



RAJU SHRESTHA

Legacies of war

While the media continues to mull over Girija Prasad Koirala's demise, Nepali legacies of a more martial kind are taking shape home and abroad.

What has been the legacy of the British Gurkhas' collective contribution to the ever-shrinking empire of Her Britannic Majesty?

Last July, actress Joanna Lumley crowned her victory in helping secure UK settlement rights for veterans with a lap of honour in Kathmandu, Pokhara, Damak and Dharan. She was hailed as a 'daughter of Nepal'. This year, sad tales of Gurkhas hoodwinked into shelling out their savings to end up penniless, jobless and even

homeless in the dead-end British army town of Aldershot have begun to surface. Was this the dream the campaign fought for?

In the Tarai, the lawlessness and corruption that has proliferated in the aftermath of our own civil conflict and prolonged political instability is giving rise to another, more frightening legacy.

It was bad enough that food crops were being displaced by cannabis. Villagers with no alternatives are now turning to highly lucrative opium cultivation, helped along by Indian middlemen and local politicians and police. The road to Afghanistan is a short one.

On a more positive note, Nepal may still be dragging its feet on signing up to the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty, but significant progress has been made in clearing landmines: it is estimated the last of 53 army minefields will be cleared by mid-2011.



Final betrayal
p5

Opiate of the masses
Operation decontamination

p12-13

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

TEACH TO CHEAT

The conduct of the ongoing school-leaving exams gives us plenty of indication as to how our state and society functions.

On the one hand you have a curriculum not designed for critical thinking. Then you test students on their ability to cram that content and regurgitate it in an exam, the importance of which, in the life of a student, is unnecessarily and greatly exaggerated. The whole examination process is seriously flawed, it rewards those who can memorise and those who cheat. There are no marks for creativity, originality, or honesty. The exam is a sham.

Cheating in the annual test has become such an accepted part of our culture that it doesn't even raise eyebrows anymore. In fact it only makes it to the media when some novel method of cheating is uncovered somewhere. Students who get answers SMS-ed to them, fake students taking exams, or teachers and parents sitting outside the classroom filling out the answer sheets of their students. It has become so blatant, the collusion between parents,



GITA ADHIKARI

teachers and students so open, that writing about it has become dangerous.

Gorkhapatra correspondent Gita Adhikari learnt this the hard way. She was roughed up by the teacher of a school in Gulariya of Bardiya when she took this photograph this week of students cheating openly under the eyes of an invigilator. The teacher, Rishiram Sharma, demanded that she erase the picture from her camera. In

Dolpa, a teacher who dared to try to stop mass cheating at an exam centre was beaten up by his fellow teachers. Irregularity in medical exams at TUTH closed down the hospital for three weeks: the most direct proof that extreme politicisation of education is now a matter of life or death.

Cheating in SLC exams is nothing new. But it has never been as widespread or accepted as it is now. There are many factors: the failure of the state, impunity, the trickle down of rampant malfeasance in government, the pandemic of impunity at every level of society, and the justification that only cheating allows the marginalised to level the playing field.

The solution to this problem is structural. As long as there is impunity in other spheres of society, rulers set the example by getting away with elastic morals. In the absence of fear of punishment in a stateless hinterland, no amount of policing will stop cheating. And there is the longer-term issue of designing our curriculum to raise the quality and relevance of education, and perfecting a test system that rewards creativity. Otherwise, we are raising Nepalis to be criminals, not critical thinkers.

A call to politics



GUEST COLUMN
Rabindra Mishra

From small tea shops to prosperous gatherings, Nepalis love to talk about politics. The precise issues may vary but politics pervades the Nepali psyche. But for all this talk, nothing really seems to change for the better. The problem runs deep: our collective attitude to politics needs to change.

When democracy was restored in 1990, a large section of the population thought the dark night of dictatorship was giving way to a bright day. But people never experienced the changes they had expected. The Maoist insurgency took root, legitimising a culture of violence in a society that had previously been largely peaceful. As the insurgency spread, democratic forces

continued to strengthen the Panchayati legacy of nepotism, favouritism and corruption in governance.

As things went from bad to worse, King Gyanendra Shah started to fish in the dirty waters of politics. Amidst growing frustration, a large section of the population became convinced

futile hopes Nepalis have harboured in the wake of every major political transition? It can be safely assumed that the country will continue to drag on in the same manner, because we as a people have never attempted to address the fundamental issues besetting our politics.

Nepal has been a country stuck in

Until good people are encouraged to join politics, we will get nothing out of it but filth and frustration

that dismantling the royal dynasty would initiate a new beginning. But things are, once more, not looking promising.

Everyone seems to be pinning their hopes on the imminent completion of the new constitution. But will that in itself help clean up the political mess Nepal has been mired in for decades? Or is it one of those

transition for six decades.

Over the years, we have changed regimes, constitutions and governments and we have debated political issues tirelessly. But we have failed to change our socio-political psyche and the overall political culture. It is not that the constitution of 1991 was flawed, as claimed by many. It is not that the post-1990

democratic dispensation was inherently incapable of transforming the country, as claimed by the Maoists. It is not that democracy was not 'soil-suitable', as claimed by the royalists. It was not that the monarchy was the major barrier to the country's development, as claimed by the 2006 *aandolankaris*. The real problem remains with us: it was and is our attitude towards politics that has failed this country so badly.

We may talk politics, but we have virtually shunned politics all along. We have never wanted any of our well-educated, well-intentioned, bright kith and kin to get into politics. Rather, we have always encouraged them to seek jobs with high pay and status, especially outside Nepal. In doing so, we have left politics in the hands of a mostly mediocre, unsophisticated, selfish and visionless bunch of people. Contrary to reason, we expect excellence from them.

We have never bothered to understand the simple truism that you reap what you sow. Until good people are encouraged to get into politics, we will get nothing out of it but filth and

frustration. I have met several dynamic and visionary young Nepalis with strong leadership potential. All enjoy commenting and lecturing on politics but none are willing to throw themselves into. For these Nepalis, politics in Nepal is a risky investment. But if significant numbers of good people don't actively commit themselves, Nepali politics will never change, no matter how much we talk about it, no matter how many times we change the constitution and the system of governance.

It's high time we encourage the most talented and able amongst the younger generation to enter politics. We must ensure they realise that if they are really serious about transforming the country in their lifetime, politics is one of the most appropriate vehicles to use.

Politics is too serious a business to be left in the hands of the kind of politicians we have. We deserve better; we need better. Without those with the right leadership ingredients this country is doomed for many years to come. 📧

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ON THE WEB
www.nepalitimes.com

THE QUIET MULTITUDE

I completely agree with Vijay that our unity in diversity is our greatest treasure and strength ('Real Nepal', #494). Our nation is beautiful and our people are humble and hard working.

Devendra Pant

- This is, indeed, what makes us different from a nation like Bhutan. While it has its challenges, we embrace our diversity and count all of ourselves as Nepalis.

Hange

QUESTIONABLE INTENTIONS

I agree that this isn't the first time this sort of party has occurred and it's definitely a shame that people in authority have not done nothing to stop it ('Babylon babbles', #495). The owner

and the Nepal Police should seriously be ashamed of themselves, the former for organising such parties to mislead the young generations and the latter for keeping their eyes closed for this long despite knowing it all along.

But at least the Nepal Police, having awoken from the deepest of slumbers, brought the issue into the limelight. This is beneficial to parents and the schools, if no one else.

Princess

- This was just a publicity stunt by the police to divert attention from their inefficiency.

Kevin Rudd

WHO NOW?

Who will lead NC now ('Real democracy', #495)? Do we expect someone bold, strong

and honest from the NC leadership? I think this time, opportunity should be given to someone well educated, broadminded, young, energetic and modern. Let us all hope for better leadership in the future.

Norbu Ghaley

SELF-GOVERNANCE

Currently, it seems like ethnicity is the major basis of state restructuring ("The questions we have raised are not just to do with ethnicity", #495). However, provinces should be delineated according to several identities, including ethnicity, language, and geography. Inclusion and self-governance are not identical, but similar. Self-governance is the strongest structure for inclusion. We should solve the problem of exclusion through a self-governance based political system in a new federal republic.

Sushil Kushum

The blogs

nepalitimes.com/blogs

Adventures of a battery bug: Electric vehicles could easily replace micro buses and tempos



Times

nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 496

Q. What does Girija's death mean for Nepal?



Weekly Internet Poll # 497. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Will the HLPN's promise to deliver the constitution hold?

Constitutional conundrums



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

A full constitution cannot be written by May 28. Neither can the integration and rehabilitation of the PLA (a precondition for the constitution, according to NC and UML) happen before that. That leaves three options.

