So close, so far

Plain Speaking
Prashant Jha looks at the road ahead of the May 28 deadline, and warns that in the light of their past conduct, Maoist threats shouldn’t be dismissed entirely.

ID-ing Nepal
MRP or no, biometrics are on the cards for the next elections.
Gandhi’s of course: “You are not your money, but money is your child.” 

From originally? Even to anyone, the next question is you answer “I am an American” down, your features, whichever citizenship you countries are vying to attract the self-interest that my country. Actually, I have a very selfish games and motivational lectures as #498). We do this through outdoor Development’ (‘Learning leadership’, mostly with college students on, for. Teaching leadership? Improved local governance. Warning (“Learning from Jajarkot”, this article is an appropriate early Prevention is better than cure; hence (forget safe drinking water) to this. Déjà vu. There was similar ignorance, apathy and Indian press for her statement. In her lengthy field report from India’s Chhatisgarh state (Indian Maoists on 6 April, Arundhati Roy described for us in the Nepali media, there is a sense of deep vu. There was similar ignorance, apathy and disinterest in the Kathmandu establishment following the first attacks on police stations in Rolpa in 1996-97. The political parties in Kathmandu were too preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more preoccupied with coalition horse-trading to notice a brewing revolution, and totally underestimated the fires that were raging. If anything, the Indian mainstream is much more
In the middle of 2007, there were murmurs from the Maoists that they would quit the interim government unless a republic was declared immediately and a full PR system adopted. No one believed them, but they did walk out. Last year, the city was abuzz with speculation about whether the Maoists would sack Katwal. For whatever reason, they went ahead with their threat.

Over the past ten months, the Maoists have fluctuated a lot but throughout, they have been consistent about three things – we will not cooperate with Madhav Nepal; the next government should be under our leadership; and we will hit the streets to achieve our goal. The Maoists have not budged. There is a simple lesson here – take Maoist rhetoric seriously. They do not operate using the same strategies and tactics as other ‘normal’ liberal democratic parties, and usually end up doing what they say they will.

Kirani and company seem to think mass mobilisation, infused with a semi-violent appetizer, can enable them to capture the state. But the pragmatists within have argued that for a jana bidroh to succeed, four elements are necessary – popular mass upsurge, a militant party apparatus, a division within the state security forces, especially NA, with the lower levels refusing to shoot; and support of sections of the international community. At best, the Maoists have the first two. Even there, the popular support of the middle and lower middle class in Kathmandu cannot be guaranteed given their ‘vaccinating’ nature. Moderates in NC and UML, one might argue, would also get pushed towards the right-wing, refining existing achievements.

Prachanda is shrewd enough to recognise that a unilateral seizure of power is not possible. But he also knows that the sole basis for a lot of Maoist bluster is the claims that they have a solid organisational and popular base. This is the time to prove it. Maoists say they will get 400,000 people out on May 1, which is definitely an over-estimate. Many in government are probably underestimating Maoist strength where they think the turn-out will be less than 100,000. But as soon as we get into that range, who really knows how to count? The Maoist premise is that non-Maoist politicians will get cold feet, the security organs will not want to get into a confrontation, and India will then try to stitch together a deal rather than risk a conflict with unknown results. If they do arrive at an agreement, the calculated gamble will have paid off. But if the non-Maoist camp does not blink, given that many feel the Maoists are bluffing (since they need a CA extension the most), then this could well go over the brink.

Rationality, logic and objective conditions suggest that there will be protests, but then the netas will hammer out something that allows them to continue to loot the state. But common sense is not the hallmark of Nepali politics, making predictions a hazardous task. Either way, the next few weeks will be critical, with for the lasting consequences for the nature of the state and who will dominate it.

**Those who dismiss Maoist threats should know what they say they will do**

*By Prashant Jha*

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The World Food Programme was a scapegoat last year, but government negligence and unhygienic local practices will be firmly in the spotlight in the event of a diarrhoea outbreak this year

The World Food Programme (WFP) is distributing food. Under its Food for Assets program, the immediate food needs of the population are met while the government initially seemed to go along with the story rather than concede that it was its slow response and totally inadequate preparation that prolonged the outbreak. “The government told us WFP food was not the cause of the epidemic,” says a health administrator at the Department of Health Services, acknowledging that diarrhoea is a common seasonal phenomenon. His recent visits to Jajarkot and Rukum didn’t indicate a full-scale epidemic. “The government initially seemed to go along with the story rather than concede that it was its slow response and totally inadequate preparation that prolonged the outbreak.”

While some newspaper reports claimed that locals were wary of WFP food because of last year’s controversy, the ground realities do not appear to bear this out. Ultimately, says the director of molecular dynamics, the real triggers of diarrhoea outbreaks are the lack of potable water, sanitation facilities, and proper hygiene in affected areas. When the water sources dry up and the number of flies increases, risk is heightened. “Food is not the cause of diarrhoea, unhygienic practices are,” says Shah, who spread the rumours in the first place. “They excrete in the open space around their houses because they don’t know any better.”

