construction workers are

matter how legitimate your grievance is. The armed police force is on hand to deal with anyone who thinks this law is flexible. Yes, the men in camouflage blue actually start doing their job instead of redirecting traffic to facilitate protests. After all, Singapore is where police with batons and shields arrested four people staging a silent, stationary protest in 2005.

Newspapers thinking this is unfair criticise the Singaporean

What they don’t seem to realise is that the first part is infinitely more important than the second, and that all of them have shown very little interest in the former while displaying an aptitude for the latter.

Still, all that is in the past in the New Singaporean Nepal. No more populist talk from now on. Singaporean leaders are just about the only ones in the world who consistently promise higher taxes and still get elected. No more petty political squabbles either, but of course that’s easy if one party completely dominates parliament, like the situation in my country.

Most Nepalis see the shiny skyscrapers, the glitz of a higher standard of living and the promise of a better life when they think of Singapore. It’s undeniable that I have enjoyed all these as a Singaporean, but being a citizen here allows me to see the other side. No one talks about the sacrifices – the lack of civil rights, freedom of the press, multi-party democracy, to name a few – that went into the Singapore story.

Are Nepalis ready to make such sacrifices when it has become second nature to take to the streets? More importantly, are the politicians ready to discuss nation building instead of spending time jockeying for power? Something tells me everyone would just spit in disgust at how far-fetched a real Singaporean Nepal would be, with or without the anti-spitting fine. 🇳🇵

Singapore is an economic miracle built on control, but Nepalis wouldn’t want to give up their freedoms

employed in a massive infrastructure upgrading programme. Again, there is a general sense of optimism as jobs are created and people are working.

But soon, things start to get strange. For one, all worker unions are consolidated into one mega union, and this entity seems more interested in persuading workers to work for longer hours for the same wages than in organising the next strike. For good measure, strikes are outlawed altogether, and demonstrations are also banned.

No more taking to the streets with banners and effigies, no

managers in editorials and reports. They are slapped with defamation lawsuits and several close down. A few editors are even arrested on the charge of inciting hatred against the government. Before you know it, licenses are required to publish newspapers, with full discretion of issuance with the communications ministry.

Of course, even in this imaginary world, the Singaporeans can’t run the show forever, so Nepali leaders have to step up to the plate. People say Nepal needs a ‘developmental dictator’ and (in private, at least) Nepali politicians seem to agree.

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Fractured fraternity

 **FOURTH ESTATE**
C K Lal

Kantipur Group chairperson Kailash Sirohiya has complained that he's received threats from unidentified groups over his organisation's coverage of the murder of fellow media entrepreneur Jamim Shah. The editor of Kantipur daily Sudheer Sharma and The Kathmandu Post editor Akhilesh Upadhyaya have also received similar threats through email and telephone.

Whether they have lodged a formal complaint with the police is not yet known. However, the media has rallied behind them. The Nepal Media Society, the Broadcasting Association of Nepal and the Advertising Association of Nepal decried the government's insensitivity towards the threats targeting some of the most prominent members of their fraternity.

Nepali media houses are united in the face of adversity, but can't quite stand each other

direct rule. Speaking the truth had been declared illegal, and several scribes were directly intimidated during the royal-military rule. Akhilesh and Sudheer may not have been in the line of fire then, but Kailash must have vivid memories of the agony of being surrounded by vigilante arsonists as the police ignored his desperate calls for help.

The threats were very real during such difficult times because the media mattered. With the ascendancy of the Maoists into the formal structures of state power, the press has aligned itself with the forces of

important issues require the concerted efforts of everyone in the business of news. Sadly, media outlets in Nepal have different priorities and they seldom act in unison even on some of the most pressing or important issues of the day. Too often, news editors refuse to pick up and develop stories that rivals have broken.

A recent example will suffice. *Nagarik* daily recently uncovered evidence that an unusual volume of money was leaving the country in the general direction of Hong Kong. In a country where capital flight has emerged as the most challenging economic issue of the day, it would have been logical for Kantipur to use its considerable resources to get to the bottom of the story. But apart from a perfunctory report, the story was allowed to die.

It is not obligatory that media houses substantiate or extend each other's reporting. Sometimes an independent investigation may conclude that a story that has been broken is not quite what it is, and new leads may emerge in the process of exploring trends. For instance, one of the



KIRAN PANDAY

But stringers in the countryside, including those associated with the Kantipur Group, have learnt to live under constant threat to their lives from identified and non-identified groups alike. Reporters have been mutilated, maimed and murdered in the line of duty. The practice of journalism in Kathmandu is somewhat safer only because what we do here matters less. That could be the reason threats to mediapersons in the city have set off alarm bells across the profession.

The only time in recent memory that journalists in Kathmandu lived under such threat was under Chairman Gyanendra's

the status quo and lost its nuisance value. Since the declaration of a republic by the Constituent Assembly, the media has functioned more or less as the mouthpiece of the military-mercantilist establishment.

The threats to Kailash and his colleagues prove that the media house he heads retains its primacy in the public mind. Threats are the ultimate back-handed compliment: people fear coverage badly enough to issue a warning.

How the Kantipur Group will use its influence for the transformation of the Nepali polity and society remains to be seen. But irrespective of Kantipur's reach,

brash broadsheets here could easily have used its Indian links to investigate whether the money being invested by Nepali citizens in the housing market in New Delhi or the industrial belt of Uttarakhand is actually larger than the reported capital flight to Bangkok, Hong Kong and Singapore.

Solidarity evolves during difficult times and through manning the barricades for a common cause. Fraternity can develop with convivial competition between people in the same profession. Nepali media houses are yet to acquire the confidence to acknowledge each other with respect. 🇳🇵

THIS WEEK

One weapon, one combatant
The government unveiled a strategy on Monday to integrate as many Maoist combatants into the army as there are arms in the Maoist arsenal. Minister for Peace and Reconstruction, Rakam Chemjong, said 3,400 Maoist combatants would be integrated into the security forces under the new plan, which is also the number of weapons verified by the UNMIN. Maoist leader Deb Gurung rejected the proposal saying: "The size of the army has not yet been decided. This is a technical matter. But we will not accept one combatant, one weapon policy at any cost. That is against the peace agreement."

Earlier in the week, the government had decided to halt the monthly allowance to Maoist combatants temporarily.

Arms controversy
Maoist cadre captured two Armed Police Force (APF) trucks ferrying arms to the capital last Friday. Security forces managed to release the trucks after six hours, and only after a large number of police were brought in from the APF's training schools to secure the trucks. According to the Home Ministry the trucks were carrying explosives, bullets and training logistics for the APF. The Maoists said the arms import from India breached the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The agreement stipulates that both sides shall not recruit additional armed forces or conduct military activities, including transporting weapons, ammunitions and explosives, but adds that Nepal Police and APF have the authority to continue routine duties.