One, come up with a 'brief' constitution. The CA chairman floated this proposal some time back. The homework to set up a State Restructuring Commission and let it determine the nature, boundaries and powers of provinces seems a step in that direction.

But the lack of a political consensus and severe time constraints reduce the possibility of even such a statute. Many Maoists feel this would be a trap to impose a 1990-style constitution and cheat them of their 'progressive' agenda. Madhesi and Janjati groups have already called it a conspiracy to subvert federalism. Disagreements persist on many issues besides federalism, and there is no broader political deal in sight that could enable what one observer has astutely termed



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a 'constitution in installments'.

The second option is what Sarita Giri proposed months ago – amend the constitution in order to pave the way for an extension of the CA. Many leaders, especially those who are in the CA, privately say this is the easiest way out.

But no party wants to be seen as pushing for an extension publicly, as they fear it would make them look desperate, erode their legitimacy, and give their rivals an edge. There are also differing views on how to go about it. NC lawmaker Radheshyam Adhikari has forcefully argued for a minimal common document, which could form the basis for an extension.

Other leaders say that extension without a broader package deal would mean just postponing the problem. If the balance of power and political disagreements remain the same, we could well be in the same situation after six months. The effort over the next month could then well be to change the balance of power – either through re-engineering alliances, Maoist protests, or government adopting a tough line – to exert pressure on the other side. In this scenario, expect brinkmanship before they hammer out a last-minute deal that includes CA extension through amendment.

The third option is scary.

Everyone knows the best way out, but no one is willing to admit to it publicly

The disagreements deepen, no side is willing to budge, and there is a political and constitutional crisis on May 28. If you listen to the lawyers, the CA will cease to exist. The government will be seen as a failure. And the president will step in, if only to appoint a new caretaker government and a new constitution drafting committee. The Maoists will erupt onto the streets, provoking a security response.

There are many in the top echelons of NC and UML who are not members of the CA and have no stake in the process. They were reluctant converts to what they saw as the 'Maoist agenda' of the republic,

federalism and secularism and see this as the moment to hit back. On the Maoist side too, some leaders feel that this is the time to sharpen the 'class conflict', that reactionaries have ganged up against them, and that the only alternative is to declare a 'people's constitution' from the streets.

But if we assume that politicians are rational actors operating in self-interest, then this nightmarish scenario dims considerably. No one will be able to control a confrontation. NC-UML will be overshadowed by a stronger militarist establishment. The Maoists will run the risk of ruining their achievements, and their leaders will face serious physical risk. And one hopes that even India will not want to go so far as to 'teach the Maoists a lesson'.

All the big netas know the way out of the impasse. Madhav Nepal's sham set-up needs to make way for a government that reflects the country's true balance of power. The Maoists have to begin the process of dismantling their coercive apparatus, with non-Maoists providing them with a respectable deal on integration. Certain liberal democratic principles along with federalism, secularism, and the republic have to form the cornerstone of the new constitution. The CA can then be extended for six months to a year. The alternative to such a broad agreement is greater anarchy and violence. Take your pick.

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The year of print



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

Despite the existence of a dozen television channels and over 200 FM radio stations, the year 2066 BS too belonged to the print media. The Nepali daily *Nagarik* and its sister publication *Republica* burst onto the scene, throwing the biggest bash in town when the twins completed 100 days. The tabloid *Naya Patrika* maintained its innovative streak. The trusted warhorse *Kantipur* consolidated

issue. Other periodicals such as *Madhuparka*, *Yuva Manch* and *Mulyankan* kept their own niches intact. The print media may be under the hammer in the developed world, but here in Nepal it's live and kicking. Publishers may not be very happy with advertising revenue, but editors have little to complain about as their readership and influence in national affairs rise.

The success of the print media can partly be attributed to the kind of fluid politics that makes straight reporting a dull and repetitive task. What can television cameras do when

duty. But when nothing substantive was happening, the cameras alone could do nothing. Power cuts ensured audiences wouldn't sit in front of the idiot box anyway.

The news on the radio, too, lost some of its sheen with hourly updates repeating the same thing all through the year: political parties had failed to reach a consensus. There are so many stations doing the same thing, all at the same time, that no FM channel has a current affairs talk-show host who can hold the attention of listeners for long.



PRINT RULES: *Kantipur's* lucky draw for inverters highlighted the woes of electronic media in Nepal

FOO CHEE CHANG

The print media may be under the hammer in the developed world, but here in Nepal it's live and kicking

its hold upon the public mind. And the Grand Old Lady of New Road — the venerable *Gorkhapatra* — survived the vicissitudes of the marketplace by devoting a part of the paper exclusively to the marginalised national languages of Nepal.

With so many daily publications to choose from, weekly newspapers lost some ground. However, newsmagazines didn't do too badly. The weekly *Nepal*, from the *Kantipur* stable, maintained its regularity and visibility on the newsstands. Fortnightly *Himal Khabarpatrika* contributed to the constitutional debate through a comprehensive package in every

decisions are taken behind closed doors? The print media, by contrast, can have a field day analysing conspiracy theories from every possible angle and speculating about outcomes.

With little to report on Maoist activities in the countryside or the diplomatic games being played out in Kathmandu, television cameras rushed around the capital chasing beauty queens, aging cine-actors and bebies of politicians on their way to or from New Delhi. Some junior ministers made desperate attempts to grab media attention by slapping a government officer, breaking the windshield of a car or manhandling a policeman on

In this year's long silly season of feckless government and wearisome opposition, the print had a clear lead over television and radio in making up stories about the power struggle within UML and the Maoist politburo alongside reporting on the antics of Sujata Koirala in the Nepali Congress. The Nepali print media also began to learn the ropes of Murdochisation, as news was turned into infotainment. Newspapers experimented with provocative headlines, spicy photos, and a jaunty rightward tilt in the overall content.

Kantipur exercises almost full-spectrum dominance in the media with a direct presence in television, radio, the Internet and print. The mainstay of its media empire, however, continues to be the *Kantipur* daily. Perhaps there is a reason to celebrate this. As political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville noted, "Newspapers maintain civilization".

THIS WEEK

'Rightist plot'

During a meeting of the High Level Political Mechanism on Wednesday, Big Three party leaders angrily denounced statements made last week by ex-king Gyanendra and former Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, among others, against secularism, federalism and republicanism. Ex-king Gyanendra said the monarchy could yet make a return if the people willed it, and Bhattarai chimed in by calling for a revival of the 1990 constitution, as well as the constitutional monarchy it sanctified. The statements raised concerns about a resurgence of the political right. Maoist vice-chairman Baburam Bhattarai was sufficiently spooked to threaten war if the 'rightist plot' weren't quelled. During the same meeting of the HLPM, party leaders also vowed to complete the constitution by May 28, and decided to form a state restructuring commission that will provide suggestions to the CA on federalism.



End of the line?

Are Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal's days in office numbered? On Monday, the Maoists said the government would only last a few more days, and promptly met with leaders of the Madhesi Janadhikar Forum to discuss an alternative. MJF leaders appeared to agree that the government had failed to complete its chief tasks — to advance the peace and constitution-writing process — and ought to be replaced. The next day, Nepal met with three other Madhes-based parties, and seemed to have extracted the vote of confidence he needed. MPRF-D Chairman Gachhadar said a change of government wouldn't be desirable with the May 28 deadline looming. But just as he plugged one breach, another opened up. On Tuesday evening, a majority of CA members, including UML affiliates, signed a proposal demanding a change in government in order to facilitate the timely completion of the constitution. CA member Rabinendra Adhikari said, "We started the campaign to replace this government after concluding that it was incapable of breaking the deadlock."

MRP mess

The campaign to introduce Machine Readable Passports has lurched from one controversy to another. On Monday, the Public Affairs Committee summoned the prime minister for clarifications on suspected irregularities in the bidding process. The contract had gone to the Security Printing and Minting Corporation of India, in contravention of PAC directives calling on the government to invite fresh bids. Yesterday, the government decided to temporarily stop issuing both traditional and machine readable passports, since the International Civil Association Organisation hadn't okayed the government's request that non-MRPs issued after the deadline (April 1) be recognised. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, said passports may yet be issued on 'merit-basis.'

NEPSE slump

The NEPSE index hit a four-year low on Tuesday as it sunk to 443.73, just over 60 points lower than it had been on 1 March. Experts say the slump will continue and is due to weak investor confidence and the liquidity crunch. On Wednesday, the Security Board of Nepal warned investors against a selling spree explaining that the slump represents a transition phase as reforms to capital markets take effect.