Bishwa Raj Khanal, senior public health administrator at the Department of Health Services, acknowledges that diarrhoea is a common seasonal phenomenon. His recent visits to jajarkot and Rukum didn’t indicate a full-scale outbreak was imminent. “The government has been doing everything it can,” he says, “by filling in health worker vacancies and providing medicine stocks. But we need support.”

The near-daily reports of diarrhoea cases, with fatalities on the rise, can’t be dismissed wholesale. But if an epidemic does gather momentum, coordinated support rather than the all-too-easy blame game is the better option.
Columnist’s curse

Bharat Bhurtel, rest in peace.

The recent suicide of a popular columnist may have something to do with the state of the profession in Nepal

Rather than being content with his achievement, the conclusion of a challenging assignment appears to have frightened him instead. Writer Khagendra Sangrula went as far as to say that the office of the president sucked his creative juices dry and then left him in the lurch. Dead men tell no tales. But rage, however, is the motive why he killed himself.

C K Lal

FOURTH ESTATE

23 - 29 APRIL 2010 #499

Advertisers, lobbyists, acknowledged as authoritative. Columns do not generate enough output is even more difficult to measure. Some excellent contributors analyse subjects that interest them. Reporters fill their columns with the leftovers of their field notes. But a general columnist has to mine his own heart and mind to find grist for the mill. That could be the reason columnists generate so much hostility: everyone thinks that they could do better if only the publisher believed in their talent.

The reality is somewhat more complex. Commercial publishers feel that columnists take away useful column inches. Some fifteen years ago, the chief executives or interest groups may take umbrage at hugely popular columns. If a columnist took into account the controversy a piece could create, she would be unable to put pen to paper.

Columnists are not popular even in the newsrooms, where most of them are considered parasites that thrive on the sweat of reporters. Editors barely tolerate these columnists often impinge upon their freedom to choose the tilt of the publication. Columnists survive in the media only because committed readers associate certain periodicals with the mugshot of their favourite writers. Stories of all pretensions, columnists are essentially writers who succeed in establishing an amicable relationship with their readers.

Bhurtel was perceived as a ‘democratic’ writer and was at his acratic best while lambasting UML or Maoist personalities. At a reception hosted by Naya Patrika daily some time ago, a friend chided Bhurtel for moving his column out of a weekly newsmagazine, pointing out that “in the magazine, you had a page facing the reader all to yourself. In a broadsheet, your column has to compete with the editorial, among other articles. Your reputation will save the column for a while, but you will have to innovate constantly to retain the loyalty of readers.”

Only a columnist of Saurabh’s stature could have been so blunt. He then tempered his observations with some empathy. “But you have your compulsions.” In retrospect, that statement seems to have been an understatement.

The contradiction of hobnobbing with the rich and powerful while struggling to make ends meet can weaken the will of even the most resilient among us. If the blame for Bhurtel’s death is to be laid somewhere, it has to be the accused profession of punditry.

Executive of a media house made this amply clear to a columnist: “The scarce space that I give you is compensation enough. Do you realize I could have given it to Pradip Nepal, Prakash Chandra Lohani or Narhari Acharya and earned their goodwill instead of publishing your rants and making enemies all around?”

Columnists generate deep antagonism among thebean counters of media houses. Everyone knows what an editor, a reporter, an advertising executive, or even a billing clerk is expected to deliver. But other than a deadline and a word limit, there are no conditions placed upon independent columnists. They don’t even punch in the timesheets.

The quality of a columnist’s output is even more difficult to measure. Some excellent columns do not generate enough response from readers but are acknowledged as authoritative. Advertisers, lobbyists, authorities or interest groups may take umbrage at hugely popular columns. If a columnist took into account the controversy a piece could create, she would be unable to put pen to paper.

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The recent suicide of a popular columnist may have something to do with the state of the profession in Nepal

Columnist Bhurtel didn’t leave a note explaining why he killed himself. Anecdotal evidence suggests he had been under immense stress. He had recently finished a piece for Nagarik daily. Even decision to complete his weekly column for the weekly, on which Bhurtel was a regular, was Bhurtel’s off-the-cuff reaction to some provocative dissent in the newsroom. Even Lohani or Narahari Acharya and Pradip Nepal, Prakash Chandra Lohani, who had been under immense stress, may have had a point, but an editor who allows a columnist to get away with such unprofessionalism is the problem.

