

Looking for leaders

A new public opinion survey shows most Nepalis don't think the present crop of leaders can lead the country to prosperity and peace.

The most dramatic finding of this year's nationwide Himalmedia public opinion survey is that there is a leadership void in the country. More than 5,000 respondents in 38 districts were asked last month which one public figure would be able to deliver prosperity, peace and democracy. Nearly one third couldn't think of anyone or didn't want to say. But of those who were pinpointed, Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal (20.2%) and Baburam Bhattarai (14.7%) led the pack, with the rest in a long tail of single digits.

But asked which three parties they would trust to lead Nepal to prosperity, the respondents reaffirmed their faith in the Big Three. Unlike in the 2008 elections, the Nepali Congress and the Maoists were neck-to-neck, named by 57% and 56.2% of respondents, with UML at 52.8% per cent and MJF at 7.2%.

At a time when royalist parties have been calling for a referendum on monarchy and secularism, the poll results show that 7 out of 10 Nepalis think it was right to declare Nepal a republic. More than half (52.2%) believe Nepal's Hindu statehood should be restored; this should be seen in light of the fact that 88.2% of respondents were Hindu.

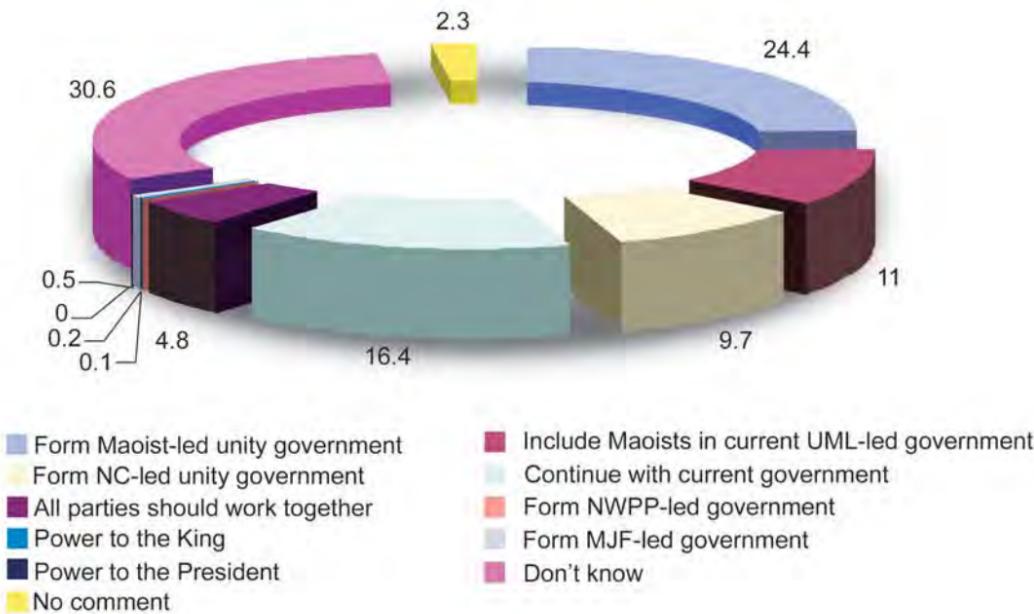
There is a seeming paradox in that a third of respondents felt the Maoists were the biggest obstacle to the peace process, while at the same time the vast majority of those who suggested a solution felt the party needed to be involved in the peace process by being included in government.

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How should we resolve the current political deadlock?



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

VOX POPULI

It shouldn't come as any surprise to our political leadership and elected representatives that the Nepali people are sick and tired of their inability to build on the success of the 2006 pro-democracy movement and move the peace process forward. The results of the Himalmedia poll in this issue prove just how widespread the disillusionment is, and it is accompanied by a gnawing fear that politicians have squandered the gains of the past four years and the country is headed back to conflict.

It should be a sobering reminder to our present rulers that when asked to name one personality who could lead the country to prosperity and peace, most respondents either didn't know or didn't say. And it should be shock therapy to NC and UML that when people do name leaders, the two who come out on top are both Maoists. Even though NC (as well as the Maoists and UML) does well in the response to the question on support for political parties, the combined poll votes for the three Kangresis vying for party leadership don't even reach double digits.