उज्यालो ९० नेटवर्कमा

आर्थिक खबर

हरैक दिन बिहान ७:०० बजे

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Final betrayal

And the Gurkhas lived...unhappily ever after

TEJ SINGH in LONDON

The campaign to give all retired Gurkhas the right to settle in Britain was one of the UK's most powerful political movements of recent years. Last May it garnered such enormous support from the media and the public that the government suffered a rare defeat in the House of Commons. Prime Minister Gordon Brown was forced into a humiliating change of policy.

In a moment that became an instant television classic, the actress Joanna Lumley forced a minister to admit he was wrong on live TV. Lumley became what the British call a 'national treasure'. "If the Gurkhas can't live in Britain, then I don't want to either," she famously declared.

The campaign was led by Lumley but jointly organised by the Nepali NGO GAESO, the British Gurkha Justice Campaign led by Peter Carroll (a local councillor from the county of Kent, where many ex-Gurkhas have settled), and the British solicitors Howe & Company.

Last July the team travelled to Nepal to celebrate their victory. Lumley was lauded as a 'daughter of Nepal' and was greeted by Madhav Kumar Nepal and Ram Baran Yadav. GAESO organised a tour to Damak, Dharan and Pokhara, and everywhere they went they were surrounded by GAESO flags and banners, appeared on GAESO stages, and wore the organisation's logo.

Since then things have gone a little sour. News reports started appearing in Britain earlier this year about destitute old men turning up in London with nothing, unable to speak English. Some ended up sleeping rough. Some had sold their land and taken heavy loans to finance the journey.

GAESO, it turned out, was telling former Gurkhas that if they wanted to settle in Britain they had to pay the organisation Rs 60,000 (GBP 500) for advice. The applicants were told they would get free houses and jobs straight away, even if they could not speak English. Upon payment, they were sent to a representative of Howe & Co, working out of the GAESO building in Pulchowk, who filled out immigration forms. In reality, the whole process should have been free, being paid for by the British Legal Aid system.

Last Monday, the British campaigners called a press conference in central London to "clear their names", which had been "smeared and traduced". They claim the British Ministry of Defence has orchestrated a campaign against them. A solicitor from Howe & Co even accused the government of behaving like the Stasi, the former East German secret police.

"Does the government really want to pick a fight with Joanna Lumley six weeks before a general



HAS JUSTICE BEEN SERVED? Joanna Lumley, Peter Carroll (back, centre) and Padam Gurung (second from right) in happier times last July in Kathmandu

KIRAN PANDAY

election?" warned Peter Carroll, now a parliamentary candidate.

"It has been suggested that I somehow was parachuted in, took the headlines and ran. I think that's a smear," Lumley thundered. "It has been suggested that I somehow spread falsehoods amongst the Gurkha communities both here and in Nepal about what they could expect. The people who made those accusations must know them to be untrue."

Yet the only critical comment from the government was by a junior defence minister, Kevan Jones, who complained to a parliamentary committee a few weeks ago that Lumley had not spoken out against GAESO's GBP 500 charge. "Her deathly silence, frankly, irritates me," he said.

Jones "apologised unreservedly" for his comments fifteen minutes before the press conference began. Prime Minister Gordon Brown, too, hastily telephoned Lumley to apologise.

But there are still more questions than answers about the British campaigners' role, what they knew and when.

According to Gopal Siwakoti 'Chintan', who has been GAESO's Nepali lawyer for ten years, he warned Lumley about GAESO's fees during her visit in July.

"Basically we tried to persuade Joanna and Peter Carroll that Howe & Co should be asked to stop it," says 'Chintan'. "We wanted, through Joanna, Peter Carroll and Howe & Co solicitors, somehow them to be saying in public that no Gurkha should pay any money. If one of them had said that during Joanna Lumley's visit then the Gurkhas would not have done it and [GAESO president] Padam Bahadur Gurung wouldn't have the guts to continue this practice."

'Chintan' says that the campaigners refused to denounce

the practice because they did not want to get mixed up in GAESO's internal affairs.

On June 8 2009, a group of disaffected senior GAESO members wrote to Howe & Co to complain that GAESO was charging former Gurkhas GBP 500, and refusing to provide translation services in their dealings with the British firm if they did not pay up.

"We have now complete evidence and witnesses that Mr [Padam Bahadur] Gurung categorically instructed GAESO staff and volunteers who were and may still be providing you secretarial and interpretation/translation services, not to allow their access to your legal advice and legal services without paying the above mentioned amount to GAESO," they wrote.

This was one of a series of emails dating from May last year onwards, obtained by *Nepali Times*, in which angry GAESO members repeatedly warned the firm about the payments and other alleged malpractice.

Another email to Howe & Co from August 17 2009 reads: "We have reports received just today that [a GAESO member] is asking all the widows, the Gurkhas and the children to rush for your services, and through him...to pay 500 pound each and get the ILE applications done soon or they will loose, (sic)."

By August Howe & Co appears to have been considering moving out of GAESO's Pulchowk office but there is no evidence that they ever did. The firm appears to have been relying on GAESO to refer its clients and translate for them right up until the scandal broke in Britain at the beginning of March this year.

Meanwhile, GAESO continued charging the fees.

GAESO's internal critics were not the only ones to raise the alarm. At the time of Lumley's visit

ex-Gurkha Gyan Raj Rai, from another veteran's group, UBGEAN, told local journalists: "We have also warned Joanna and Peter Carroll about the true intention of Mr Gurung and not to endorse any malpractices of GAESO leadership."

The warning signs went back further. GAESO split last April and members filed a lawsuit against president Padam Bahadur Gurung alleging longstanding corruption. GAESO members complained at the time that the organisation had raised GBP 95,000 to cover Howe & Co's legal fees, even though they were covered by British Legal Aid. In eighteen years, GAESO has published its accounts only twice.

Six thousand Gurkhas have so far applied to live in Britain, many of them through Howe & Co. It is possible that GAESO has raised millions of pounds through the fees, but all of the money has gone

missing. GAESO has insisted that all payments are 'voluntary', and both Gurung and vice-president Krishna Kumar Rai declined to comment when contacted.

The British campaigners seem to have been as out of their depth dealing with GAESO and the ex-Gurkha scene in Nepal as the old soldiers who turned up at Heathrow, unable to speak English, were in Britain. At best, it appears they were too naïve to understand the warnings they were given.

Luckily for Howe & Co, the solicitors still got hundreds, or maybe thousands, of valuable clients while Lumley became a 'national treasure'. Peter Carroll is looking forward to being elected to parliament. 🇬🇧

Transcripts of emails between GAESO and Howe & Co are available online

HIMAL KhabarPatrika

29 March-13 April 2010

YEAR-END COVER

2066: Year of Sorrow
Prof Dhruv Kumar on a lost year
Dr Chaitanya Mishra on people power
Ambassador Bhekh Bahadur Thapa on an uncertain and difficult year
Dr Biswambar Pyakhurel on economic transformation

Investigation:

The real Kalibaba
Charlatan or holy man?

AFTER GIRIJABABU WHAT?

Constitution Supplement

Field report on Limbuwan
Chandrabahadur Gurung on the Tamu Pradesh
Ramkumar Sharma on the 14-province model
The new constitution and the 'new lahurey'



Succession issues



It was the late Girija Prasad Koirala who nurtured the political careers of Sher Bahadur Deuba, Ram Chandra Poudel and Sushil Koirala from the '60s through the '90s. As Nepali Congress sails into its post-GPK phase, these three are now vying to be the chairman of the party, and newspaper reports indicate the inevitable bickering has already begun.

It's not past glory that counts when it comes to the Nepali Congress, it's the future



One does not attend meetings called by the others, and each loudly proclaims his own list of sacrifices for and contributions to the party. To be sure, this spectacle was to be expected, in part because GPK, in a prestige-denting move to bolster his daughter's political career, did not work hard enough to institutionalise a system to manage proper succession plans. Choosing a party leader based on bygone sacrifices, struggles and contributions might have served Nepali politics well in another era. In today's politically competitive times, what if such measures are too inward-looking and outdated to choose a party leader? What if traits and skills such as an ability to position the party, an ability to understand

and work around external change agents, and an ability to work collaboratively to focus on national priorities matter more in the selection of the new leader? **Positioning:** In most voters' minds, Nepali Congress comes across not as a clear entity, but as a lumpen blob. Given this unclear positioning, how will the new leader clearly place Nepali Congress in the voters' minds? Will it be a party still wringing its hands between socialist policies and a competitive market economy? How will it defend the tenets of pluralism and multi-party

government jobs to party cadres a long-term way out. What plans does the new leader have to start addressing the issue of unemployment? More and more Nepalis are now migrating to small towns and cities for education and jobs. How will the new leader help restore the instruments of local government so that responsive governance starts to take root at the local level? Nepal needs both 'hard' (building roads, upgrading electric grids, etc) and 'soft' (improving gender parity, providing universal access to water and sanitation, etc) forms of development. How will the new leader articulate and sell Nepal's development needs to international aid agencies and international investors? China and India are fast becoming global economic success stories. How can Nepal, sandwiched in the middle, benefit from their boom? **Priorities:** The immediate priority is to ensure that the constitution is drafted in time so that the pall of uncertainty hanging over the country's future is lifted. The longer the delay, the more uncertainty saps energy and resources. Does the new leader have the ability to focus on what matters, and bring all squabbling political parties together to rally around commonly accepted national goals that benefit Nepal's future? Going through the pangs of critical transition, it's tempting for Nepali Congress or any other political party to seek solace in embracing its own history. But such an approach is ultimately short-lived and self-defeating. What the party must do in today's politically competitive times is to look ahead, ask questions about the future, and choose leadership based on who represents the most viable prospects for the party, regardless of that person's past sacrifices and contributions. 🇳🇵