The NA recruiting scam

The parliamentary State Affairs Committee will submit its report on its much-hyped investigation involving the procurement of equipment for the Nepali mission in Sudan on Friday, and the report is expected to impinge upon the government’s high-level commission. The report is expected to call for the dissolved Constituent Assembly (CA) to be re-elected in order to complete the Constitution drafting process. The NA recruiting scam

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ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

POOKARA – Nepal Tourism Year 2011 was launched with much fanfare and people seemed happy to see this tourist city bustling with activity. The city has transformed quite a bit in the past decade, with buildings and excavator ceremonies’ eating hills to create flat land for sale. There is less observed greyness as the need has outward, Pokhara is aping the wrong model: Kathmandu.

For tourism to really make sense, we need to see not only physical transformation of places, but also the transformation of mindsets. After two days, one runs out of eating options as the ‘tomato puree’ culture predominates the restaurant industry here. There have to be more restaurants that provide good food at fair prices. Maybe it’s more restaurants that provide industry here. There have to be runs out of eating options as the wider world. Having sappy Internet connections or changing a bomb for connectivity isn’t tourist friendly. Of course, the most important transformation we need to see is in service delivery. Since the establishments seem to think they are gods and we, the customer, are at their mercy. We need to understand that workers are paid to provide good service. Productivity and wages need to be linked. In some places in Pokhara, we actually felt we were a big burden imposed on employees who would rather sit around twiddling their thumbs. There are of course exceptions. One need only observe the staff at the highly successful Busy Bee Café to wonder why other restaurants aren’t the same.

But Pokhara must also make more of its incredible natural beauty. Simply dumping tourists here is not enough. Planning is necessary to determine how the lake can be used for more than just rowboat rides. How about a pathway around the lake for walks? The challenge is to find more options to keep visitors busy.

What better time than now to think about destination overhaul? It’s not more construction that we think about destination overhaul?

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LIFE TIMES

Mobile nation

AHMAD ISKANDAR

The world is in your palm. Laptops have become passé, as smartphones are the lightweight champions of the world.

Smartphones went mostly unnoticed until Apple’s iPhone was launched in 2007. Suddenly, everyone wanted a smartphone. The iPhone embodies the dreams of its consumers: responsive high-resolution touch screens, apps and games, and most importantly, instant web access on the go. It ushered in the era of 3G mobile services, with smartphones making the most of fast internet access. Converging technologies and services have propelled each other since. Google and Microsoft are making huge investments in the sector.

Nepal was lauded as the first in South Asia to offer 3G services, back in 2007, but progress has since been slow. Nepal Telecom has only 2,100 3G clients, all within the Kathmandu Valley. “3G hasn’t really caught on here as the network coverage was limited, and the rates were considered expensive,” says Kabindra Shrestha at the Nepal Telecommunication Authority (NTA). “A lot of improvements have to be made to the basic infrastructure so it can meet consumer needs.”

But 3G is showing signs of a revival, with subscriber numbers tripling since February in response to more competitive rates and better coverage. Pokhara is undergoing tests for 3G coverage. With NCell poised to enter the 3G market soon, speculation is rife about competition benefiting subscribers. A boost in 3G subscription is likely to complement the smartphone market, too.

Smartphone sales are already gaining momentum. “More Nepalis are switching from basic handsets to smartphones,” says Mansur Khamidov, chief commercial officer of NCell. People from all walks of life have found their personal equilibrium in the use of smartphones (see p8).

Alas, the industry is under attack from a threat close to home. Sales of imitation smartphones, mainly from China, are stealing a large portion of the market share. NTA’s Shrestha estimates that roughly 30 per cent of smartphone users have Chinese imitations with near-identical forms and functions. “Without regulation, copies will continue to be popular with Nepalis, especially the low and middle income groups,” says Shrestha. NTA is currently looking into ways to curb piracy, and is assessing the Equipment Identity Register (EIR) that assigns unique International Mobile Equipment Identities (IMEI) to each branded phone and bars calls to or from pirated models. “As it is relatively easy to clone the IMEI, there are still doubts about its reliability,” says NTA’s Arjun Ghimire. India recently required mobile users to register their IMEI numbers, shutting out 20 million imitation phones.

For now, distributors and retailers can only voice their frustration. “It’s not fair,” says Ramesh Shrestha, a general manager of the electronics division of Chaudhary Group, a distributor of LG phones. “While companies like us are paying duties and taxes, these pirates get away with it.”

It may be time to connect with the industry players again.

Your business circle, always by your side

Corporate solutions, from Ncell

In your professional life there are certain people who matter a lot. That’s why we have Closed User Group (CUG) services. With CUG rates at just Rs. 0.8 per minute, your business circle has never been closer.

For inquiries, please call our Ncell Centre. From Ncell mobile please dial 9005, from other numbers please dial 980 9005 000 www.ncell.com.np
It’s all too easy to feel left behind in the frenetic information age. Smartphones are more than up to the multi-task. *Nepali Times* rounds up the hottest smartphones in town.