Minister sacked for corruption
Education Minister Ram Chandra Kuswaha was sacked on Wednesday and replaced by Sarbendra Nath Shukla after the former was accused of selling relief teachers' vacancies for up to Rs 300,000. Tarai-Madhes Loktantrik Party recalled the minister after international donors threatened to scrap a \$ 120 million education program. It is unclear what kind of action will be taken against the former minister. A new report published by Global Integrity, an international corruption tracking organisation, says Nepal anti-corruption agencies lack clear jurisdiction. "There are so many instances that even the constitutional anti-graft body like CIAA and even court decisions are influenced by powerful politicians in Nepal. The CIAA decisions have been declared invalid by the court so the CIAA has been losing case battles," the report published on Tuesday says.

Shechen Monastery centennial



TOM KELLY

Shechen Mahabudha Vihara celebrated its centennial this week (*pictured*) in Kathmandu with a gathering of monks, devotees and pilgrims from all over Nepal.

The respected Buddhist monastery is dedicated to the preservation of Himalayan Buddhist culture and has a total of 350 apprentice monks, 85 per cent of them from Khumbu, Mugu, Dolpo and Mustang. The monastery includes a philosophy college, which is training teachers for the future University of Lumbini that the government is planning to set up.

The monastery also runs an art school and an archive with a collection of over 15,000 documents on Himalayan Buddhist art. Shechen Publications

have reprinted over 300 volumes of Buddhist scriptures over the last 30 years. The Shechen Clinic treats 50,000 patients every year from all parts of Nepal, most of them for free.

The monastery was founded by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche (1910-1991) who was a luminary of Buddhism, respected throughout the world for his teachings. The centennial celebration was a gathering to honour the great master who has put Himalayan culture and Nepal on the international Buddhist pilgrimage map.

The monastery says it is a non-political institution, devoted solely to the preservation of culture and preaches non-violence and compassion.

ADBL to issue IPO

Agricultural Development Bank Limited (ADBL) will issue Rs 960 million worth of ordinary shares beginning 14 April. CEO of Ace Development Bank Siddhant Raj Pandey said collection centres have been established in 150 places and employees have been trained about Initial Public Offerings (IPO).

RamroMotors

Nepal's first multibrand automobile showroom, Ramro Motors is to open in Sano Gaucharan, Gyaneshor. The only one of its kind, it will showcase cars of brands such as Mazda and Perodua under the same roof, and provide services regarding the purchase and sale of new and used cars. The showroom also has an exchange offer.

FasTracKids

FasTracKids, a global educational franchise for children of ages between six months and 8 years, will begin operations in Nepal from March this year. The institution is well-known for its modern infrastructure and child-focused teaching style. It will be located in Lazimpat and franchised by Imperial World School (IWS), the institution is well known for its modern infrastructure and child-centered teaching styles.

Auto Works

Morang Auto Works, the authorized dealer of JCB India in Nepal, inaugurated its office in Itahari this month. The company offers a wide network of After Sales Service and Spares, and since its establishment in 2002, has sold nearly 500 machines in Nepal. Within the next two months JCB plans to open branches in Pokhara and Dhangadhi.

Prudent invest

NMB Bank and National Life Insurance Company signed an agreement prior to the launch of their new product NMB Bank Prudent Invest. This investment plan starts with a deposit of Rs 100,000 and aims to help common people gain access to affordable life insurance.

Chevrolet Concert Series

Vijay Motors Pvt. Ltd. And Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory will put on the first Chevrolet Concert Series 2010 this Saturday at 5:30pm in Jhamsikhel. The program is free and open to the public. The concert is part of series that will be held during the last weekend of every month.

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The business of banda

From Shivaratri to stock markets



ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

On the Monday after the valley came to a standstill due to yet another banda from a party that seems to have become irrelevant in the new political equation, a dear friend of the Beed remarked: "This may tempt the ex-king to make demands of his own and call a Banda." On the same day, investors closed the stock exchange for two days and pushed the government into loosening up a bit on margin lending against stocks. So if Nepal is to liberalise, it ought to tell foreign investors in fine print: there is a risk of business closures during abrupt holidays called for lunar, solar, ethnic and political eclipses, and the stock exchange can also be closed by anyone who makes his way onto NEPSE premises.

For everyone, closure has become the ultimate tool to use to get authorities to listen. And, it seems, authorities only indulge the habit by waiting until closures to act. Therefore, the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB) will wait until all the people who have invested in real estate come and gherao it before it reviews its earlier decision on real estate lending.

The margin lending against shares is a classic way in which government just does something weird and never follows up. First

of all they had a policy that people could borrow against shares freely with no restrictions. So everyone started pledging certificates and then getting money. That pushed the stock market. Then they decided, this should stop and put in a strange rule that one could only borrow 50 per cent against stocks valued based on 180 day pricing and which cannot be

a decision.

There are many policies that have not been reviewed for the past couple of years. Everyone lives for the present and political parties are more interested in the short run in selling government positions than doing something good for the people. The fact that we have a weak finance minister right now does not help. As



KIRAN PANDAY

renewed beyond a year. So it did not matter whether you had stock of blue chip companies or fly-by-night operators, the rule was the same. The quality of assets did not matter, only the value did. Then the NRB decided not to pay attention to revising this by instituting a system of valuation or ratings to ensure that people with better stocks could borrow more for longer periods and people with bad stocks could not borrow a rupee. After three years, when their patience wore out, the investors started to stop trading and suddenly NRB decides to take

someone who has been on many missions to Nepal told me, "This finance minister is probably the worst we've had since 1950." The finance ministry did better during the king's direct rule.

The business of closure that was just introduced in Nepal after 1990 has taken deep roots in our society and culture, and has grown into something very ugly. How do we end this? Perhaps we should begin by preventing kids from causing obstructions during Shivaratri. That way, we'd catch 'em young.

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रत्ननगर

अब सधैँका साथी

Feeling high



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA



AHMAD ISKANDAR

Avia Club puts Nepal on the sports aviation map

AHMAD ISKANDAR
in POKHARA

Avia has clocked more than 13,000 fault-free flights in the past 13 years. In the company office in Pokhara there are positive testimonials hand-written by Avia's international customers in many languages.

Natasha's son Stephen Shrestha was also bitten by the flying bug, got a private pilot's license from the U.S. and now helps run Avia. "I have flown in many different parts of the world in various aircraft, but nothing can beat the view from an open cockpit of an ultralight on bright clear mornings flying past Annapurna," says Stephen, as he briefs a passenger before taking off.

Avia now has a fleet of six aircraft which operate out of a hangar at Pokhara airport. The Avia Club Nepal Flight Training School was formed in 2007 and serves as a training facility for young pilots on ultralights and its Aeroprakt fixed wing plane.

Despite hurdles and obstacles along the way that has prevented Avia from, for instance, starting amphibious ultralight flights from Phewa lake the company has been instrumental in branding Nepal as an adventure destination, and putting Pokhara on the international adventure sports map.