The boss at Boss



Publisher Shalini Wadhwa's philosophy in life is to be provocatively positive, and this permeates into her work as CEO of Speciality Media, the publisher of magazines like Boss and VOW. Interviewing Wadhwa is like talking to a new age guru: "In the media we are trained to look at the black spot on a blank sheet of paper, but if you think positive you are always trying to find creative ways to fill the white space." Or: "The future is not something you arrive at, you make it yourself every day." This message of positive enforcement is carried in Boss, a monthly magazine for Nepali entrepreneurs, and the glossy women's magazine, VOW, published in both English and Nepali. 'Wherever I go, there I am,' Wadhwa writes in an editorial in a recent issue of VOW, on returning to her job after many months due to illness in the family. 'My eyes are brimming as my heart wants to burst open to say thank you to all of you...I witnessed the miracle and the power of those prayers every month, every week and every day.' Wadhwa says she hasn't always been so positive about herself. At age 28, following her son's birth in Patan Hospital in 1984, Wadhwa recalls having an existential crisis. "I remember thinking I had done nothing with my life, I had no dreams, no visions," she says.



Shalini Wadhwa wanted to change the public's negative perception of business

Accompanying her husband to Sri Lanka, she started the travel magazine, Explore Sri Lanka, "without a business plan, and no clue about how to go about it." Later, in California, she launched a travel magazine where she did the writing, editing, desktopping, marketing and even the delivery of copies to hotels in the Fresno area. "I learnt the business the hard way, doing everything myself," she recalls. Returning to Nepal in 1995, Wadhwa helped restart Shangri-la Inflight Magazine for Royal Nepal Airlines. After hearing her libertarian husband lecture her endlessly about the free market, Wadhwa decided in 2003 to launch the monthly business magazine, Boss. "People thought it was a terrible name for a magazine because the word has negative connotations, but that was precisely the point. Businessmen in Nepal are all seen as crooks, we had to change that image," she says. Seven years later, Boss is regarded as the premier business journal in Nepal and its annual Top Ten awards constitute a prestigious recognition of young entrepreneurs. "We wanted to create icons in society, the younger generation need role models, people they admire for their integrity and hard work, people who they can emulate," explains Wadhwa. She also believes that being a leader places great responsibility on a person: "It is a holy covenant to behave yourself, to set an example. You are put in that position, how dare you misbehave?" What Wadhwa hadn't expected were the number of women entrepreneurs who were reading Boss, which led her to set up the 'Voice of Women' club, the logical conclusion of which was the magazine, VOW. "Especially with the Nepali language edition, we get many calls from people telling us what a difference the magazine has made to their lives," Wadhwa says. A man who was against his daughter-in-law remarrying after his son died called the office to say how an article about widow marriage changed his outlook. Charities flocked to support prison inmates after a recent article about the work of Indira Rana Magar with children of jailed mothers. Having been selected as Nepali Times Company of the Month, Wadhwa expands on what motivates her. "After a while you realise it's not just to keep your magazines afloat by selling ad space," she explains, "it is about involving people, by making them a part of your story to change society for the better." 🇳🇵 www.vownepal.com www.readtheboss.com

2609 Mahavir



Nepal Jain Parishad celebrated the 2609th birth anniversary of Mahavir as a welfare festival on 29 March. Mahavir is the founder of Jainism, a religion of non-violence and peace. Yoga guru Swami Ram Dev was the chief guest at the event.

Branching out

Bank of Kathmandu has opened a new branch at Sankhu to provide better service to customers in the north-eastern part of the Kathmandu Valley. The branch will serve the people of Sankhu as well as Lapsipedi and Nagarkot of Bhaktapur district, with deposit, loan, trade transaction and remittance services. As of now, the bank has a total of 33 branches.



New showroom

MSK Automobile, the authorised dealer of Morang Auto Works, has opened its new trade-in 'MSK Enterprises' at Balaju. The trade-in provides excellent valuation for old bikes, easy financing facilities to customers, and a range of brand new Yamaha motorbikes.

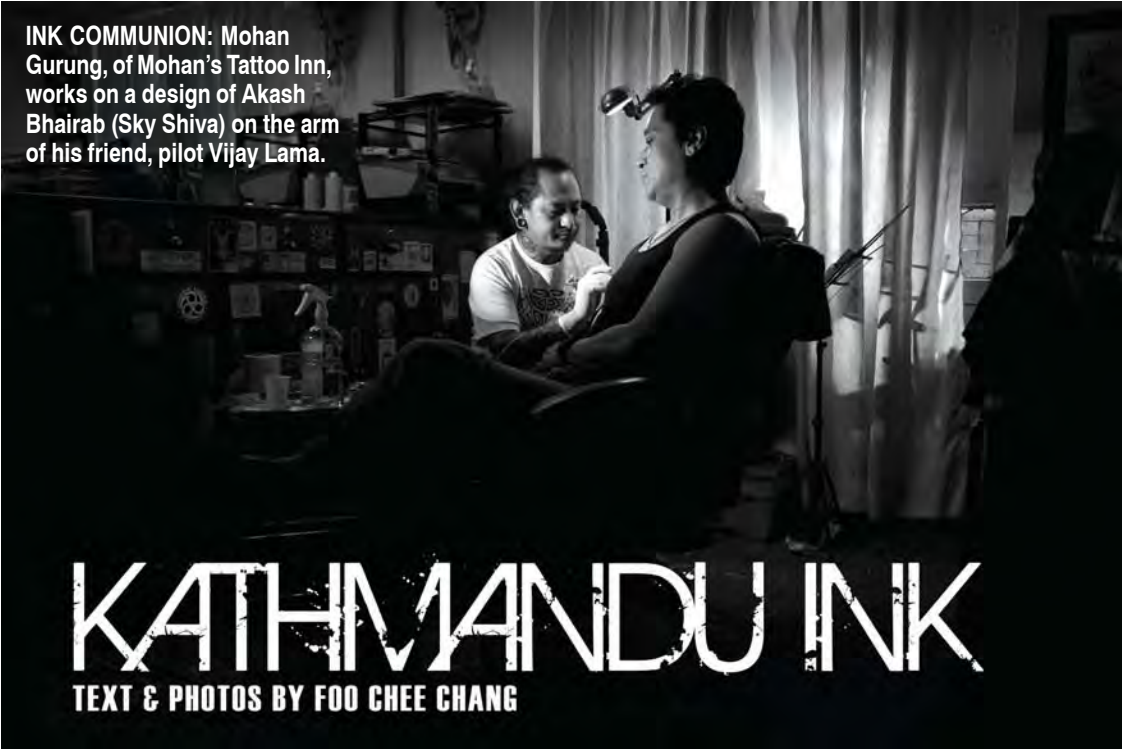


Colouring lives



Nepal Association for the Welfare of the Blind inaugurated the National Braille Library in its central office, Tripureswor, on 27 March. Seedlings Braille Book for Children, USA, donated 100 Braille books to the library. Visually impaired people can now enjoy a whole stock of world literature.

INK COMMUNION: Mohan Gurung, of Mohan's Tattoo Inn, works on a design of Akash Bhairab (Sky Shiva) on the arm of his friend, pilot Vijay Lama.



KATHMANDU INK

TEXT & PHOTOS BY FOO CHEE CHANG

In a tiny space on the second floor of a Thamel shophouse, tattoo artist Mohan Gurung is hard at work within a gargantuan world – one filled with age-old tribal symbols to modern bio-mechanical images. He is a conduit for the art, which flows through steady hands onto canvases of skin.

“I have a big studio in Pokhara, but little business. Here in Kathmandu I have a small space, but big business,” jokes Gurung. The quiet and affable Gurung, who received his

training in South Korea after some persuasion from a good friend who noticed his talent, counts celebrities and fans from all over the world among his clients. He is so busy, in fact, that he is booked all the way till the end of the year and has stopped taking any more appointments.