The large number of undecideds in this and previous polls underline the fact that the preoccupation of most Nepalis (survival, food, health, education, jobs) is not reflected in the obsession of our political leadership with power and its trappings. This survey represents the public opinion of the citizenry, and any political force that ignores public opinion for too long is headed for oblivion.

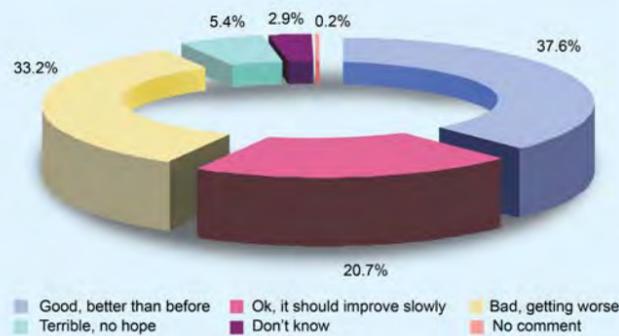
For the Maoists, too, the message is loud and clear. We support you mainly because we have no other choice, but

we'd support you even more if you renounced violence and started behaving like a party for change that doesn't need to employ brutal methods. The people have rejected a return to monarchy or the ways of the past, so the Maoists are flogging a dead horse by stoking panic about counter-revolution. The vox populi is: join the other parties to agree on power-sharing and peace, stop intimidating and beating us up, help us raise our living standards and even more of us will vote for you. The Maoist khukuri-rattling and slogans in the run up to May Day have drowned out the people's voice. If they only stopped to listen to the people in whose name they fought a ruinous war, they might actually benefit.

The poll also indicates that an overwhelming number of Nepalis are hopeful about the future despite the feeling that corruption has got worse. Most people compare the present situation with the war years and see a vast improvement. Unlike most urban dwellers and the media, the people tend to see the bottle as half full.

It is now up to our politicians to honour this optimism and work to fulfil the Nepali people's hope for peace and prosperity.

What do you think of the country's situation now?



Infectious optimism



GUEST COLUMN
Birgitta Dahl

As I readied myself to come to Nepal, I started to follow the news more closely. I knew I was coming to a country that was struggling out of a decade-long conflict, and had my doubts about the democratic process as well as respect for the rights of women and children.

But a week-long trip in mid-western Dang changed those impressions. The people I met in the villages, mainly women and children, stoked my optimism about Nepal.

I met many women in Dang, some affiliated with women's cooperatives, female community health volunteers undergoing

training, teachers, and women working relentlessly to mediate cases of domestic violence.

In Hapur VDC, members of the Women's Federation told us how fewer babies are falling ill to treatable diseases, and no babies had died in recent years from diarrhoea or pneumonia. Because of watch groups for safe motherhood, no mother had died during childbirth.

In Dhikpur village the women showed us charts illustrating how immunisation rates, school enrolment, toilet construction, birth registration, family planning and consumption of iodised salt have all gone up. Death rates and unattended births have dipped. I marvelled that all of this was achieved despite the armed conflict. The women told me this was possible because they were doing it themselves. Their grassroots movement was not singled by the

wildfire of the conflict.

Witnessing this first hand helped reaffirm my belief that the roots of democracy lie in a decentralised system where the decision makers are those whose lives are affected by development programs. A bottom-up planning system can trickle up from the community to the district level.

In Dang, Nepal's grassroots movement has not been singed by the wildfire of the conflict

When I heard about the issues Nepali women were trying to overcome – poverty, illness, malnutrition, illiteracy – I was reminded of Sweden about a century ago. Like here, it was a movement by the non-governmental sector that first pushed for social reforms.

The children I met during my

trip also filled me with hope. In Hapur, they told me how difficult it was to convince their elders to construct toilets and not defecate in the open. These children wanted us to provide adult education classes for their parents! In a tiny classroom in Tulsipur, decorated with children's artwork, boys and

girls shared their dreams with us. Most had to work and were only allowed to be children for two hours a day at school. Guided by a caring teacher, these children explored a new world through books. They wanted to become doctors and teachers, and despite their hard lives, they were full of hope. Their

optimism was infectious!

In Nepalganj, we met young peer educators who reached out to those at risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. I was amazed at the immense courage these youngsters demonstrated. When they emphasised the importance of sex education, I was taken back six decades, when as a young teenager I had advocated for the same in our school, following the expulsion of a pregnant schoolmate.