**QWERTYs**

**Micromax Q3**
- Pros: With the option of using two SIM cards—GSM and CDMA—in the same phone, you’ll never be stranded, wherever you go.
- Cons: Memory is only expandable up to 2GB, small by today’s standards.
- Price: Rs 6,500 from Network Solution, 4220128

**G-Phone G-388**
- Pros: Aside from its sleek and stylish looks, its dual SIM card option is useful for business trips out of the valley. Comes pre-installed with Nimbuzz, great for social media applications such as Facebook and Skype. On-board camera is a plus point.
- Cons: Not 3G enabled, makes up for it with wi-fi.
- Price: Rs 9,000 from Estel Network, 4221445

**LG GW925**
- Pros: Has an excellent QWERTY keyboard and a large 2.8” touch screen. Memory is expandable up to 8GB. A 3MP camera is perfect for parties, and a 3G option is a bonus.
- Cons: Keyboard isn’t the coolest looking.
- Price: Rs 21,500 from Chaudhary Group, 5525039

**Nokia N97**
- Pros: Large, 3.5” touch-screen display, slide-out QWERTY keyboard for easy typing, full A-GPS support with Nokia maps, 5MP camera with Carl Zeiss optics, auto-focus, LED flash and video light.
- Cons: Bulky, so will only appeal to those who need the features. Expensive.
- Price: Rs 52,000 from Neoteric Computer, 4250001

**Micromax Q3**
- Pros: With the option of using two SIM cards—GSM and CDMA—in the same phone, you’ll never be stranded, wherever you go.
- Cons: Memory is only expandable up to 2GB, small by today’s standards.
- Price: Rs 6,500 from Network Solution, 4220128

**G-Phone G-588**
- Pros: Aside from its sleek and stylish looks, its dual SIM card option is useful for business trips out of the valley. Comes pre-installed with Nimbuzz, great for social media applications such as Facebook and Skype. On-board camera is a plus point.
- Cons: Not 3G enabled, makes up for it with wi-fi.
- Price: Rs 9,000 from Estel Network, 4221445

**HTC Hero**
- Cons: Small built-in memory.
- Price: Call TeleTalk, 4254546

**Samsung Omnia II**
- Pros: 3.7” touch-screen, long battery life, full connectivity options.
- Cons: Price. Dismal applications store.
- Price: Rs 49,000 from Virgin Mobile Showroom, 4260173

**Motorola W7 Active Edition**
- Pros: Fitness applications make this phone a niche product. Small and light.
- Cons: Small screen. No internet browser.
- Price: Rs 13,500 from Call Mobility, 4240886
Bhushan Shilpakar, PhotoCircle, currently roaming around France

“Iphone has been my saviour on this trip, especially for maps. Getting in touch with friends and family back home makes me feel like I’m really travelling! Easily checking e-mails, uploading pictures and instant messaging have simply been great. Since finding a cyber café in Europe isn’t easy, the free wi-fi negates this problem. It’s much better than lugging a laptop around. Got this dreamy gadget as a gift. I also have a Nokia E73. While not as fancy as the iPhone, it still serves me well with basic tasks such as checking e-mails whenever I’m out of the office. As long as there’s 3G and GPRS, it’s still relevant.”

Kshitij Regmi, Marketing & Communications Consultant

“I don’t usually play games on the phone, but I spend a lot of time checking e-mails with my Nokia E63. It’s really convenient to toggle between my three inboxes. I also use social media applications such as Facebook, Twitter and Fring a fair bit. Works fine every time. The speaker volume isn’t great but it charges fast and has a strong body.”

Clash of the titans

Two smartphone heavyweights are in talks to enter the Nepali market soon. NCell, which recently took over Mero Mobile in grand style, will be focused on bringing in the Blackberry. Known for its robust build and high reliability, the Blackberry is the weapon of choice for most business people. Rumours also abound of an iPhone deal between Apple and telcos here. The iPhone is renowned for its superlatively smooth user experience, as well as the large number of applications and games to choose from. Watch this space.
**EVENTS**

Art Exhibition: Sojourn in Bangladesh, series of paintings by Jubier Pradhan, opens 5.30pm, 23 April, until 12 May, Siddhartha Art Gallery, Baber Mahal, Revisited, 4218048

**DINING**

The Lazy Gringo, a favourite among expats, serves authentic tex-mex cuisine (Arizona mex, actually) to satisfy the hungry gringo within. Of note are the Arizona rice bowl and enchiladas with salsa. Wash it all down with freshly-forging lemonade, Jawsbank Chowk, 2210527

Himalayan Java, a Thamel establishment more known for its coffee, serves excellent sandwiches (including a baba ganoush and an Egyptian tomato stuff), and tuna cheese. Trijevi Marg, 4425219

1905 Restaurant, feast on roasted delights within this converted aristocratic residence. Walled ambience and green surroundings make it an oasis within the city, Kantipath, 4215069

**GETAWAYS**

The Great Escape, retreat from the hustle and bustle of the city to The Dwarikas’ Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort in Dhulikhel. Last 45 minutes from Kathmandu, the short ride offers enchanting panoramic views and nature’s best. Overnight packages available for local residents, The Dwarikas’ Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, Dhulikhel, 4974488, www.thedwarikas.com

The Last Resort: One-stop for Adventure Sports. Take your pick – a bungy jump over the Bhote Khosi river 160 metres below or mountain biking to the Last Resort. The Last Resort Sales Office, Jawalakhel Chowk, 2210527.