Tattooing is an art that transcends time and physical boundaries. The threshold of pain is pushed in the hours required to apply even a simple design. And not only for the person getting the tattoo – the tattoo artist

sits locked in rigid concentration, knowing full well that even a single mistake is unacceptable.

After about 3 hours of work with Vijay Lama, a pilot with Nepal Airlines who calls himself a ‘devotee’ of Gurung’s art, the artist limps off for a break, the physical and mental toll apparent. “He spends 12-14 hours a day in this little place, hardly moving, and yet he is one of the happiest people I know,” says Lama. “I’m amazed.”

Gurung returns and explains that he is in

talks with the Nepal Tourism Board to hold the country’s first tattoo convention in April next year. “With tattoos becoming more popular here, there is a niche for tattoo tourism,” he says. Returning to his seat, Gurung picks up his tools and gets back to work, his dreams of becoming a great artist and sharing his passion spurring him on. And the wider world is ready and waiting for him. 🇳🇵

www.mohanstattooinn.com



CLEAN, MEAN MACHINE: Hygiene is of paramount importance as the dyes are injected into the skin. Disposable gloves, new needles for each session, and a regular wipe-down of the skin with antiseptic solution are some of the precautions taken.



TOTAL TATTOOS: Tattoos and piercings adorn Gurung’s entire body. He gets inked by fellow artists, some of whom are his idols, at tattoo conventions all over the world.



PREP TIME: Natural, vegetable-based dyes are injected into the skin at the rate of 80-150 times per second through tattoo machines from Micky Sharpz, a well-known brand. Needles range in size and configuration for different purposes like outlining and shading.



IMMENSE FOCUS: Making a mistake is out of the question, and even experience cannot be taken for granted. Gurung is always looking forward to his next piece, because he knows it will be better than the last.



PAPER IS GOOD, SKIN BETTER: Akash Bhairab is the emblem of Nepal Airlines. Captain Vijay Lama has made it his own to mark his dedication to the national flag carrier, and hopes for clearer skies ahead.

VIDEO NIGHTS



Doubt

2008’s flavour this may be, but topical it sure is. As the Roman Catholic Church once more tries to contain controversy relating to child abuse by its priests, award-winning Doubt manages in its understated way to illuminate the quiet horror of what goes on in some parishes to this day. Uncovered in many cases, but not wholly ignored: in a 1960s Bronx parish school, uber-strict Sister Aloysius (Meryl Streep) and naïve Sister James (Amy Adams) struggle to determine just what likeable Father Flynn (Philip Seymour Hoffman) is upto with Donald Miller, the school’s only black student. It starts slow, but builds to a troubling climax. 3.5/5 RT



Ne te retourne pas (Don't look back)

Jeanne (Sophie Marceau) begins to notice things are a little different. More than a little different; she can’t recognise her home anymore, then her own family, and pretty soon she herself begins to morph into someone else (Monica Bellucci). There’s dark childhood history to be delved into here. A tantalising prospect? This 2009 French psychological thriller promises much but falls rather flat. It’s not just the double whammy of Sophie Marceau and Monica Bellucci who fail to deliver, it’s the entire premise that’s ridiculous, and no amount of redemptive psychobabble can salvage this mess. 2.5/5 RT

EVENTS

13th Floriculture Trade Fair, with spring in the air, beautiful flowers from all over are gathered in one location for your convenience. Choose from over 50 stalls displaying their best specimens. *Bhrikuti Mandap, 10am-6pm, 1-5 April.*

Any One of Us: Words from Prison, re-run of the adaptation of Eve Ensler’s Vagina Monologues first staged at Nepal Academy on the occasion of International Women’s Day. *Sunday 4 April, Kamal Mani Theatre, Patan, tickets Rs 200, discount for students*

Chaitya & Silent Flow, works of Kailash Shrestha and Sushma Shakya made during their one-year residency sponsored by the Australian Himalayan Foundation. *Opens Sunday 4 April, Siddhartha Art Gallery, 4218048*



Khariko Ghero (The Caucasian Chalk Circle), a Bertolt Brecht play about a peasant girl and her adopted son set against our recent, politically turbulent history. Directed by Max Webster and Mia Theil Have at *Rimal Theatre, Gurukul, performances resume from 6 April-1 May, 5.30pm, everyday except Mondays, 4466956*

American Voices: Broadway-focused workshops, five-day long workshop for theatre enthusiasts that will end with a joint performance with ‘American Voices’ performers this weekend. *Saturday, 3 April Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, Jhamsikhel, 4491234*

Infiltration of Darkness, an exhibition of paintings by one of the most promising young artists of Nepal, Sunil Sigdel, *26 March-18th April, Kathmandu Contemporary Art Centre, Jhamsikhel*

Painting for peace and harmony, mural painting with Andorran artist Jordi Casamjor on the south perimeter wall of Hyatt Regency Hotel, presented by *The Himalayan Children’s Foundation of Kathmandu, 4 April, 10am*

Spring Camp 2010, organised by Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory, open to children aged 3 to 12 to discover the joy of dance, music and theatre. *Runs till 9 April. Reservations at 5013554 or info@katjazz.com.np*

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MUSIC



Disco party and tapas festival, seems like an unlikely combination but the disco itself will be a good change from the trance-y oblivion that is Thamel. And we are told Christine will be serving tapas all night long. *Friday, 2 April, 8pm onwards, Délices de France Restaurant, Ganesh Man Singh Building, Thamel, 4260326, dress appropriately*

Moksh Rock Festival, workshops and performances by a who's who of the Nepali rock music scene. Expected guests: Mukti Shakya of Mukti and Revival, 1974 AD, Hari Maharjan, and more. *10-13 April, 5pm onwards, Moksh, Jhamsikhel*

Albatross live at Lakhey, they brought the house down with their first reunion gig at the House of Music last Friday. If you are new to the band, we suggest you print out the lyrics of their songs because everyone will be singing along. *Wednesday 7 April, 7pm, Lakhey Bar, Darbar Marg*

Kalakarmi, launch of Hari Maharjan Project's debut album, Kalakarmi. The album will be one to watch because Hari Maharjan has been labelled the best guitarist in Nepal. *Saturday, 3 April, Nepal Music Center, Pingalsthan, 4465463*

JSC Quartet, bringing you live smooth jazz through the night at Comfort Zone. Hang around with the cool cats and enjoy the cool breeze of the night with a rooftop view. *Thamel, rooftop of Bank of Kathmandu, every Friday, 7-11pm, 9841364368*

Jazzfusion at New Orleans, Jhamsikhel at 7pm, 3 April. 5522708

Jatra ladies night, one free cocktail for all the ladies and mesmerising Sufi and Nepali music with Dharmendra Shwan. Sounds like a win-win. *Every Wednesday at Jatra Bar, Thamel*

DINING

The Oriental Tearoom at Pipalbot has rather complicated opening hours but a mouth-watering spring menu. Try sake-cured salmon for lunch and twice-cooked caramelised pork belly for dinner. *Wednesday to Monday for lunch, and Thursday to Saturday for dinner, Babar Mahal Revisited, 4267657, bookings preferred*

Everest Steak House, an old-school joint for everything steak. A sanctuary for meat. *Thamel, near Chhetrapati chowk, 4260471*

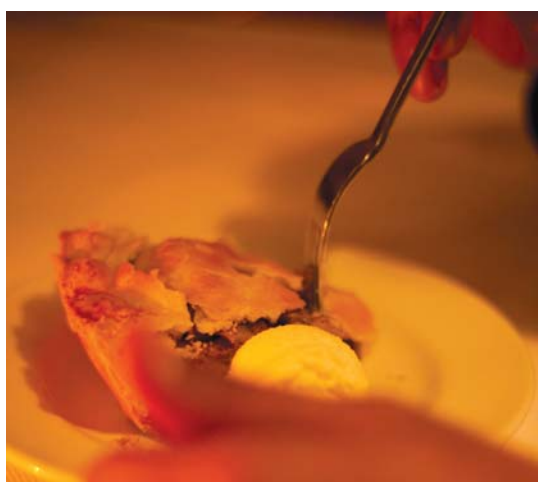
Jazoo, a quiet place ideal for beer and relaxing conversation. Bring a friend and enjoy their special barbeque set for a mix of everything, *Jawalakhel (near the zoo), 5538321*

Hadock, big compound with ample parking space, their Western and Thakali dishes are done to perfection. *Jhamel, 10am-10am, 5546431*

Lhasa Bar, enjoy a beer or a splash of cocktail at this springboard for excellent young musicians starting out on the Thamel circuit. *Thamel, 985101043*