I didn't get the chance to tour a lot of Nepal, but whatever I saw convinced me that the women and children of Nepal, often with the support of the men, are well on their way to becoming very capable future leaders. Once Nepal has a democratic constitution and local governance flourishes again, this can become a reality. 🇳🇵

Birgitta Dahl was MP in Sweden for 34 years, Speaker of the House for 8 years and Minister of Environment and Energy for 9 years. She is now President of UNICEF Sweden.

ON THE WEB
www.nepalitimes.com

IDS: CHEER OR FEAR?

It is probably good to have a multi-function ID card but the social cost is too great ('ID-ing Nepal', #499). Data storage and protection is the huge concern. And access to data is also a big concern. Very little is being done on the preparation of introducing ID cards in Nepal but one thing is sure, the privacy of the people of Nepal should not be put at risk at any cost.

Privacy Nepal

- In a polity with irresponsible policymakers, incompetent bureaucrats and quite a bit of corruption, the ease of information access that a biometric ID provides can only lead to identity theft and other negative effects on personal liberty. Tough legislation could curb potential identity theft but experience

suggests that any sort of workable safety net will not be provided.

Battisputali

HOLLOW THREATS?

I think everyone does take the Maoists seriously about what they say and plan to do ('Blustering reality', #499). After all they planned and instigated an insurgency which cost the lives of 14,000+. The problem, as Jha mentions, is their ability to be negotiated with, their stubborn non-diplomatic stance and inability to budge, which has cost them politically. At the end of the day the Maoists have proven to be extremely destructive and self-destructive.

rishav

HOME, SWEET HOME

We all appreciate the efforts of Non-Resident Nepalis and the rest in investing in Nepal to create more jobs so that people

do not have to travel overseas to search for menial work ('Homeland', #499). But have the leaders and bureaucrats of the country done enough to make the environment of the nation more conducive for investors? The answer, unfortunately, is 'no', and those who have invested millions are planning to quit.

Lahure

REVAMPING SERVICE

Excellent article that hits the point: we don't truly know how to provide service to customers ('Destination overhaul', #499). Our maintenance efforts (if any) are similar; we make roads but leave them to crumble. We have a 'use and abuse' policy where we try to milk everything for what it's worth and then make a quick escape – netas included. If we are to truly be a successful hotspot for tourism, we have to be in it for the long haul.

Hange

The blogs

nepalitimes.com/blogs

The Brief

Exclusive coverage of the May Day rally, and other developments



Times

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Weekly Internet Poll # 500

Q. What does the Maoist training of cadres signify?



Weekly Internet Poll # 501. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. What will May Day lead to?

They're here



PLAIN SPEAKING
Prashant Jha

Kathmandu's elites cannot seem to understand who these people are. But talk to the cab driver, waiter, vegetable seller, small shopkeeper, slum dweller or construction worker and you will get an idea of who may dominate the streets from Saturday.

There has been coercion in the process of mobilisation. But the Maoists have essentially tapped into the three core contradictions of Nepali society – ethnicity, class, and space (Kathmandu versus the rest). They have

constitutionalism and democracy. They have highlighted Maoist extortion, use of violence, and portrayed the movement as one aimed to 'capture the state'. The idea is to sound reasonable – look, we are willing to give up, but the Maoists are not committed to democracy.

A core group of ministers, which includes hardliners like Bijay Gachhedar, Bhim Rawal and Bidya Bhandari, will monitor the situation and respond accordingly. A tough cop, Ramesh Kharel, has been given charge of Kathmandu. And NA has been asked to be prepared.

The government's initial premise was that the Maoists were bluffing and would not be

camp rhetoric is reduced to 'anyone but Prachanda'.

If NC-UML stays inert, the Maoists will claim victory. If they act strongly through NP and APF, the Maoists will cry repression. If they call in the army, they will be overshadowed by a strong military establishment which will come out after credible guarantees from Delhi. And if they do a deal right now, the Maoists will have the upper hand. The strategic short-sightedness of the 'democratic camp' is truly astounding.