**MUSIC**

Blast of Bar, organised by Planet Music Academy featuring Ashish and Neekham, and Mahayaara, 24 April, 5pm, House of Music, Thamep, 8915071

Best of Suli, chill out to soothing Suli music by Heman Ramji with your choice of poison at hand, every Monday, Boudha Room, Darbar Marg, 4447103

Dinesh Rai & The Sound Minds, jam it up at Fusion while you celebrate the start of the weekend and drive away the stress of the past week with a sumptuous buffet and drinks. Every Friday from 7pm, Fusion at Dwarikas’s Hotel, Bhatapur, 4479488. Buffet at Rs 999 (includes a soft drink or beer)

Suvaprabhat, catch this talented band fronted by lead singer-guitarist Prabhat Manadhar while sharing a hookah with your friends, every Thursday from 7pm, Shisha Terrace Café & Bar, Thamep, 4701104

Mountain Bike Rally, grab a bike and make an environmental statement by riding from Pulchowk to Chobar, where there will be a cross-country race for advanced riders. Saturday, 24 April, starts 6am, Laxmi Bank, Pulchowk, 4444684. Entry fee Rs 1000 (includes t-shirt and lunch)

** november 2010 #499 **

**TEST OF FAITH: Representatives of the Christian community demand timely promulgation of the constitution and equal status for all religions at Khulamanch, Tuesday.**

**RUNNING ON EMPTY: Waiting for water in Nakabahil, Patan.**

**FRONTLINE: Head of OHCHR in Nepal Richard Bennett launches Himal Books’ ‘Close Encounters’ on Monday at Yala Maya Kendra, Patan Dhoika.**

**WOW: VON’s 6th Top Ten College Women award ceremony at the Radisson Hotel, Lazimpat, Sunday.**

**Weekend Weather by Ngamidra Dahal**

There’s a week left in April, but the mercury is coolest in the main winter months i.e. January-February. Expect you to haven’t had enough rain with the Valley receiving only a third of its monthly rainfall of 65mm. The available image suggests a couple of showers on the weekend and early next week as a fresh westerly is still pumping in moisture through the usual routes. Nevertheless, the short wave in the jetstream shifts to the southern side of the Western Himalayas which has the bar pressure system is still active. Valley residents should expect a upspur to wind and caution should be exercised over the weekend.
I'm only writing this now, in the depths of darkest loadshedding, because of the sun. Thanks to a new 20W photovoltaic solar panel, I can not only charge my laptop and light a couple of energy-efficient bulbs, but also charge my internet modem. This allows for a quick background check on the nice people at ECCA who sold me my solar system (battery included) for Rs 18,500: ECCA meaning Environmental Camps for Conservation Awareness, which developed the Solar Tuki to replace kerosene tukis in rural Nepal (“Tuki-free country”, #258). It's no big deal, you may say. My inverter/generator does just as much and I can run everything in my house for about Rs 40,000. And when I went around announcing that I was now greener than the average Ram Bahadur Nepal, it was somewhat deflating to see even fellow children of the sun shrug and go, ‘Ey, ho...’

But I insist on making a big deal out of it. If I can tilt a panel less than 20”x20” across, run it through a small battery and have electricity pour out the other end, regardless of whether NEA has two hours of loadshedding a day or sixteen (at which point all your fancy inverters are just so much junk), why shouldn’t it be a big deal? It's nothing less than magic. I had better point out that my panel is still indoors, as I haven't yet found a thief-proof spot, and works adequately.

In fact, it occurs to me that it is the rest of our energy-starved nation that is making a big deal out of solar energy, by not investing in it. Yes, solar energy is expensive – solar tukis cost Rs 3500 and are not affordable for many rural households without subsidies; larger home systems to run lights, a TV and a desktop computer can easily cost Rs 150,000 – but prices are dropping steadily, and financing plans for Gham Power products are now available from companies such as the Clean Energy Development Bank. Without going into the nitty-gritty of how long it will take to break even, let me just say that solar is the only sure thing. Loadshedding may go up, diesel may be blockaded, hell, even the glaciers may evaporate and render hydropower obsolete, but the sun won't stop shining in Nepal. And photovoltaic panels last up to 25 years.