Buddha Bar has been an establishment since the days of the hippies and offers a warm and cozy space for intimate conversations over a large selection of drinks. *Happy hour 4-7pm, Thamel, 9851053235*

Mike's Breakfast, huge breakfasts and a never-ending supply of coffee amidst a lush garden setting characterise this café, popular among tourists and locals alike. *Naxal, 4424303*



Summit Hotel, posh Western-style dining area with candlelight and a romantic night view of the city. Get really busy with the succulent ribs basket, and add the finishing touch with a hot Dutch apple pie. *Jhamsikhel, 5521810*

GETAWAYS



Mountain Bike Festival, go for an exhilarating downhill ride on a mountain bike at the festival organised by Initiative Outdoor, then relax with food and drinks from the stalls. *Saturday, 3 April, Gyanodaya Residential School, Khokana, 2pm till late, 9851014586, www.initiativeoutdoor.com*

NexGEN Adventure Program, rock climbing and canyoning in Sundarijal: a pleasant respite from the rising temperatures with a bit of adventure thrown in. *Daily departure, 016914541, www.canyoninginnepal.com*

Paragliding picnic, head towards Godavari on your favourite off-road bike, take a tandem paraglide flight with one of the experienced pilots, and finish off with a picnic in Godavari Botanical Garden. *Pick up also available, booking and info at 5536863, ktmparagliding.com*

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GAME 1
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Guava nectar

Real
Fruit Power
Mango nectar

Real
Fruit Power
Orange juice

WELCOME PUSH: British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's Special Representative for Peace-Building, Jack McConnell, meets Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal in Singha Darbar on Wednesday.

RAM & RAM: President Ram Baran Yadav swears in Ram Prasad Shrestha as chief justice on Monday at the Presidential Palace.

GRAINS OF HOPE: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sujata Koirala, whose father passed away recently, serves rice to seniors at an old age home in Pashupati on Wednesday, as is customary on the 12th day of mourning.

INTO THE BLUE: Devotees pull a chariot into Gahana Pokhari, Handi Gaun in celebration of Gahana Khojne Jatra.

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WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

Wednesday night's thunderclouds delivered less rain than they threatened, and left in their wake clear skies and cool daytime temperatures. The westerly front that entered our climatic zone last week has lapsed, though pressure should remain low. People in the west can expect scattered and light rainfall. Those in Kathmandu can look forward to beautiful, sunny days.

re

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Flower power



AHMAD ISKANDAR

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Look through the lyrics of Nepal's best-loved songs, and you may conclude this country has an obsession with flowers. Even the national anthem, *Sayaun Thunga Phool Ka*, (made of hundreds of flowers) serves as a reminder of their power. But if the people are singing praises of flowers, the floriculture industry is moving to a rather more melancholic tune.

Since the Floriculture Association of Nepal (FAN) was set up in 1992, the number of

2003, but is yet to be passed.

Loknath Gaire, director of the Chitwan-based nursery United Flora, agrees that it has been difficult to expand his business further without supportive policies. "The government has to step in to provide more technical and logistical support, as the industry still has much room to grow," says Gaire. He points out that Nepali growers are well versed in practical knowledge of floriculture, but there remains a huge gap in technical knowledge, which could lead to exponential improvements. This is where government needs to step in.

FAN figures show that cut flower imports went down to a low of 18 per cent in 2002, but crept back up to 25 per cent as of last year. Shabnam Shrestha, owner-director of major retailer Women In Floriculture, offers a similar breakdown. Upto 20 per cent of her flowers are imported from India, and the figure is double that in certain seasons.

This is a worrisome sign, as Nepal's closest competitors India and China are catching up and slowly eating into the local market. "If this continues, I might eventually have to close down my business," laments Gaire.

Nepal's floriculture industry has also failed to capitalise on export potential. Exports of Rs 60 million were dwarfed by local sales of Rs 560 million in 2009. "Indian floriculturists get up to 90% of support from government, for instance government will provide wells for water," says Shrestha. "Nepali growers are at a disadvantage as they get no help at all."

So how can the industry reach its full potential? A study published in 2009 by the Department of Biology at Kathmandu University has several recommendations (see box) that emphasise government support and research. This help might just be around the corner.

According to Shashi Adhikari, under-secretary of the planning division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, a floriculture policy has been finalised and will be tabled in a cabinet meeting next week. If it is passed, it will provide the boost industry players need. "The floriculture industry has huge potential, and with the policy in place, the sector is sure to flourish further," says Adhikari. "It will be a huge milestone, and floriculture will become one of Nepal's major industries."

The seeds of Nepal's floriculture industry have put down strong roots and begun to bloom beautifully. The right attention is needed to ensure our flowers don't wither away.

The 13th Floriculture Trade Fair will run from April 1-5 at Bhrikuti Mandap

Nepal's floriculture industry has witnessed remarkable growth, but could be so much more

floriculture nurseries has grown from 80 to 600 in 2009, according to president Arun Chettri. But the full picture is far from rosy. Numbers have virtually plateaued since 2003, when there were 550 nurseries. Chettri attributes the slowing of growth not to a saturation of demand, but the absence of a floriculture policy like that in many other leading exporters such as the Netherlands and Colombia. A draft policy was submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in

Apart from the need for technical growing expertise, acquiring financial backing has also proved a problem. "Banks are only providing short-term investment loans, when the industry itself needs 10 to 15 years to mature," says Gaire.

Such obstacles have hampered the growth of the floriculture industry. "Local demand is growing at a steady rate of about 10 to 15 per cent yearly, but the supply has not been able to match demand," says Chettri.

Empowering flowers

1. Government policies, such as air freight subsidies and loans at lower interest rates.
2. Joint research on hybrid seed production and diseases and pest resistance.
3. Cooling storage at international airports and market districts.
4. Collaboration of government, agricultural institutes and private floriculture companies to strengthen human resources.
5. Training, conferences and seminars by qualified government personnel to impart more technical knowledge to growers.
6. More foreign collaboration to exchange information through industrial policies providing proper incentive packages.
7. Strict quarantine law enforcement during the import of planting materials from India and other countries.

Source: Gauchan, D.P., Pokhrel, A.R., Pratap, M., & Lama, P. (2009). Current status of cut flower business in Nepal. *Kathmandu University Journal of Science, Engineering and Technology*, 5(1), 87-98.

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RAJU SHRESTHA

Opiate of the masses

RAMESWOR BOHARA
in PARSА

The parallels with Afghanistan are already frightening in the Nepal Tarai: criminality, impunity, the absence of the state, corruption and militancy. Acres upon acres of white poppy flowers now complete the picture.

Just as in Afghanistan, it is difficult to tell the difference between political militancy, criminality and terrorism. Police estimate that up to 2500 bighas (4175 acres) of farms in Bara and Parsa are growing poppies. That is enough to produce 30,000 kg of opium, which can be refined into 3.5 tons of heroin. Officials estimate that Nepal is now exporting nearly Rs 3 billion worth of opium.

Middlemen come to villages to pay IRs 65,000 for a kilo of opium, but if the farmer can take it across the border himself, the same amount can fetch

IRs 80,000. "Why wouldn't I grow poppy if I can make up to Rs 100,000 per kathha (0.08 acres)?" asks Shahidullah Dewan. Opium has become such a lucrative cash crop that many farmers in the Tarai who were growing cannabis have switched to poppies.

Afghanistan today supplies 90 per cent of the world's opium. Travelling across the badlands of the Tarai these days, you find many of the same conditions as in Afghanistan: economic collapse, years of war, criminalisation of politics, poverty and joblessness. And just as the Taliban now source their income from opium, the Tarai's separatist militants could do the same. More ominously, poppy fields would find even more fertile political and climatic conditions in the midhills.

"It is clear that Nepal is not just a transit for the drug trade, but is emerging as a major producer," warns former police AIG, Keshab Baral.

Farmers in Parsa say the entire

trade is conducted from across the border in Bihar. Indian wholesalers even send their own agricultural experts to advise farmers on farming methods. Indian middlemen pay out advances to Nepali farmers, and buy the entire crop even before it is harvested. They even promise security in case they are harassed by police. Bara's farmers are now so professional, they produce their own poppy seeds.

"This is exactly what happened in Afghanistan," explains police superintendent Devendra Subedi, who was an adviser for the UN in Afghanistan till 2007. "There is political instability, law and order have collapsed, there is no investment. We are on the same path."

India has huge tracts of government-supervised farms where it grows opium for medicinal purposes. But there is also a large underground trade in contraband opium for production of brown heroin meant for export. With Nepal emerging as a major

POPPY FIELDS FOREVER: Police destroying an opium poppy field in Bishrampur of Parsa last month. Despite token action like this, opium and cannabis cultivation would not be possible without police and political protection.

producer of opium, it is only a matter of time before Indian heroin syndicates move their production to Nepal's lawless Tarai.