The Maoists do not have it easy either. They will struggle to find a right balance during the agitation. They have to escalate sufficiently to generate pressure on the state, but if they go too

The coming days will be a tightrope act for both the government and the Maoists



KIRAN PANDAY

Old style security response?

deployed their cadres; capitalised on the rage of those on the periphery; and channelised popular discontent against inflation, power cuts, corruption and insecurity, for which Madhav Nepal has been projected as solely responsible.

The party leadership knows that violence will invite a backlash and they have tightened up the command structure. Their assessment is that if they can cripple the country for 4-5 days, influential elites and residents will pressurise the government to go. Other assumptions include NP and APF being worn out, NC and UML not having the stomach for a prolonged stalemate, NA staying in their barracks, and India intervening in favour of consensus. This would then totally stamp out the possibility of a right-wing drift post-May 28, which the Maoists are genuinely concerned about.

For its part, the government has framed this as a question of protecting the state's integrity,

able to mobilise. Now, their assumption is that these are only party workers and not the general public; citizens will turn against the Maoists for disrupting their lives; and the Maoist base of daily wage labourers will soon tire. If the state can stand firm for a few days, this argument goes, the Maoists will be 'exposed' and have no choice but to compromise.

In reality, the government is on the back foot. Unlike the Maoists who have reached out to social groups directly, the government has relied on the media to put forth its version. Madhav Nepal's suggestion that there should be a third candidate instead of Prachanda or him has given the Maoists a major perceptual and psychological advantage, for implicit in the statement is the PM's lack of faith in his own government. The carefully constructed case that the Maoists must transform before they can be allowed back to power lies in tatters, and the non-Maoist

far, it will invite a full-blown conflict that they do not want either.

The party will have to answer some very difficult questions internally and externally. How much will be enough? What if the government doesn't blink for a week – do you turn more violent? How do you arrive at a consensus, which will involve giving up certain demands, when street passions are at their peak? If a non-Prachanda led government is the only solution even then, what was the utility of the movement in the first place? And what if NA joins the fray?

The ideal scenario is a package deal by Friday or even Saturday night, that allows Maoists to convert the crowds into a victory procession and send them back home. Positions will only get more entrenched as the movement progresses. But perhaps a round of limited confrontation is inevitable, to break the stagnation and stabilise the balance of power.

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KIRAN PANDAY

DEWAN RAI & SUVAYU DEV PANT

Lost in the smog

The government doesn't seem to care about Kathmandu's worsening air pollution

It seems there are few things the government cares more about than climate change. Last year, it caught the world's attention when it held the highest ever cabinet meeting at Everest Base Camp, and has since been asked to lead an alliance of mountainous countries lobbying against climate change. Yet it has turned a blind eye to pollution problems closer at hand, in Kathmandu.

The average PM 10 count concentration in Kathmandu, a measure of the particulate matter content in the air, was 183 ug/m³ in 2003 and 173 ug/m³ in 2007, both far above the National Ambient Air Quality Standard of 100 ug/m³. The World Health Organization's standard is 50 ug/m³.

But there is no data for 2009 as the air quality monitoring project in Kathmandu, started in 2002 with the assistance of DANIDA, has effectively been discontinued. Ambience monitoring machines were placed in seven different locations in the valley to measure PM levels. DANIDA covered 70 per cent of costs during the first year under the condition that the government would take over full financial responsibility in three

years. However, the government hasn't kept up its end of the bargain and the monitoring machines have not been operational since 2007.

The government has set aside Rs 2.5 million to install two machines that may still work if repaired but hasn't moved ahead with the installation. It has approached Kathmandu Sustainable Urban Transport (KUST), an Asian Development Bank project to improve the city's traffic, for technical support and solar power back-up.

The government isn't totally to blame. The machines must run for at least 16 hours to obtain valid PM counts, which is difficult under load-shedding conditions. However, the cost of back-up power isn't beyond the government's means. "We don't need donors to reinstall them but the focus of environmental issues now is on climate change," admits an official at the Ministry of

Environment, Science and Technology.

In the absence of PM 10 readings, other indicators suggest Kathmandu's air pollution may be getting worse. The number of patients suffering respiratory problems in some of Kathmandu's hospitals has risen over the last couple of years. RP Mainali of Norvic Hospital says, "About 300,000 people have come to Norvic seeking treatment for respiratory problems over the last four years, which is a massive increase. Growing air pollution is one important reason why."