I confess also that while I was never blasé about the power of solar, the choice before me, a first-time buyer and consumer (discounting solar water), was paralysing. It didn't help when the front desk of one of the leaders in the field of solar energy, upon hearing I wanted a small system, nodded sadly and advised me to get an inverter, here’s a number you can call. It was only when I saw a friend troop off to Doti with a portable package that I decided, definitively: I’m gonna get me one of them gizmos. And I did.

Like all innovations, it’s not reading an article in a paper that’ll get you on the phone to tap into gham power. It’s your neighbour’s house, inexplicably powered sans inverter or generator, while you miss out on World Cup 2010 and pray for an early monsoon. The system isn’t going to work for you anytime soon. Don’t wait for power, get your own. Now that’s empowering.

ECCA – www.ecca.com.np
Gham Power – http://ghanpower.com
Clean Energy Development Bank – www.cestli.com/
Twenty-eight-year-old Shivanth B. Pande is head of the Research & Development department at Nepal Investment Bank. "I am optimistic because we in Nepal have comparative advantages that are not being funded. The banking system has not been successful in financial inclusion and national coverage of financial products. I am optimistic because we in Nepal Investment Bank have been working hard over the past year and half to address this deficit. Mergers should happen in the sector and the capital base of banks should increase to Rs 5 billion and then to Rs 8 billion over the next five years."

"What role do you think it plays in maintaining the health of the financial sector? Research helps in decision making. With more timely, accurate data, better decision making can happen. Also, research prevents you from moving in a herd mentality as you can be better informed than the rest of the pack. In terms of business development and innovation, without adequate research into the latest trends, thoughts and practices, you will be left far behind."

"What caused the liquidity crunch? This problem has been brewing for the past four years, and has many sources. We can summarise the main issues:

- too many financial institutions and cooperatives concentrated in the same places, bidding up deposit rates that are transmitted to loan rates
- low public confidence in the viability of some banks
- people keeping money at home and in bank lockers rather than in deposits
- unnecessary speculation about the viability of our exchange rate system
- sudden slow down of remittance growth, which hits the economy
- sudden anti-money laundering tightening and tight regulation on sources of funds
- real estate speculation and share market speculation on excessive credit
- capital flight from Nepal
- excessive exposure of parties to credit and the subsequent unwinding of built-up leverage
- poor political outlook and lack of unity and a constitution, drastically lowering business and investor confidence in the economy
- lack of security
- lack of coordinated policy between government agencies and ministries"

The new governor has enacted a very new and logical program. The banking system has not been successful in financial inclusion and national coverage of financial products. I am optimistic because we in Nepal Investment Bank have been working hard over the past year and half to address this deficit. Mergers should happen in the sector and the capital base of banks should increase to Rs 5 billion and then to Rs 8 billion over the next five years. What are your thoughts on the future of the financial sector and banking in Nepal? Part of what we do for research is to look around for best practices, and figure out how we get to that level. Technology is now going to be at the edge of streamlining payments, making things cheaper and faster. It can help speed up money transfer within Nepal, which is very inefficient, and upgrade the skill base of our workforce and services."

Within the next two to three years, we see a huge change in the industry, and we’ll be comparable to anywhere in the world. One exciting thing about banking is that it’s fundamentally the same everywhere in the world, so it’s like because we’re Nepal, we’re behind. We’re in a good place right now now.
In a week, the pilot phase of a voter registration project compiling a new voter list with photographs and fingerprints will be complete. Each voter will be given a unique identification number, which will be used to deter fake voting, detect and remove duplicate registrations and manage the internal migration of voters.

This also means we will be moving closer to a National ID (NID) card system. The voter list will include not just eligible voters but also citizens between the age of 16 and 18 in order to create a national civil registration list.

Inspired by similar schemes in neighbouring countries like Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the government introduced a provision for the creation of NID in the last budget. “It’s a matter of providing an identity card for citizens,” says Hari Prasad Nepal, joint secretary at the Office of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers. “We can prevent fraud and duplication if we have a central depository for such data.”

By the end of the fiscal year the Ministry for Home Affairs, which oversees the NID project, aims to issue cards on a voluntary basis in the pilot area. Initially the card will act as a voter identification card. “Eventually, we aim to make it a multi-purpose card and it can be used to hold information about property ownership, driving licenses and criminal records,” Nepal says. “People can access various public services using the same card.”

The Ministry has yet to draw up a plan to implement the use of NID and draft laws that will govern the use of these cards. However, the reaction to the NID card has been one of both relief and concern. In the wake of Jamim Shah’s murder in February, Nepal Police blamed its slow progress on the lack of a national database. “The government needs to create a database with personal information on citizens in order to assist police investigations,” Rajendra Singh Bhandari of the Crime Investigation Department says.