There is little doubt here that the open opium cultivation would not be possible without police and political protection. One local politician admits: "A large proportion of the farmers rely on poppy cultivation, there is no way I can do politics here if I try to stop it."

Police involvement is nothing new. During the war, a police unit traveling to Bara's interior to collect protection money from the drug mafia was caught in a Maoist ambush, in 2005. Thirteen police were killed.

The spread of opium cultivation in the Tarai is turning parts of Nepal into Afghanistan



RAJU SHRESTHA

Ganja, too

When the Indian Embassy organised a function for the inauguration of a school it helped renovate in Auraha village recently, the dignitaries probably didn't realise that they were sitting next to a vast field of cannabis (*pic, above*). District officials estimate that nearly 60 per cent of the cultivated land in Parsa district is under cannabis, a total of 15,000 bigha (25,050 acres). Opium is displacing a lot of the ganja fields of the Tarai, but the area under cannabis is still considerable and is not restricted to the Tarai. Makwanpur has become a major producer, and the hill districts of the mid and far west have traditionally been big ganja growers.

Cannabis was always one of the major cash crops of Nepali farmers

Former VDC chairman of Khairang in Makwanpur, Rajkumar Malla, says cannabis cultivation is open and was established in the past 15 years. Had it not been for this cash crop Makwanpur's subsistence farmers would have migrated for work because they can't feed themselves for even six months with their meagre harvests of millet and maize.

"I have calculated that just in Khairang alone, farmers made Rs 10 million from selling marijuana," says Malla. A farmer with one bigha (1.67 acres) can grow a ton of ganja, and sell it at Rs 500 per kg. If he can take it across the border, he can get more than double that amount.

Farmers now grow cannabis on every square inch of available land: in their kitchen gardens, in backyards and on the boundaries between terraces. Cannabis even grows next to schools, health posts and behind police stations.

The police are all in on it, and get Rs 400 per 12 kg packet of marijuana smuggled to India. In fact Makwanpur's marijuana is escorted by police in night convoys of up to 40 motorcycles each, right up to the border.

The only problem for farmers here is that a glut in the market has cut the price of marijuana by half.

Sunil Neupane in Parsa, Ramkumar Ailan in Hetauda, Shrawan Kumar Deb in Rajbiraj and Ajay Anuragi in Janakpur



SUNIL NEUPANE

COLLECTIVISED: Farmers in Bishrampur in Parsa trample their cannabis harvest underfoot before selling it to Indian middlemen.

Operation decontamination

"We can see the light at the end of the tunnel where mines are concerned"

Boris Cerina, ICRC Regional Weapon Contamination Adviser for Asia-Pacific, visited Nepal recently. Excerpts from an interview with *Nepali Times*:

Nepali Times: What brings you to Nepal?

Boris Cerina: I visit Nepal from my base in Bangkok every three to four months to exchange information on the situation in Nepal, as ICRC has no mine action delegation here.

I should also clarify what we do. Everyone, including the UN (which leads demining activities in Nepal), uses the terminology 'mine action' and 'mine awareness'. In reality we are all talking about the risks posed by different kinds of mines, unexploded ordnances, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and small arms and ammunition – hence the term 'weapon contamination' that was introduced by ICRC last year.

So what work do you do on 'weapon decontamination' in Nepal?

We started a pilot project on mine risk education – again, including other weapon risks – in 2005, before the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed. We were working in upto 46 districts in 2006-7, and are now back down to 10 districts.

We support two physical rehabilitation centres – the Green Pasture Hospital in Pokhara (since 2004) and the army rehabilitation centre in Kathmandu (since 2009). The centres treated a total of 1100 people in 2009, and distributed artificial limbs and crutches where needed, for free. ICRC also runs regular 'war surgery' courses, which are emergency and trauma courses for doctors.

ICRC programs such as Micro Economic Initiatives provide families, including victims of the conflict and landmines, with grants of Rs 10000 to get their lives back on track.



RABI THAPA

What is the situation with weapon contamination in Nepal?

The Joint Mine Action Working Group brings together diverse actors such as the Nepal Army, the UN Mine Action Team, INSEC and others (including ICRC/Nepal Red Cross Society).

There are no exact figures on how many mines there are, but there are 53 mine sites, mainly around army barracks. Twenty-four have been cleared, 20 more will be cleared this year, and the remaining nine should be cleared by the middle of 2011 by four demining teams. So we are doing pretty well on this count.

It's difficult to gauge the extent of IEDs that were used by the opposition, but these are what cause the most accidents, mostly involving children (60%). The total number of casualties since the CPA stands at 262.

Why hasn't Nepal joined the Ottawa Treaty on banning mines ?

155 countries have joined so far, but there are no reasons for Nepal not to join as it is already implementing parts of the treaty. There are other legally binding provisions such as destroying mine stockpiles and so on, but the reason seems to be a lack of awareness and prioritisation. This takes time, which is why events held during the UN's International Mine Action Day (April 4) are important. But progress is being made on the ground and the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction is taking a proactive role; it is currently studying what joining Ottawa will require.

You've worked with ICRC close to two decades, starting in your native land, Croatia. How has this informed your approach, and what would you consider a success story?

You never get used to human suffering, you just become more professional, less emotional. And it is more difficult to be neutral in your own country. But our role is clear – it is to assist the victims of conflict, whichever side they are on.

All the places I have worked in are success stories in one way or the other. But compared to places like Cambodia, Afghanistan, Iraq and even the former Yugoslavia, the problem here was on a much smaller scale and was not complicated. In five years, we are already seeing the light at the end of the tunnel here. But we would like to see Nepal join the Ottawa Treaty.

See also
'Anti-ordinance ordinance' #484

No load-shedding zone

Makar Shrestha in Kantipur, 29 March

Singati (Dolakha): 45-year-old Bhakta Siwakoti of Lamidanda-6, a village in the north of Dolakha district, has set an example for rural electrification by lighting up three VDCs.

About 200 households of Laduk, Lamidanda and Jhyaku villages are getting uninterrupted power supply from the plant Siwakoti installed himself. Kerosene lamps have become obsolete in these villages.

Siwakoti took a loan from a local cooperative and started the project. As the project progressed, the costs crossed his estimation. He borrowed

क्रान्तिपुर



money from his relatives. “The project cost me Rs 2.1 million altogether,” he says. Besides lighting up the villages, the electricity is used to run mills for rice, flour and oil.

Siwakoti only studied up to Class Four, and was completely new to the field. But he mobilised locals. Chet Kumar Shrestha offered him technical support while his friends and family members helped him in construction work. “This is not work for experts,” he says.

The tariff rate is also reasonable: Rs 105 for fixed 15 units per month and Rs 10 per unit beyond that.

“We got rid of kerosene lamps,” says local shopkeeper Arjun Pande, “We open our shops until late in the evening these days.”



‘From the people to the people’

Introduction to the new Maoist website, www.ucpsnm.org

The twenty-first century is the century of information revolution. Globalisation of information, thanks to Internet technology, has reduced the entire globe into a small rural unit. And, due to this, any positive or negative development in any corner of the earth can have its impact on the whole world in the blink of an eye.

The time we are living in is, as Lenin pointed out, the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution. But, because of Internet technology and globalisation, some features of imperialism, its mode of hegemony, are not, needless to say, ditto as they were in the 19th century. Its obvious and logical consequence is that this very change can have a generous say upon the characteristic of contemporary proletarian revolution, into which the historical document of our party's second national conference 'Great Leap Forward : The inevitable necessity of history' delves lucidly.

What can be the role of media in the establishment, defense and development of People's Democracy? How the media can be one of the weapons of people's scrutiny and control upon the state in the system of DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY? These questions, by the way, demand more time and effort to be answered. We've launched www.ucpsnm.org hoping that the website will provide easy access to information about our party, the Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), and our movement to all. Our party believes in no 'conspiracy theory' but mass line. 'From the people, to the people' is the basic premise of the Maoist mass line. People should have easy access to information and their right to information should always be protected. And ucpsnm.org is an attempt in this direction from our side. The feedback, critiques and comments from our readers and viewers are always the most precious asset for us and our party.

योग

माओवादी + कांग्रेस + साना दल

माओवादी + मधेसी दल + कांग्रेस

माओवादी + कांग्रेस

जन + विद्रोह

=

प्रधानमन्त्री

Yoga

Maoists+NC+small parties

Maoists+Madhesi parties+NC

Maoists+NC

People+revolt

=

Prime Minister

नागरिक

Robin Sayami in

Nagarik, 30 March

The Himalayan

unstoppable

As we pull out all the stops, The Himalayan Times now comes to you loaded with Specials everyday. Spanning the gamut of life, your daily is loaded with something exclusive for everyone. Easy to expect nothing less when you've accepted the unstoppable.