Avia Club has also been involved in Pokhara's other tourism efforts like cleaning up of Phewa lake. For Stephen, beyond the beauty of the natural landscape and passion for flying, it was the people and culture that eventually served as pull factors for returning to his homeland. He also wanted to give back to Nepal what Nepal gave to him.

"In Pokhara, the people are always smiling, representing the open and helpful nature of Nepalis," says Stephen after Avia was selected as Nepali Times Company of the Month for February 2010.

Stephen has set two goals for the future. First is to develop Phewa lake as an income-generating resource for the local people. This is done by creating a sustainable business model with an emphasis on preserving the natural beauty of Pokhara. Secondly, Stephen wants to promote sports aviation and tourism by introducing new activities and providing quality service. He hopes this will also create more income opportunities for the locals, and generate greater recognition for Nepal as a tourist haven. 

Visit avioclubnepal.com for more information.



The valleys below the Annapurnas in central Nepal is one of the most spectacular places on earth, and flying among these mountains adds a new dimension to the scenery. Pokhara's Avia Club overcame enormous bureaucratic hurdles to get airborne, and today it is the only place in Asia where tourists can get an aerial sightseeing tour in ultralights.

As the story goes, a Russian tourist brought an ultralight to Nepal in 1995, seeking to fly it in Pokhara. He met Natasha Shrestha, a Russian married to a Nepali engineer and within two years Avia had obtained a license from the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal. Today, no tourism brochure or promotional film in Nepal is complete without an iconic photograph of a colourful ultralight soaring on plastic wings amidst the rock and ice face of Machhapuchhre.

Lake View Resort *Stay by the lake*



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नेपाल सरकार
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय
सूचना विभाग



PICS: AHMAD ISKANDAR



Two feet firmly not on the ground

AVIATION SPORTS
SPECIAL

Pokhara's annual paragliding competition brings enthusiasts from Nepal and across the world

It might not have rained over the past week, but mini rainbows were colouring the skies over in Pokhara. However, the strange celestial sight did not invoke surprise among the locals. An annual occurrence for the past ten years, it was a sign that the 11th Open Paragliding Competition was in season yet again.

Paragliders with their multi-hued wings soared and swooped to claim the top spots and prizes. The three-day event, organized by Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal Western Regional Chapter (TAAN), ended on Saturday.

Some spectators sat quietly, observing with their necks strained from looking up while eating their snacks. Others happily gave chase to the landing paragliders one after the other. Over at one side, a rock band was doing numerous covers, blasting the normally quiet fields with loud music.

However, this year, the locals have much more to celebrate. For once, Nepali names dominated the rankings in the various categories (*see box*). The most popular of these names is Rajesh Bomjan, Nepal's rising paragliding celebrity.

Another popular name was Narayan Parajuli (*pictured*), Nepal's second pilot and owner of Blue Sky Paragliding. Although he did not participate in any of the competitive categories, Parajuli stole the show with his comical theatrics by wearing a yeti suit while paragliding. His antics brought laughter and cheers from those watching from the Khapaudi landing spot. "I just wanted to make the children happy and make the event more interesting," Parajuli explained.

Read More p8



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AHMAD ISKANDAR

Rising Nepal

Pokhara’s paragliding scene has been picking up over the years, and Nepali paragliders are now competing with the best in the world. In the first paragliding competition 11 years ago, Rajesh Bomjan was the only Nepali, this year there were 42, and the numbers are still rising.

“The new generation is more interested and has a love for adventure,” says Som Bahadur Thapa of the Trekking Agencies’ Association of Nepal and coordinator of the competition. Sarangkot has also been widely mentioned as one of the best locations in the

world for the sport, making it a very attractive option.

Alas, it is not all good news. Despite being able to match up well with international competitors, none of the Nepalis are legally eligible to participate in competitions overseas because the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal does not have a provision for flying licenses which is required by Fédération Aéronautique Internationale, the international governing body for gliding sports. At present, only three Nepalis have international licenses.

GROUNDING: An international competitor takes off from Sarangkot, Pokhara, as a local pilot looks on. The competition was held from 18-20 February 2010.

Another issue raised was the lack of funding and advertising. Lacking in sponsorship, money for the event was, for a large part, raised by the paragliding companies and local businesses. Hopefully, next year’s competition, coinciding with Visit Nepal Year 2011, will be a bigger hit with Nepali fliers flying even higher. 

And the winners were...



- Overall Category**

 - 1st ñ Jaime Messenger (UK)
 - 2nd ñ Aja Kumar Sharma (IND)
 - 3rd ñ Claudia Mota (CAN)

DHV1/2 Category

 - 1st ñ Eva Wisniserka (GER)
 - 2nd ñ Sachin Bomjan (NEPAL)
 - 3rd ñ Rabin Gurung (NEPAL)

Overall (Nepal) Category

 - 1st ñ Rajesh Bomjan (NEPAL)
 - 2nd ñ Sanobabu Sunuwar (NEPAL)
 - 3rd ñ Bimal Adhikari (NEPAL)
- Sanobabu Sunuwar (left) and Damodar Prajuli (right) were among the many Nepalis who won.**

Best Acrobatic Category

 - 1st ñ Damodar Prajuli (NEPAL)

Best Spot Landing Category

 - 1st ñ Moon Seov Lim (KOREA)


Best Landing Category



 - Brinad Bomjan (NEPAL)

Best Costume Category


 - Narayan Parajuli (NEPAL)

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Roadshow

The Australian Film Roadshow played at the Russian Culture Centre in Kamalpokhari from 19-23 February. Six short films and eight feature films were screened over the five days, among them the internationally-acclaimed *Rabbit Proof Fence*, *Chopper* and *Love Serenade*, which also proved to be audience favourites.

CHOPPER

Friday, 19 February Time: 06:00pm
Duration: 95 mins

KENNY

Saturday, 20 February Time: 06:00pm
Duration: 95 mins

MOTHER TONGUE

Sunday, 21 February Time: 06:00pm
Duration: 95 mins

BIRTHDAY BOY

Saturday, 20 February Time: 08:00pm
Duration: 95 mins

FOOTNOTE

Sunday, 21 February Time: 08:00pm
Duration: 95 mins

MULLET

Tuesday, 23 February Time: 08:00pm
Duration: 95 mins

BOOTS

Saturday, 20 February Time: 10:00pm
Duration: 14 mins

TWO HANDS

Sunday, 21 February Time: 10:00pm
Duration: 95 mins

LOVE SERENADE

Tuesday, 23 February Time: 10:00pm
Duration: 95 mins

CRACKER BAG

Saturday, 20 February Time: 10:00pm
Duration: 14 mins

HARVEY KERMIE

Sunday, 21 February Time: 10:00pm
Duration: 23 mins

GREEN HUSH

Tuesday, 23 February Time: 10:00pm
Duration: 23 mins

THE AUSTRALIAN FILM ROADSHOW

19 FEB - 23 FEB 2010

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

of diplomatic relations between Australia and Nepal

Venue: Russian Culture Centre

With genres that ran the gamut from crime and comedy to drama and romance, the roadshow catered to differing tastes.