Aside from disorganised urbanisation and the garbage problem, traffic exhaust and brick kilns are major contributors to air pollution in the capital. The geographic structure of the valley is such that a dense low layer of smog is formed, trapping all dust particles in the atmosphere during winter.

Government regulation has not been effective in controlling air pollution. Vehicle

Emission Standards (VES), first endorsed in 1995, are routinely violated. Last month, the Prime Minister's vehicle was spotted being driven into Singh Darbar, leaving behind a jet of black smoke, without a green sticker signifying that it had met VES. When the media reported this, people from the Department of Transport Management immediately pasted a green sticker on the windshield of the PM's car.

The government also phased out diesel three-wheeler Vikram tempos from Kathmandu and legislated a ten per cent additional tax per year on vehicles older than 15 years, but only after failing to ban the use of vehicles older than 20 years. Bhusan Tuladhar, executive director at the Environment and Public Health Organization (ENPHO) says removing old vehicles from Kathmandu alone could reduce pollution by 20 per cent.

There are no new programs to improve air quality because of a lack of resources. However, the private sector could help the government in formulating policies and plans. "We can help the government to improve the environment, in fact we have plans ready," says Tuladhar, "All we need is cabinet endorsement and implementation." 

Troubled waters

SUVAYU PANT & FOO CHEE CHANG

Illegal water bottlers, most of them operating in small-scale 'one-room' factories, have severely hurt the water bottling industry and pose significant health risks to consumers.

By law, water bottlers require a license to market their product from the Department of Food Technology and Quality Control (DFTQC) and registration with the Department of Small Cottage and Industries. DFTQC checks for acidity levels, the presence of harmful chemicals – such as arsenic and cadmium – and especially microbes, which pose the greatest danger in the Kathmandu Valley.

There are 73 licensed bottlers in the capital, but the number of illegal bottlers is unknown as the government has not been responsive to calls for a full accounting by industry leaders and experts.

"Illegal bottlers have a huge price advantage over their legal counterparts since they don't invest in proper purification processes and techniques," says industry specialist Jogendra Prasad Rauniyar.

Illegal bottlers either fill used containers purchased from recognised brands or buy easily available caps and labels, which cost Rs 2-5, to mislead consumers. Since they forgo the purification process, the



Poor regulation is costing legal water bottlers and consumers dearly

production cost per litre bottle is just Rs 10-15. This is about Rs 5 less than the production cost per bottle borne by legitimate companies.

The purification process varies depending on the source of the water: river, spring or groundwater. Most companies in Kathmandu use groundwater, and run it through at least three filters to eradicate any chemicals or microbiological matter and 'soften' it to make it less harsh on the digestive system. While many of these companies market their products as mineral water, in fact no minerals or nutrients are added, as that would raise prices to uncompetitive levels.

This is usually enough to meet DFTQC requirements. Those who are caught flouting requirements are fined Rs1000-2000 and have their license revoked if they are guilty of multiple offences. Last year, four bottling companies were shut down.

However, regulators are strapped for cash and manpower. They are only 10 inspectors for the valley, though at least 40 to 50 are required, and they operate according to an outdated food security act dating from 1967. Pramod Koirala, a regulator with DFTQC, says, "We have drafted a new act, but this cannot come into effect until the constitution is completed. The new act will

increase penalties, which currently reflect 1960 prices, and increase the number of food inspectors."

Be that as it may, the regulatory measures may be wrong-headed. "Current regulation focuses on the safety of the final product, but more emphasis should be placed on the cleanliness of the source of water," says conservationist Hum Gurung.

What's worse, a price war and unhealthy competition between companies have led to the cannibalisation of profit margins. "Many companies are selling their products at a loss. A bottle should cost at least Rs 15-20, but is often sold at less than Rs 10 in bulk," says Suman Pradhan of the Nepal Bottle Water Industries Association (NBWIA).

NBWIA is at the forefront of a campaign to counter such challenges by bringing more transparency to the illegal trade, encouraging healthy competition and improving consumer awareness. In the last two years, many city-level associations have formed under its wing.

"We must make safety our number one priority. It will be tough, but there is a hopeful future for this industry," says Pradhan. 