Many countries including Spain, Germany and France use a multi-purpose national identity card. But such cards have been vehemently opposed in the United Kingdom and Australia over questions about its effectiveness in fighting crime, as well as privacy and civil liberty concerns.

A study by human rights watchdog Privacy International found “claims of police abuse by the way of the cards in virtually all countries” that use cards. Following concerns over national security in the recent Machine Readable Passport (MRP) debacle, anxiety about privacy is not far behind here. “We will have to pay special attention to how the data is stored and protected,” warns Dinesh Thapa of Privacy Nepal.

Since the NID card entitles access to public services, there are additional concerns about the cost of lost or stolen cards and how it might affect those who can’t afford them. It will also require citizens to update the national database and when events such as births and deaths take place. A special effort may be needed to make sure everyone has access to such facilities.

The National Election Commission will complete its data collection next year, but it is still unclear when the NID cards will be introduced nationwide. For starters, the Home Ministry needs to present draft legislation on NID cards in parliament. In the meantime, it is worth investigating all these concerns, to determine whether we actually want, or need, a national identity card.
neither the guerrillas in the after ushering in a republic, constitution-making process and coming into this historic regression. My feeling is that after to revisionism, backsliding, and present state of affairs is leading government. Unfortunately we have a consensus able to defeat these forces unless transformation. We will not be and who are against progress and republicanism and secularism are those who want to roll back encircle the cantonments. There dissolve the CA, others want to some people are still trying to abandon our peace efforts. But we remember this, we can reach an agreement on the constitution and we will. There is no alternative. For this a national government isn’t a condition, it is indispensable. The Nepali people will not tolerate any conspiracy to derail the peace process. Excerpted from a speech at the National Association of Professors.

Editorial in Rajdhani, 20 April
Prime Minister Madhav Nepal may not admit it publicly but he has reason to be distrustful of Maoist promises, and the people understand this. The nationwide mobilisation by the Maoists of their cadre for military training is being taken seriously by a section of the international community. However, there are agencies that have closed their eyes to such Maoist behaviour while trying to extend their role. The end result is the possibility of a militant mindset driving extremism to dominate the country. In this struggle, those who will suffer are the pro-democratic forces that believe in pluralism and nationalism. It is because the UML and NC have been unable to challenge the agenda of the Maoists and other extremist groups that the country is now in the grip of ethnic, communal and territorial fragmentation. Unless these two parties put up a solid, united front to deal with the Maoist threat of ‘state capture’ they will also themselves go down in history as parties that couldn’t stop the extinction of democracy in Nepal.

Editorial in Nepal Samacharpatra, 20 April

This is not the time to quarrel. This is not the time to say that the peace process was a mistake. Since the constitution is not going to be written by May 28, the parties to the Comprehensive Peace Accord must at this late stage work together to find a peaceful fallback option. The alternative is further chaos and perhaps even a return to conflict. Which is why the army recruitment of 271 without exceeding its strength at the time of the peace accord should not be magnified out of proportion for political expediency. Political parties should stick to logic. Weakening the national army is weakening the state.

Sambhu Shrestha in Drishhti, 20 April
The Maoists are dreaming of getting back to power precipitously because they have made it impossible for the constitution to be written. They have concluded that the situation post-May 28 will be dangerous, which is why they need to get into government before that by hook or by crook. For the nation, nothing could be more perilous than the Maoists coming to power in this way. The ascendancy of militancy will mean the funeral of democracy. This is the reason the other parties also don’t see any other way to defend democracy. They understand that the Maoist goal is to set up a totalitarian people’s republic. The Maoists must understand that this is impossible in the 21st century, yet they pretend not to understand.

Editorial in Kantipur, 22 April
The government’s decision to open army recruitment at this sensitive phase of the peace process will only help make it even more fragile. On the other hand, what is the necessity for the Maoists to give khukuri and baton training to its cadre ahead of their May Day rally in Kathmandu? Why shouldn’t we believe the Maoist leadership when it says all this is in preparation for an uprising? Are the Maoists preparing for an unconstitutional power grab? The leadership should clarify these questions. Like other parties, the Maoists have the right to hold peaceful demonstrations. But if rallies take an extreme turn and turn violent, it will take the country back to conflict. Both army recruitment and Maoist training are encouraging extremist politics, and must stop immediately.
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The peace process will be unstable until the integration and management of the PLA is complete

The peace process is stuck due to blame games. Technical and high level committees have failed to decide on the issue. The High Level Political Mechanism has been passive and proposed integration schemes have been ineffective. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal believes it is the Maoists alone who benefit from keeping PLA soldiers in the cantonments.

Although the integration, management and rehabilitation of the PLA is an integral part of the peace process, it is not undisputed. The peace process will be disrupted until there are two armies. The integration and rehabilitation of PLA soldiers are very sensitive issues and require a consensus for resolution. But the leaders of the political parties do not have a specific plan to achieve this.