The roadshow concluded with the splendid *Love Serenade*, a movie set in small-town Sunray that entertained as much as it caused the audience to squirm in their seats in awkward laughter. In this darkly comedic twist of 'fatal attraction', sisters Dimity and Vicky-Ann fall for, fight over and eventually disposed of Ken Sherry, a radio personality, new to town and looking to spread his message of free love. *Foo Chee Chang*

Organised by the Australian Embassy and in its eighth year, the roadshow was also held to celebrate 50 years of diplomatic ties between Australia and Nepal.

Rajesh Gongaju, director of the event, said that such film festivals broadened the exposure of Nepali audience to international cinema, which has so far been limited to formulaic productions from the twin behemoths of Hollywood and Bollywood.

“This film festival is a treat for Nepalis. I also hope that this will inspire local filmmakers to develop a stronger sensibility for choosing subjects, as there are so many different stories to be told” said Gongaju. He explained that the films were chosen for audience appeal as well as aesthetic values.

MUSIC



Paleti with Meera Rana, Friday, 26 February at nepa-laya, Kalikasthan, 4412169

JSC Jazz Quartet, every Saturday 8pm on at Upstairs Jazz Bar, Lazimpat, 9803160719

Chillout Lounge with DJ Miriam, every Friday at the Bourbon Room, Lal Durbar Marg, 4441703

Saturday African Nite, with African food and music from 8pm at Jazzabell Café, Jhamsikhel, 2114075

Robin and the New Revolution, every Tuesday 7pm at the Bamboo Club, Thamel, 4701547

Live band every Friday and rooftop bbq everyday at Kausi Kitchen, Darbar Marg, 4227288

Some like it hot, live music by Dinesh Rai and the Sound Minds every Friday 7pm at Fusion, Dwarika's Hotel, 4479488

Happy cocktail hour, ladies night on Wednesday with live unplugged music at Jatra Café & Bar, Thamel, 5-7pm

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

HyJazz at the Rox Bar every Friday evening and **Sunday Jazz Brunch** at The Terrace with live music from Inner Groove, Hyatt Regency, Boudha, 4489362

Basement Jam, live music every Friday at Bourbon Room, Lal Darbar Marg, 4441703

Live music with Anil Shahi every Friday with special BBQ at Royal Alina's Café & Pub, Lazimpat, 417506

Nepali Ghajals at D'Lounge Beijing Duck Restaurant, every Thursday 6.30pm, 4468589



ChildGames
7StarCare 9x Aastha
Animax AajTak
9xMusic Aradhana
Aashirwad Asianet AXN
B4U AyurLivingIndia
AzadNews B4UMovies 84UMusic
BalleBalle CareerTV CareWorldTV
CartoonNetwork BindassMovies Video On Demand
Channer[V] BizzNews CNBC-TV18 CNN-IBN
CNNInternationalAsiaPacific CNNInternationalSouthAsia
Colors Crescent CricketPlus CTVN AKDPlus Doordarshan
Deepam DiscoveryChannel DisneyChannel DisneyXD
Divine ESPN HallmarkETCMusic HBOAsia Fox History
Fashion TV India TV
NDTV24x7

IBN7 National Geographic
HeadlinesToday NDTV
NDTVImagine MTV Neo
Cricket NeoSports NewX pxtv
SETMAX StarGold
StarCricket ZeeCafé VH1
StarNews StarOne StarPlus
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TV Music India SAB TV Surya TV HD Quality

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DINING

Experience the Gyakok (hotpot with T-momos, meats and more) for lunch and dinner at the Shambala Garden Café, Hotel Shangri-La, 4412999 or at Royal Saino Restaurant & Bar, Darbar Marg, 4230890



Boudha Stupa Restaurant and Café, for wood-fired pizza and free wi-fi Internet, 012130681

Famous stews of the world, enjoy famous stews of the world at Rox Restaurant, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 6pm onwards, Hyatt Regency, 4491234

Strawberry High Tea, 4.30-6.30pm, The Lounge, Hyatt Regency, 4491234/4489362

Arabian Nights for Middle Eastern specialties every Friday, 6.30pm at The Café, Hyatt Regency, 4491234

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

Jazzabell 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

Mexican Sojourn, mexican dishes and tequilas every Friday 7pm, Hotel Himalaya, Kupondole, 5523900

Pipalbot, lunch and dinner, Baber Mahal Revisited, 4267657 or 9721331390

EVENTS

A Print Maker's Feelings, exhibition of prints by Sauranga Darshandari at Kathmandu Contemporary Art Centre, Jhamsikhel, 5521120, www.kathmanduarts.org



Literally Figurative, an international art exhibition, drawings by Kapil Mani Dixit and students of North Lake College on nudity, 26 February, Imago Dei Gallery, Nagpokhari, 4442464

Cultural Studies Group Nepal Monthly Lecture Series, **Friday, February 26th at the Shanker Hotel at 10 AM. Kunda Dixit presents the making of the A People War trilogy.**

Himalayan Buddhist Meditation Centre, Tai Chi 10-11.30am

Saturday, Yoga 8.30-9.30am and meditation 5-6pm weekdays, Keshar Mahal Marg, Thamel, 4410402

People After War, permanent photo exhibition, every day 11am-4pm, Madan Puraskar, Patan Dhoka, for bulk school bookings call 5521393

Tasafu-Kathmandu Scrolls, Alliance Francaise presents an exhibition of paintings by Julien Sole, 26 Feb-19 March, Siddhartha Gallery

Watch football live on big projected screen every Saturday and Sunday at Bottles 'n' Chimney, Thamel, 2123125, Blues with Nekhvam every Monday 1900

Cooking class with lunch, French cuisine first Saturday of each month, 9 to 2 at Delices de France Restaurant, 4260326, info@restaurant-nepal.com

Movie night every Monday night 2000hrs on at Comfort Zone Bar & Grill, Thamel, 4700080

GETAWAYS



Tiger Tops: Special Re-opening Offer, Enjoy safari, nature walks, bullock cart rides. Experience the rich Tharu culture. 3 Nights/4 Days US\$534 per person. Offer valid until 28th February, 4361500

Holi Boat, all-day rafting and Holi experience on the Trishuli River, Rs 3000 package includes transfers to and from Kathmandu, breakfast, rafting + equipment, lunch, BBQ in Riverside Springs Resort, beach volleyball and pool party, 28 February, contact Yeti Travels, 4221234

Chiso Chiso Hawa Ma Special Package, Club Himalaya, Nagarkot, 4410432, locals and expats

Godavari Village Resort, 5560675, 5560775, special packages for locals and expats

Shangri-La Village Resort Pokhara, Kids Break Package - couple with two children below 12 years sharing parents room complimentary, 4435741

Mirabel Resort, special package rates for locals and expats, Dhulikhel, 490972



Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, food, yoga, massage, meditation, walks, pool and more. 4361500

NexGEN Adventure Programme, rock climbing, daily departure, 016914541, 9841283385,

WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Most parts of the country except for the eastern region have already received their quota of rainfall this month. The valley has received 22 mm, 5 mm more than its monthly quota. Satellite pictures from Thursday shows scarce cloud cover across the Himalayan region. This means we can expect sunny days and clear nights ahead. Watch out for smog during the afternoon.