Asymmetric information



FOURTH ESTATE
C K Lal

The gushing travelogue Arundhati Roy wrote about her experience of being embedded with the Naxalites appears to have created a spot of bother for the celebrated activist and author. The Director General of Police is contemplating action against her under the draconian Chattisgarh Special Public Security Act. The anger against the Maoists is so strong among the comfortable classes that the voice of a few civil society activists may not be enough to prevent her arrest.

The middle class is on the warpath against what Premier Manmohan Singh has repeatedly characterised as the greatest security threat to the Indian republic. The business community is baying for the blood of the Maoists. Militant Hindu groups have always detested leftwing movements. Now an influential section of the Indian media has joined the chorus and is openly calling Roy's 'Gandhians with guns' terrorists.

Roy did get somewhat carried away with her 'thousand-star lodging' in the jungles of Chhatisgarh. Gandhians and guns are contradictions in terms. The Mahatma was quite emphatic in stating: "I can find a thousand causes to die for, but I have never found a single cause that I can kill for." The massacre of hapless security personnel by

stealth at Dantewada shows that the group behind the atrocious crime deserves no public sympathy. The grievances of the poor in the tribal belt are real, but such a response is abhorrent.

Maoists may justify the butchery as a 'propaganda of the deed' or even the 'violence of defensive offence'. Acolytes of the Great Helmsman are masters in the art of obfuscation. But the massacre of 76 CRPF jawans at Dantewada was an act of terrorism

Here at last is something Nepalis can teach Indians: media coverage of a Maoist conflict

pure and simple. Of course, occasional acts of terror don't make an entire group terrorists. If that were so, the security forces that make people 'disappear' would deserve the tag, too. In civilised societies, crime needs to be condemned but the criminals have to be saved, sometimes from their own stupidity, insanity and rage.

Politicians have to resort to fiery rhetoric. In the wake of 9/11, George Bush II bluffed about 'smoking out' al-Qaeda from its mountain hideouts. Similarly,

Indian Home Minister P. Chidambaram can be forgiven for exclaiming that he will "wipe out the Maoists in two to three years". The media has to see through the bluster.

When the Maoist insurgency began in Nepal, the media here was still on a learning curve. Leftwing romanticism enticed some influential reporters into depicting armed guerrillas as saviours of the poor and the downtrodden. A few rightwing editors allowed themselves to become apologists of the insurgents to vent their anger against the government of Girija Prasad Koirala. But by and large, the Nepali media avoided the 'us against them' oversimplification, even though the conflict here has been far more ruthless and has consumed many more lives than the 40-year-old Naxalite insurgency.

Enough Nepali journalists have been to India to see how the free press functions in the supposedly largest democracy of the world. Perhaps now it's time to invite some Indian mediapersons to Kathmandu to show them methods of coping with the asymmetrical warfare of misinformation. The Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels once said, "Think of the press as a great keyboard on which the government can play." The Indian media needs to contemplate the consequences of accepting such a role. Not that we need to gloat, but we have been better learners and need to revisit our own experiences to face the challenges of an uncertain future better.

THIS WEEK

Red tide

The Maoists have planned an indefinite nationwide strike in the name of a third Jana Andolan, beginning 2 May. All industries, businesses and educational institutes will be shut down, and all transportation halted. The purpose of the protests is to force the dissolution of the current government, to put in its place a national unity government headed by the Maoists.



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

Understandably, the announcement caused disquiet and foreign envoys immediately met Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai to express concern. Adding to the unease is the reality of thousands of Maoist cadres from across the country pouring into the Kathmandu Valley in preparation for the protests. One PLA commander was caught carrying 36 hand grenades and a khukuri. UNMIN was quick to condemn the commander as 'reckless', but this may be far from an isolated case. The PLA is officially on Red Alert mode with units asked to remain vigilant in light of the political situation. On Wednesday, PLA commander Nanda Kishore Pun ordered all units on home leave to return to cantonments. Outside of Kathmandu, an extortion drive is reportedly underway to pay for the protests. In their defense, the Maoists claim that the payments have been given voluntarily.

Smile for the cameras

With the Maoist protests looming, the Big Three held a three-hour televised debate on Wednesday, during which they fielded questions from people across the country and clarified their stances. The parties made several conciliatory gestures, but also took the opportunity to trade blows. UML Chairman Jhala Nath Khanal said his party would resign from government in favour of a new, national unity government if an agreement could be reached on key political questions, including the management of the Maoist ex-combatants and power sharing.