Specials

- Sunday - Shopping Plus - info, bargains, discounts, destinations
- Monday - Hi Tech Plus - technology and gadgets
- Tuesday - Health Times ; Medical Board - Nepal's best doctors respond to queries ; Wheels - everything automobile
- 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

Imminent danger

DAMBAR K SHRESTHA
in ILAM

Local leaders still claim the May 28 deadline for the constitution can be met, but the people are sceptical. The Limbuwan National Federal Democratic Forum and the Federal Limbuwan Council of Ilam have been working on programs to protest the anticipated failure.

Dharma Gautam, a civil society member, blames the political parties for the delay. “Political parties may come up with a constitution but it had better be one that is acceptable to all,” he says. He’s doubtful however that the parties will resolve contentious issues any time soon. “They will realise the significance only after the country enters armed conflict, resulting in economic crisis and ultimately foreign intervention.”

Bheshraj Acharya of the Nepali Congress has been pinning his hopes on leaders that an agreement will be reached soon, particularly on two issues: state restructuring and forms of governance. He is against the idea of a concise constitution. “The constitution should be written no matter what it takes,” he says, “or else we should hand over power to the army or be ready to face civil war.”

UML’s Mahesh Basnet considers the Maoists the main obstacle to writing the constitution. Instead of focusing



Already vexed by frequent bandhs and strikes, the eastern districts are worried about the delay in constitution writing and its potential consequences

on constitution writing, he feels, they launched protests in the name of civilian supremacy and an anti-Indian movement, and pelted stones or showed black flags to ministers. “They want to create instability and reap benefit from it,” he says.

But president of the Maoist-affiliated Limbuwan Liberation

Front, Shree Jabegu, maintains it is wrong to say the Maoists have obstructed the constitution-writing process. “The Maoists raised the issue of the Constituent Assembly due to which they won the elections. How can the Maoists be against the CA?”

Ilam president of the Nepal

Bar Association Appellate Unit, Madan Khadka, warns there is not enough time to follow all the procedures in endorsing the new constitution. He thinks the political parties should first agree on the forms of governance and the federal model to move the process along.

Some local leaders and intellectuals are still hopeful, but the public is not. Bijay Rai, who runs a hotel in Pokhareli Bus Park, Ilam, is worried about a possible conflict. “We were hoping the new constitution would put an end to conflict in the future but it does not seem to be the case as the political parties are engaged in power games,”

he says. Bablu Pariya, a tailor in Nikunja Path, adds, “The new constitution was supposed to end all kinds of bandhs and strikes to create an environment conducive for working class people, but now it seems it cannot be written on time.”

While CA business is stuck debating the federal model and forms of governance, half a dozen parties and organisations in the eastern hills have been haggling over the proposed territory of Limbuwan state.

Limbuwan has been claiming Jhapa, Morang and Sunsari, which in the draft proposal of the Committee on State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power fall under another province. Rai and Limbu fronts are fighting over Khambuwan and Limbuwan territory. The Kirat Workers’ Party and the Khambuwan National Front have been saying the Limbuwan and Khambuwan regions should be jointly called Kirant Province.

Dharma Gautam says this is the result of the hasty decisions of the political parties, which did not consider economic viability, geographic accessibility, social and historical backgrounds in determining provinces.

Shree Jabegu, meanwhile, rules out ethnic discrimination in Limbuwan state. “There is no need to be scared of ethnic slogans. We all are Nepalis first. Everyone will have equal rights irrespective of the community they represent and the place they reside in,” he says.

Party stances are the obstacle

Debi Khadka, Maoist CA member, Dolakha 1

How is the constitution-writing process going on?

Apparently, about 75 per cent has been completed. But a lot of things are yet to be done. The political parties have not agreed on the fundamental issues of the constitution.

Who is to blame for the disagreement?

The political parties’ stance’s are the main obstacle. They are refusing to be flexible.

That is what is holding up the constitution-writing process?

If the leadership acts wisely, the constitution can be written on time. For that, there should be political consensus.

Your party is involved in pulling down the government instead of writing the constitution?

Constitution and government are interrelated.

The people’s mandate should be respected to write a new constitution and complete the peace process. A national unity government is required to expedite the constitution-writing process.



What will you do if the constitution is not written in two years, as promised to those who voted for you?

I will go to the public and tell them who was responsible for the delay. I will do whatever they ask me to do.

Who do you think is responsible for the delay?

UML and NC are responsible.

You blame UML and NC while they accuse your party of not internalising democratic norms.

Our party acted responsibly in the CA. We never obstructed

the CA sessions once.

Wasn’t the CA session postponed on 6 December last year due to a bandh called by your party?

It was an exception. We never obstructed CA business.

Recognise Chamar community

Shanti Devi Chamar, UML CA member, Kapilvastu

How many Chamar representatives are there in the CA?

There are five of us.

You are also in the Committee on State Restructuring and Sharing of State Power. Is the Chamar community happy with the 14 provinces as proposed?

The draft has overlooked the issues of the Dalit community. Dalits are assured special rights within the provinces, which is not sufficient. Although I approved the draft, the provinces should not be created on the basis of ethnic identity only.

Are you a supporter of political prerogatives?

The proposal came on the final day of the meeting, recommending political prerogatives for certain communities. I opposed the idea as it ignored the wellbeing of the Dalit community. We don’t want mercy in the federal system. We were discriminated against and treated as untouchable in the past. The state should compensate Dalits by providing them with reservations in state mechanisms for a certain time.

What is the Chamar community expecting from the new constitution?

Chamars do not have their own land. So they should be provided with land. Chamar women are supposed to take care of women who have given birth for minimal pay, this practice should be eliminated. They should be trained as nurses and midwives. Chamars should be provided with free education and health facilities. Chamars are more discriminated against than hill Dalits. Madhesi leaders should understand our difficulties.

What will you do if the constitution is not written on time?

The Interim Constitution is due to expire on May 28. If it is not amended before that we will no longer be CA members.



A man with a mustache, wearing a white jacket over a white shirt and dark trousers, sits cross-legged on a white sheet. He is shielding his eyes with his right hand. A speech bubble above him contains the text "I'm willing to try anything...". In the background, other people are visible, some also shielding their eyes, suggesting a bright or uncomfortable light source. The setting appears to be an outdoor event at night.

shoots himself in the foot every time he opens his mouth. Just the other day he was warming up to his favourite subject (“no constitution until we come to power”) when he paused and said: “I’ll stop there because I have been warned not to talk too much...” But when he got onstage with Ram Dev this week, he got so carried away again that he babbled on about how his revolution actually was a “fusion between spiritualism and dialectic materialism”. He also said he agreed with Ram Dev that animal sacrifice was barbaric, but that (under certain objective conditions) human sacrifice was ok. And he had just started waxing eloquent on how yoga was an inherent part of Mao Thought when the crowd started heckling him. **Comrade Stupendousness** was oblivious to the hooting, so Ram Dev came to the rescue and sent the Chairman down to practice diaphragm exercises and to explosively expel air through his leftist nostril.

The reason **Comandante Terrifico** seems to be hooked to the opiate of the masses is that he is losing his edge against arch-rival Laldhoj in an internal power struggle. PKD told UML honchos the other day not to trust BRB because he was RAW. Com Red Flag emerged much stronger after Kamred Kiran sided with him on not going for a vote of no confidence against the govt now. Being much better in maths since his SLC days, Baburam Sir knows his party could never muster enough votes. Besides, he thinks the UML-led coalition will get all the blame for not finishing the constitution on time if it stays on till May 28. The pro-Baburam section of the Baddie media have unleashed uncharacteristically blistering attacks on **Brother Number One**, and BRB himself wrote in an op-ed (choosing his words carefully) that getting into government now without a two-thirds majority would be “awesome stupidity”.

The newly-revamped Maoist website is worth a visit (www.ucpnm.org) because it has the latest updates, central committee decisions and even a streaming video of the Chairman's speeches, minus the Shaktikhor tape. It will soon carry the new constitution drafted by Com Khimal Dev-quota, to be launched at the May Day rally. The site also contains the address of the party headquarters at 'Perish Danda'.

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If you are a Tamang from Nepal with 'Lama' as a surname, be prepared to be singled out at immigration in Shanghai for special interrogation. Apparently those guys think you are all related to **HH, The Dalai**.

ass(at)nepalitimes.com

A cartoon illustration of a donkey's head, looking slightly to the right with a neutral expression. The donkey has large, floppy ears and a grey snout.