FRI	SAT	SUN
26-5	26-4	24-7



KIRAN PANDAY

MYSTIC TUNES: Supporters of RPP-Nepal picketed in front of Singha Darbar on Tuesday, demanding a referendum on federalism, republicanism and secularism.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

VIRTUOSO: Renowned musician Madan Gopal Singh performs at Patan Museum on Tuesday after journalist Kanak Mani Dixit was presented Prince Claus Award for outstanding contribution to public debate.



KIRAN PANDAY

FIESTA: Newari women make lentil pancakes for a food festival in Kirtipur on Sunday.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA

ON THE SLY: Poachers transport stolen firewood from protected forest in Kalaiya on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

BLAZING TRAILS: Veteran marathoners participated in a peace torch rally on Wednesday to mark Nepal Tourism Year 2011. The torch was brought all the way from Lumbini.

Fist-happy



KALAM
Rabi Thapa

It was an ordinary day in an outer city Kathmandu neighbourhood. I'd paused by the side of a steep, gravelly incline when the rattle of a motorbike alerted me to a youth straining up behind me, too close for comfort. He swerved and passed me, two children hanging onto the back seat, but the machine couldn't make the grade, and he slid backwards and toppled over in slow motion.

Any other day this might have been quite amusing. But we started arguing.

'Why didn't you give way?'

'Why didn't you use your horn? Why didn't you pass me on the right?'

'Don't you see you were in the way? How could I pass you?'

It was true, I was standing on the smoother, more navigable part of the road. But I certainly wasn't going to concede the point to someone half my age who was now swearing at me, demanding I apologise or he'd 'fix me'.

I should have taken him at his word when he flicked out his phone, ranting all the while. As a



KIRAN PANDAY

The Nepali character is caught between warrior-like Gurkha and smiling peacenik

passing local tried to mollify him, I slowly walked away. It was too late. Once more, I heard the bike roar up behind me, and before I knew it, two of his friends had joined him and began to kick and punch me. Luckily, a few more locals managed to pull me away and push me up the

slope, away from the raging youths.

It was a shock. Never mind my own anger. What struck me was how easily violence came to these kids, and how easily one could be caught up in it.

Perhaps I shouldn't have been. God knows I've seen and

heard of enough senseless, unnecessary violence in this country, from drunken scuffles among friends to the burning of buses involved in accidents, to yes, the civil conflict that claimed the lives of 13,000 Nepalis.

But the incident did make me wonder – do Nepalis have an instinct for violence (cultivated assiduously through the mythic figure of the mercenary Gurkha) that is beginning to override the equally mythic, peace-loving, ever-smiling Nepali? The late king Birendra, of course, bore the brunt of this impossible contradiction – he pushed for the declaration of Nepal as a Zone of Peace, only to perish in a hail of gunfire in his own home, at the hands of his own son.

There is a general sense that criminality and violence is on the rise in Nepal. Some would lay the blame at the feet of a state unable to provide security and deter crime in a society still plagued by poverty. But could it reflect a fundamental change in the Nepali character, if it is at all possible to generalise? Is it true that if we are not necessarily more likely to murder than we were two decades ago, we are at least much more likely to 'fix' each other at the drop of a hat?

If this is indeed the case, if Nepalis have become more violent as a society, it is not so difficult to attribute causes.

The conflict is the 800-pound gorilla in the room. A whole generation of Nepali youth has

grown up thinking violence is an acceptable means to whatever end, thanks to the example and encouragement of elder statesmen across the political spectrum.

Migration, too, has precipitated a breakdown in traditional notions of family and community, and urbanisation brings many more strangers into uncomfortable proximity. You're far more likely to punch a stranger who grazes your car in midtown traffic than your uncle in downtown Raigaun whose cycle has just knocked into your cow.

Certainly we're misguided if we imagine foreigners think we are all happy-go-lucky smilers welcoming them to their beautiful land. Every single time I've had a visitor from abroad, some stupid Nepali has contrived to destroy that illusion – the taxi drivers who refused to let our hired Russian jeep pass from Naya Pul to Pokhara because it was 'their route'; the guides in Bhaktapur who called me a 'hero' because I told them none of my friends needed their services; and last week, a Thai friend had to intervene to stop a fight between children wielding rocks.

There used to be a time when we studied etiquette in school. In the gnarly, uncouth polity in which Nepalis are barely managing to co-exist at present, such a conceit seems laughable. But perhaps it's time we took a good, long, hard look at ourselves, and consider if our ready anger is really worth the consequences.

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Win

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Flying in a ropeway over



DARE DEVIL: Mark Zimmerman (above) recalls how he was once a stowaway on Nepal's now-defunct cargo cable car from Kathmandu to Hetauda and lived to tell the tale. Photo from the carriage with legs dangling above Chitlang Valley (left).

MARK ZIMMERMAN

“How often does a car actually fall off?”
“Maybe about once every 2 or 3 months.”

During the years I worked in Patan Hospital, on my off-days I used to hike in the hills southwest of the valley. I always appreciated escaping the noise and dirt of Kathmandu, but one day in November 1995 stood out above all the rest.

I rode the bus out to Thankot and began walking up in the forest towards Chandragiri. After more than an hour of steady climbing, I crested the hill and looked across towards the village of Chitlang in the distance. This was the old walking route from India, on which decades before crews of 40 or 50 porters would carry automobiles into the isolated Kathmandu Valley. The air was fresh and sweet as I turned east and headed along

the ridge trail, alternately catching glimpses of villages to my right, the crowded valley to my left, and the Himalaya beyond.

Another two hours on, there it stood below me: The Ropeway. Constructed in the 1980s, this cable car system carried goods back and forth over the 95 km between Kalimati and Hetauda. I watched the cars come rhythmically through the station and then float off into the air over the fields and villages of Makwanpur. I'd walked past the place before, but on this particular day it was an arresting sight and an idea took hold. What's stopping someone from just jumping on a car and riding it down to the Tarai?

I walked slowly down the hill towards the power station, plotting

the moves that would be required, but before I could act a man came out from the station and greeted me. Soon he was joined by his colleague. These two older men were both friendly, but now my plan of simply hopping a car, freight train style, seemed impossible. They saw my camera and asked me to photograph them while they sat at the controls of the station, then urged me to sit and have my photograph taken.