The parties were hopeful that PLA integration would begin shortly as the 'modalities' had, more or less, already been worked out, although disagreements remain as to the numbers of combatants to integrate. The parties also vowed to restart 'consensual' politics. But there was also a hostile undercurrent, as the Maoist leaders faced some angry questions with regard to its planned strike this weekend.

SAARC summit

Climate change topped the agenda at the 16th SAARC summit held in Thimpu on Wednesday. Leaders of the region's eight countries vowed to step up measures to combat climate change, which has been closely linked to the growing rate of glacial melt in the Himalaya. Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal said posterity would not forgive our generation if it failed to roll-back the effects of this intensifying problem. The summit saw the establishment of the US\$300 million SAARC Development Fund, which aims to reduce poverty in the region. There were also calls for greater economic cooperation within the region. The PM identified intra-regional trade as an antidote to shared economic challenges, and met the Bangladeshi delegation on the sidelines to discuss ways to increase trade between the two countries. A day before the summit, the PM accepted a proposal by the Bhutanese Prime Minister, Jigme Thinley, for a ministerial level meeting to resolve the refugee crisis, though it has not yet been agreed when and where such a meeting will take place.

Chanting for consensus



STRICTLY BUSINESS
Ashutosh Tiwari

Consensus, the joke goes, is the most overused word in Nepali politics. In the last two years alone, if you were to be paid a rupee each time the word was mentioned in the press, you would be a billionaire by now. All political leaders talk about the need for consensus. Most end speeches calling for consensus. Yet a lack of it is about to bring

other side can be persuaded to give a little as well, so that, over time, both parties can make progress towards a middle ground. This sort of all-or-nothing behaviour hardens positions instead, sets a bad precedent, and makes future negotiations all the more difficult. Unless a fresh set of leaders take over our political parties (and it's increasingly unclear how new leadership will come about) to sweep away these cobwebs of hardened positions, chants for consensus are just that: chants.

the youths and children, or for that matter, from the concerns of the voters, that there is not much of a common national reference for them to refer to when they negotiate with one another to push work ahead.

Vague phrases like 'New Nepal' can only go so far as a common reference before confusing everyone. And in an electoral system which, by design, makes elected representatives disproportionately more accountable to their party leaders than to the voters that elected them, few politicians have to



'Compromise garne' seems a particularly Nepali trait, but our politicians don't understand the meaning of consensus

the country to a standstill this weekend and beyond, making life difficult for millions of Nepalis, and enlarging the dark cloud of uncertainty over Nepal.

How then to unravel this apparent paradox: that the greater calls for consensus have not led to it? For an answer, it's instructive to look at the anatomy of negotiations that take place in Nepal.

Compromise seen as a sign of weakness: Whoever said that politics is the art of the possible never took account of the psyche of the Nepali politician. Our politicians' world-view is that giving an inch to the other party under any circumstance is a sign of weakness, and one that is equated with a loss of face within one's own group and the larger political landscape.

It does not matter whether the

No common frame of reference: Most of our political conversations share little common frame of reference besides the fact of our being Nepali – an identity which is itself under assault at present.

In the West, politicians lasso their soaring rhetoric around what's right for their countries' youth and children, who, as everyone knows, make up the generation that's coming next. The booming economies of China and India have given their politicians and the citizens a dose of self-confidence to realise that their countries matter on the global stage.

But in a country where half the population of 27 million citizens is 20 or under (i.e. not even born at the time of Jana Andolan 1), so divorced are politicians from the concerns of

worry about having to face the wrath of the voters come the next election cycle.

Is it any wonder that frustrated by some politicians' penchant for holding the entire country hostage time and again, most civil society pundits are reduced to practically begging those politicians to improve their behaviour? Cut off from both the voters and the future of the country, the politicians have every incentive to focus only on their immediate self-interest, which they will work towards at any cost.

It's time for those who talk about consensus to start talking about the underlying dysfunctional anatomy of our political negotiations. Only then will we begin to come up with ideas for moving ahead. Otherwise, chanting for consensus will just become another diversionary slogan.