It has come to light that Dahal and Koirala had agreed to integrate 3,000 to 5,000 PLA soldiers into the NA during the signing of the CPA. But since the demise of Koirala, the Maoists have been saying that their demand was for 12,000 to 14,000 PLA soldiers to be integrated into the army. In the Special Committee, PM Nepal has proposed integrating 5,000 PLA soldiers. But these discussions have only focused on numbers, rather than how and where in the security forces they will be integrated, and what designations they will receive.

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The latest Maoist demands include the possibility of integrating all 19,602 PLA soldiers. Those opting for rehabilitation or a political career, according to the Maoists, should receive Rs 2 million or 5 to 10 bighas of land. Alternatives include integration and rehabilitation, setting up a separate Maoist regiment, or creating a new security force comprising PLA fighters, army and police.

At first glance the alternatives don’t seem unreasonable. But how logical is it to increase the number of security institutions to address integration? Qualified PLA fighters should be integrated not only from the basis of claims and counter claims but on the basis of the CPA and the Agreement on Weapons and PLA Monitoring 2007.

It should be noted here that in the agreement signed by Krishna Bahadur Mahara of the Maoists, nowhere is it mentioned that integration is mandatory. But the fact remains: we cannot avoid the issue of integration on these grounds. It is not just a Maoist but a national concern that will determine the future stability of the country.

Those who are totally against integration are as wrong as the Maoists who attempt to put a price tag on their fighters. It should be a matter of shame for revolutionary leaders to confine their fighters to cantonments and then bargain for their release, at a price.
‘Visit Nepal, And We’ll Squeeze Every Last Penny From You’ should be the slogan for 2011. Visa fee, ticket to enter Bhaktapur, ticket for Patan Darbar Square, ACAP fee, new trekking permit fee, Mustang royalty…visitors to Nepal can be forgiven for feeling like they’re being held upside down until the last coin drops out of their pockets. Just when they thought there were no more fees, tourists stranded here by the Icelandic volcano got a rude shock on Wednesday as they were fined for overstaying in Nepal. Every other country in the world, including Schengen states, automatically extended the validity of temporary visitor visas. But at our Imitation Dept, the cash counter was tinkling away.

In 1850 Jang Bahadur, who had just come to power following the Kot Massacre, became the first South Asian potentate to visit Britain and France. His intention was to gauge British military might so he could decide whether it was worth declaring war on England and, if that were to happen, whether the French would side with us. Which is why while there, besides inspecting the red light district, he also visited cannon factories and the naval wharf. Impressed, he decided to be Britain’s friend and sent troops down to rescue them during the Indian Mutiny. Today, Pushpa Kamal (‘Comrade Jangay’) Dahal is in a similar conundrum about whether or not to declare war on India. He did nasal exercises alongside His Holiness the Ramdev last month to probe the possible fallout. He met another Soodsayer, who told him his Saturn was stronger than Mars. And now, before launching his Mahabharat Yuddha on May Day, he has sent everyone’s favourite emissary-at-large, Amresh Bhai, to sound out Delhi Darbar. Only problem is that since the demise of his mentor, Amresh has been blabbering away to the local press, which is full of reports of how Chairman Fearesomeness is willing to do anything to fulfill Five Conditions so he can be anointed PM. This led one wag to mutter at a diplomatic do the other night: “It will be worrying if the Indians stop worrying.”

The Three Leaders of the Three Parties (which makes nine in total) are trying to revive the HLPM, but it’s looking more and more like flogging a dead ass. The bottom line is that the Baddies are in no mood to allow the new constitution to be written until they are back in the saddle. But that can’t be done until PKD hears back from Dilli, so what to do while we wait? Well-publicised nationwide khukuri exercises and martial arts training. The long wait is making Awesome antsy, mainly because he suspects a plot is afoot to make his nemesis BRB PM instead of him. The sabre-rattling is therefore not aimed so much at making Makunay quake, but to warn Laldhoj away from any fancy ideas. BRB, however, is not in any particular hurry and is patiently sitting it out. In fact, Comrade Red Banner is against being in any kind of govt before May 28 so that the blame for not drafting the constitution will go to the incumbents.

So, it’s official. Mao Media Corp is being launched soon with tv, radio and newspapers. There is considerable opposition to this from within the party, with some comrades arguing that political power doesn’t flow out of a Sony HVR HD-1000. The real reason PKD is interested in being a media mogul himself is that every wannabe warlord is buying up radios or newspapers, and the chairman is worried the party line is being diluted. Media consultants invited to a briefing told the comrades they could earn more propaganda points if they stopped threatening people with ‘bowtick carbuy’. The other week, the Ass broke the story about the new department store being built inside Singh Darbar. It looks like the store will also have a Child Care Centre. Wouldn’t a Geriatric Centre be more appropriate?

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