“I want to go to Hetauda on one of these cars,” I said.

Puzzled at first, they then began to give serious consideration to my demand. One of them picked up his phone and said, “There's a foreign sahib over here. We're going to be sending him along to you.”

More conversation transpired, it seemed to be proceeding in a positive direction.

Then another man showed up. He assessed the situation and said to me, “These cars are old and dangerous. They sometimes fall off the cable.” The balance was beginning to tip against me (as perhaps it should have), but the vision had already captivated me. I asked more about the actual risk and continued to urge them on. The new man finally said, “Better send him up to meet the boss.”

One of the operators led me through the station and up the hill to a small concrete shed. Inside we found a man sleeping on a bare wooden bed, a burlap bag filled with plastic bottles for his pillow.

The dimly-lit room smelled of alcohol. “The boss” sat up unsteadily and regarded me. He was a thin man of about 30.

“I want to ride the Ropeway down to Hetauda.”

“Impossible. It's for goods, not people. Cars sometimes fall off.”

“How often does a car actually fall off?”

“Maybe about once every 2 or 3 months.”

Getting more information about the daily number of cars, I calculated the random risk to be no more than 1 in 4,000 trips. To me these odds seemed unlikely enough, but the boss appeared to be unmoved. I walked outside and sat on the steps, reason did not overtake me, so I waited. About an hour passed. It was noon.

Finally, I suggested that I sign a sheet of paper in Nepali, *I take full responsibility for anything that may happen to me while on the ropeway.* It did the trick. The boss said: “OK. You can ride the ropeway. I'll go too.” As the boss spoke to the operators, a crowd of about a hundred village people formed on an overlooking knoll. Cars came through moving in both directions, some loaded with sacks,



PRACTICAL ACTION

Learning the ropes

The engineering marvel that was the Hetauda-Kathmandu ropeway has rusted and died, but smaller ropeway systems across the country are helping people overcome Nepal's difficult terrain.

Practical Action Nepal is working with communities across the country to build gravity ropeways. The design beats gravity with a simple law of physics: two linked trolleys run on steel wires suspended from towers. As the trolley packed with vegetables comes down pulled by its load, it pulls the empty one up by its weight, ready for the next load.

Gravity ropeway was first used in Mustang six years ago to make apple transportation faster and cheaper for the locals. Since then it has made its way to four other locations, Gorkha, Tanahun, Kalikot and Achham, connecting upland villages to the highways on the valley floor.

“We apply technology as a means for poverty alleviation,” says Practical Action's Achyut Luitel.

An example is the Fishling-Bhumichowk gravity ropeway in Gorkha which cuts the transportation time from five hours to three minutes. It has increased farmers' income and in less than a year every household using the ropeway has earned more than Rs 50,000 from vegetable sales.

A gravity ropeway extending about 1.5 km costs Rs150,000, far cheaper than building a road that costs twice as much per km. Ropeways are also more environmental-friendly and even work in the rainy season.

Practical Action has plans to build six more gravity ropeways and the Ministry of Local Development may soon be introducing the technology to ten other districts.

Nepal

some empty. The operators stopped 3 or 4 empty cars in turn, rejecting each as being "not good". Finally they stopped a car that passed everyone's muster. The boss motioned for me to go first and we climbed on.

Ropeway cars were palettes about 2.5 by 3 m, with a floor of wooden planks separated by 10 cm gaps. In the front and back were retaining bars. A steel arm with rollers at the top curved up over a supporting cable, and a second cable that was connected to the power stations pulled the car along. Rather than hugging the contour of the hills, the cables extended horizontally, with only a slight bow, towards the next mountain peak. The boss and I sat side-by-side facing forward and holding firmly onto the front bar.

Within moments, we were airborne. A cheer rose from the crowd behind us and quickly faded into the distance. My euphoria gave way to fear. I looked over at the boss, who seemed as uncertain as I felt. We began to make continuous small talk to calm ourselves. His name was Krishna. We were 60m, 80m and climbing above fields and houses, moving in complete silence across the sky. I suggested we say a short prayer together, to which Krishna agreed.

"How many times have you ridden this, Krishna?"

"This is my first time. People don't usually ride it."

"Does it ever get stuck?"

"Sometimes, but not always."

My nerves began to steady as we finally approached the first mountain, a cut in the trees where two towers stood. We glided in, briefly smelled the pines, and then launched off into the space beyond.

This needs to be documented, I thought. I pulled my camera out and took photos of the land passing below. I felt deeply in love with this country, a place where it

was possible to just take off and ride over the hills.

About half way out from that first mountaintop, the car jarred, wobbled slightly in the air, and finally settled. I surveyed the lines of cars behind and in front, all of us now hanging motionless.

"How long will this take?"

"It's hard to say."

I took stock of my provisions: half a bottle of water, one sandwich and two tangerines. I looked at my watch. What if this takes days? Feigning nonchalance, I offered Krishna a tangerine. We spat the seeds into the air and watched them float down beyond our sight. While sitting still, we seemed higher in the sky, more vulnerable. The minutes expanded.

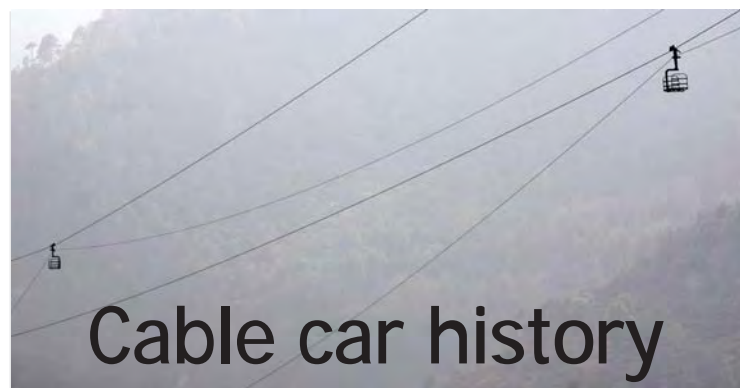
Then our car lurched forward and we were flying again.

We crossed four or five more mountains. Each passing was sublime. Kids ran up and gave 'Namastes'. A chowkidar by the tower waved. We took in the green and brown details of earth, a village house or two, and then glided away.

After about 45 minutes, the forests and yellow mustard fields were interrupted by a wide swath of shimmering blue. "Kulekhani," Krishna said, "there's a power station here. The car will stop."

I'd already been considering how, if I rode this all the way to Hetauda, I was going to be able to make it back to work the next day. "I think I'm going to get off here," I said. "So will I," said Krishna.

Our car stopped inside the power station where Krishna exchanged greetings with the operator. Firm earth under our feet, we walked out into the afternoon sunlight. I thanked Krishna and gave him a small tip, then took directions for my hike back to Kathmandu. Before heading home, I turned for one last look and stood for a moment to watch the cable cars glide off into the quiet mountains. 🇳🇵



Cable car history

The nearly 31km long **Dhorsing-Matatirtha** ropeway was an impressive piece of engineering for its time, built in the 1930s. But even that was the second ropeway in Nepal. The first in 1924 was the **4km Halchowk to Lainchaur** ropeway bringing stones from a quarry to feed the Rana's palace-building spree.

The American-built **42.3km Nepal Ropeway** from Hetauda to Kathmandu served Kathmandu's needs well until it fell victim to corruption and bad management. It did work one last time in 1994 when monsoon landslides marooned Kathmandu for a month. Despite the potential, no major cargo cable system has been built in Nepal. The private **Manakamana Cable Car** is the only successful model for passenger ropeways.

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Kshetri kshetra

Ghatana Ra Bichar, 17 February

घटना-बिचार

Kshetris have united for cultural unity and national integrity. At a rally on 11 February they shouted slogans against ethnic federalism. A gathering at Khula Manch was addressed by the president of Kshetri Samaj, Dil Bahadur Kshetri. The following is a transcript of the speech by Vice President Kumar Bahadur Thapa:

First of all, I would like to remember our brave ancestors who toiled and shed blood and sweat to build this country. We cannot forget the contributions of brave Prithvi Narayan Shah, Bhakti Thapa, Amar Singh Thapa, Bhimsen Thapa, Balabhadra Kunwar and Jung Bahadur Rana. I salute them. The country is in crisis once again. The time has come to fight for the country's integrity, and that is why we are gathered here today.

Kshetris have always been in the frontline

whenever the country is in a crisis. Nepal has become a playground for foreigners. Nepali self-esteem has been dented, and the very fabric of society is in danger of being torn. The country's identity is being obliterated in the name of ethnic and regional identity. The campaign against the country started with the demolition of the statue of Prithvi Narayan Shah. Now, the national animal, national religion, national bird and national flag are being eliminated. We have to be vigilant against this onslaught.

We are ready for whatever it takes to save this country. The activities in the four years of democracy were intolerable but we went along. But, it has reached such an extent that the country is likely to fall apart. We said nothing when 2.4 million foreigners were given citizenship, when the country is run by a remote and not from Singha Darbar. The conspiracy is being hatched to chop up the country. Kshetris won't tolerate it any more. They will rise up and save the country.

Jai desh. Jay Nepali. Jay Kshetri.



MIN RATNA BAJRACHARYA



KIRAN PANDY

Cow slaughter to buffalo worship

Deb Shankar Poudel in Rajdhani, 21 February

राजधानी

On the concluding day of discharge process, the disqualified PLA combatants received flower garlands in a customary farewell from their supreme commander in Dahaban, which they threw away angrily. The combatants, still young and enthusiastic were bitter about being asked to leave the cantonment after dedicating their lives for the revolution. While children of their leaders whiz through Kathmandu's streets in slick cars, they were "disqualified". Those who fought for equality were startled to find the reality.

Prachanda then went to Sunsari in the east. Before the disqualified combatants had even got home, astrologers discovered scientific facts about the Chairman being under the negative influence of Saturn, the planet of bad luck. He worshipped a female buffalo to appease the enraged god, then announced that religion and astrology had a scientific basis.

This was the same leader, who had ordered his cadre to slaughter cows and forced people to eat beef during the conflict. He doesn't seem to see the irony in worshipping a buffalo now. Those who slaughtered cows were given a couple of thousand rupees and sent home.

The worst thing in human life is to be disqualified. In the presence of their revered leaders, the combatants were declared disqualified in front of the Nepali people, political parties and the UN. It is because they survived the war. Had they been killed, they would have been declared 'great martyrs'.

Worshipping a buffalo to appease the planets is a new dimension in communism. Had they found this enlightenment before and told their cadres, thousands of books of the Sanskrit University would not have been torched, people in mourning would not have been killed and priests would be spared. Pundit Narayan Prasad would be alive. Thousands of cows would not have died in vain.

Karl Marx said religion was the opiate of the masses. Our Maoists were inspired by Marx, but they forgot to take into account that there should be a different political system in a multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic country like Nepal.

Senior Maoists leaders have been hobnobbing with many holy men lately: the high priest of Gorakhnath, Manakamana Mata, Pilot Baba, Yogi Kamalnayanacharya, Chandra Swami. If only Babaji and Swami Maharajas would indoctrinate the disqualified and qualified combatants, it would be a fusion of spiritualism and materialism assuring the great leap forward in the revolution.



"Don't worry, I am with you."

कान्तिपुर Abin Shrestha in Kantipur, 24 February



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"Don't worry, I am with you."

कान्तिपुर Abin Shrestha in Kantipur, 24 February

Optimistic, but only if there is a political consensus

It seems increasingly unlikely that the Constitution Committee will complete the first draft of the constitution by 5 March, the formal deadline. Durga Khanal of *Kantipur* spoke to CA chairman Subas Nembang about progress on this front. Translated excerpts below:

As the deadline to complete the constitution draws near, the CA seems to have nothing to do. How come?

Subas Nembang: Not really. We are engaged in serious discussions to find a way forward. We have finished discussions on the drafts submitted to the CA. Of the 11 thematic committee reports, one has passed unanimously while there are genuine differences in other reports. The CA members have already spoken on these issues in the House. The report study committee is working to find a solution for the contentious issues. On the recommendation of the committee I have met with political leaders informally and discussed these matters. But the political parties seem to be having problems figuring how to address it.

But we are running out of time and your informal meetings don't seem to come up with solutions.

There is a special study committee to recommend and

suggest solutions for contentious issues. It is also holding discussions with top leaders of the political parties. However, the parties are inflexible. They repeat their commitment to write a new constitution on time but they do not act on their words.

Does it not indicate that the new constitution will not be written on time?

I am optimistic. I would like to urge everyone to work towards the deadline. We can adopt a widely accepted international approach to complete the task on time if there is consensus among political parties.

What kind of approach is that?

We can drop the minor issues and focus only on genuine issues in the short term. But for that we need political consensus. Political parties should be open to compromise. To achieve that, I have asked for daily meetings with the political parties, which have yet to materialise.

Are you referring to state restructuring and PLA integration? Is it plausible to resolve these issues after promulgation of the constitution?

There are different aspects of state restructuring, say the issue of local government. There are other similar constitutional issues. However, the public



KIRAN PANDAY

should be convinced that their aspirations are incorporated in the constitution. There is no mention of the constitution writing and PLA integration separately in the CA schedule. The political parties are raising this issue. Some say integration first, while others say constitution before integration. Some even say it should go simultaneously. Political parties

should make their stance clear on these issues.

There are talks of extending the CA and a holding new elections in order to establish fresh mandate for the constitution if the CA fails to meet the deadline. What options do we have?

I still believe the new constitution will be written on time if the

political parties develop an understanding among themselves. If they do not work together, we don't have to wait until 28 May. A crisis could befall this country anytime.

Are there any constitutional provisions to extend the tenure of the CA?

We don't have to think about that yet. The best option is to complete the task in the given timeframe. The preamble of the interim constitution says the constitution promulgated by the CA will institutionalise the achievements of the movement. The political parties should take this into consideration.

A high level political mechanism is formed to assist the constitution writing process. But it is focused on the government rather than the constitution. How is it possible to meet the 28 May deadline?

When I got the news of formation of a high level mechanism, I thought was about to happen, but even its members are waiting for something to happen. It should clear the deadlock. It is a political mechanism. It will be meaningful if it facilitates the peace process and constitution writing. It has to prove its significance through action.

Unscientific



Danbahadur Kurmi Chaudhary, CA member, TMLP/ State Minister, Kapilbastu-2

What do you think of the 14-state model passed by the State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power Committee?

I am totally against it. There are efforts being made to fragment the country in the name of ethnicity, and create recognised ethnic groups.

What difference does it make if we give provinces to those who suffered injustices?

Provinces should not be created on the basis of ethnicity or religion. On what basis do those

who supported the creation of a secular state speak for ethnicity based provinces? There should be three provinces consisting of Himal, Hills and Tarai, and sub-provinces could be created within them.

It is said that if Chitwan is made the federal capital, Madhesi will be willing to accept two separate Madhes provinces?

Some of the parties in the Madhes may be in favour of this. But this is not what the Madhes movement in general wants. There should be a single Madhes province with sub-provinces according to what the Madhesi want.

What do you think of the two-Madhesi state model proposed by the State Restructuring Committee?

It is very unscientific. The people won't benefit from this, quite the opposite. In places, three or four ethnic groups have been assimilated to make up a mish-mash province. It's laughable. They could even have named the two states Lumbini and Mithila. How can people who can't settle on this issue restructure the state?

Some say this is necessary for ethnic identity.

The Maoists have destabilised the country to generate conflict and capture state power just in the name of ethnic identity. Otherwise how would there be ethnic provinces here? There aren't ethnic majorities anywhere.

Ethnic federalism will invite conflict



Laxmi Pariyar, CA member, NC Udaypur

I cannot agree with a model that promotes only ethnicity at the expense of geography, population, economic capacities and natural resources. The committee has tried to please some ethnic groups with its 14 provinces. It's also spoken of political prerogatives to certain groups, which is an even more dangerous prospect.

Is it wrong to give political prerogative?

Look, I happen to fall under Kirat province. If the head of the province and other political posts go to Kirats, then Dalits may as well not get into politics. This will create more conflict. There is no room for Dalits in this model. Provinces should be created on the basis of population, proportional representation and inclusiveness.

Are you saying there should be a separate Dalit state?

In reality, it's only the Dalits who are oppressed in Nepal. We are not asking for a separate province; we are asking for compensation and special privileges. Other ethnic groups only have the problem of disparity between rich and poor – they don't have to face untouchability. We don't agree with a model that bars oppressed communities such as Dalits from top political posts.

Which committees did you speak on behalf of at the CA?

Except for National Interests Preservation Committee, Economic Rights and Sharing of Natural Resources and Public Revenue Committee, I took part in discussions of all other committees.

What do you think of the 14-state model passed by the State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power Committee?

The Little Big Man

The impressive way Khagendra Thapa Magar was handling himself at the pre-departure press conference before flying off to Italy to stake his claim to be the planet's smallest man, most hacks present wanted to nominate The Little Big Man as Nepal's next prime minister. As the **littlest man in the world**, he has a bright political future ahead of him because he understands the problems of Nepal's small people. And look at it this way, even if Girjau doesn't get the Nobel Peace Prize, Khagendra will have made the nation proud by being in the Guinness Book.



Hounded by the Financial Ministry over the Rs16 million expense claim for her Singapore trip and an even bigger request for her forthcoming Europe tour, SuzieQ is now so impatient to have the PM lollipop that she is tugging at Daddy's labeda and throwing a tantrum. After trying to cream the MRP deal, Sooj and Sood seem to have patched up and the FM is now solidly behind the \$4 Indian MRP proposal even though the Indonesians have offered the same quality for a few dollars less. The **Ass'** **assessment** is that whoever gets



the databases for Nepali passports must give us a hefty discount.



GPk summoned MKN to Presidentganj this week and Makunay took KPO along for moral support. For someone who had been blackguarding the prime minister at every instance lately, GPk suddenly seemed very accommodative, according to the **mule's mole** who was present. All this made the Dotter lose heart, so off she went to Chhatara for some divine support from The Godman. Yes, the same one whose feet Awesome touched and was told he had to appease the

Planet Saturn (*see last Ass*). It appears Suzie's also has a situation vis-à-vis Saturn, so she worshipped the same buffalo PKD had sought blessings from. The lack of Indian backing for the Koirala-Dahal alliance doesn't seem to worry the two because they have now gone to a higher-up authority and received heavenly blessings.



Seeking solace in the opiate of the masses and realigning Saturn by getting a buffalo to intervene, PKD has gone from **Stalinism** to **Saturnism**. He also started telling the truth by admitting finally that the main agenda of

the High Level Meccano is to come up with a power sharing agreement, and then threatening that the constitution will not be written unless the Maoists lead the government.

Whenever the Baddies start making a mountain out of a molehill you know there are serious rifts within the party. It wasn't surprising that the comrades started raiding APF trucks in Baireni the day after the fracas at Kharipati in which the Jamakattel faction attacked rival comrades and cracked a few ribs.



After Gairidhara had leaned on Baluwater to cancel the president's participation at the 100th anniversary celebration of the Shechen monastery, Shit-all Nibas chickened out and cancelled the visit. But somehow the word hadn't got out to the **Foreigner Minister** and the **Cultured Minister**. The two were en route to Boudha in a convoy when the call came from Baluwater: "Abort! Abort!" Suzie and Minendra did an abrupt about turn and headed back barely 100 metres from the gates to the monastery. From the way they are spooked by Buddhism, it seems they believe power comes

not from the barrel of a gun but from the turning of a prayer wheel.



So the Tarai Madhesh Loot-tantra Party has "recalled" education minister Ram Chandra Kushwahahaha and replaced him with another apparatchik. But not before the minister had already pocketed two lacs for each teacher appointment for 1,000 schools. **Kushwahahaha** must be laughing all the way to the bank cuz all he got was a slap in the wrist for embezzling an amount that won't even register in the Ass' calculator because multiplying 200,000 x 1,000, the total is too large. The beauty of this scam is that Ghusuwaha doesn't have to return the money, he ain't going to jail, and what's more the man is totally unrepentant.

His remark after being removed from office this week has been unanimously declared the Donkey's **Quote of the Week**: "A fish swimming in the ocean can't help drinking the water."



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