BoK campaign

Bank of Kathmandu marked its 16th anniversary by organising a staff rally as part of its Social Awareness Campaign, 'Save for the Future', on Saturday. The rally, starting from Kamaladi, passed through the thoroughfares of Kathmandu. The campaign aims to promote saving habits. Inaugurating the rally, bank chairman Narendra Kumar Basnyat said that the bank has been actively involved in making social contributions in various fields including health, education and environment, and the campaign is an attempt to make a contribution to the banking industry and society at large.

New showroom

Skoda M.A.W. has appointed Rachana Motors (P) Ltd as its new authorised dealer of Skoda vehicles for Biratnagar. Skoda Auto, a premium European automobile brand in Nepal, officially opened the doors of its new showroom on 28 April in Bargachhi.

SMS winner declared

The winner of the highest correct SMS prize of a SONY BRAVIA 22" LCD TV for Dabur Real's 'Score the Real Goal' is Sunita Lama. She entered a total of 3866 correct entries to become the 4th weekly highest correct SMS prize winner, with Game 1 of 'Score the Real Goal' coming to an end. There will be a monthly bumper lucky draw prize of a Sony Bravia 32" LCD TV.

Round the clock service

Morang Auto Works, authorised sole distributor for Yamaha Motorcycle in Nepal, has opened its new showroom Extramile Pvt Ltd at Balkumari. The showroom offers excellent valuation for any kind of old bike, easy financing facilities to its valued customers and also sales of all available models of Yamaha Motorcycles. The showroom has also launched a special 24-hour service support to all Yamaha motorcycles inside the Kathmandu Valley, according to Anil Vetwal, MD of Extramile.

Teen sensation

16-year-old Ashbeer Saini won the Surya Nepal Masters held at Gokarna Forest Golf Resort last week. The Indian amateur made two late birdies to secure the title by two shots over Rupak Acharya. Saini shot a round of one-under 71, which took his tournament total to 11-under 277.

Rupak made a bold charge but fell agonisingly short and despite holding the lead briefly in the final round, his last-round score of three-under 69 could only take his tournament total to nine-under 279. Sri Lankan amateur Mithun Perera finished in third place at two-under 286. Bangladesh's Md Milon Ahmed finished ahead of Shiva Ram Shrestha in fourth place after the big-hitting local made a double bogey on the final hole to drop down the leaderboard to fifth place.

Classroom goes digital

After two years of experience in using Promethean's Interactive Whiteboard technologies, ActivClassroom, in primary grades, Ullens School team hosted a special event last Friday to demonstrate the nature and impact of utilising digital educational technologies in the classroom. A group



of school leaders, teachers and students shared their experiences, the learning outcomes, the resources and opportunities that abound in making education go digital for Nepali students and Nepali teachers. Ullens is the first school in Nepal to use cutting edge digital educational resources in its teaching/learning practice. The impact in the past two years of using ActivBoards has been so compelling, according to school authorities, that they have invested further in equipping all 18 classrooms with ActivBoards.



AHMAD ISKANDAR

What's Nepali Kukur to do come Saturday? Why, take to the streets to explore the terrain

statue was once more being manhandled by self-proclaimed 'sweeper of Nepal' and local loon Laxman Singh Khadka. And down into the blue-tarped interior of the bazar, surprisingly cool and quiet, with only the gently insistent vendors murmuring as we passed: *suit ko kapada, sari, kurta...*

I exited into Bhrikuti Mandap, and followed the masses to the delightful National Industrial Expo, where scores of stalls from all across the country sold honey, blankets, woodcraft, topis, khukuris, pickles, you name it, Nepal's got it, who needs Kuponhole's boutiques? I didn't see a single expat, but it was clear many Nepalis were enjoying a day out. A man with bees all over his face was the star attraction, but it was the yarchagumba stall that drew those in the know.

Ey, so this is yarchagumba. What does it do? 'Sex power', proclaimed the youth standing over a glass case full of caterpillars with the famed herbs growing out their heads. Then, as if to temper his initial enthusiasm, 'Diabetes, fever, headache...'. Headache? At Rs 200 a worm, I'll stick with Cetamol.

Shopped out with lapsi treats and gundruk ko achar, I then crossed Tundikhel to Mahaboudha where, weekend notwithstanding, the DVD stores were open for perusal. Then into the Ne-warren and out through Jamal for a bicycle helmet. But just as 15 years back I'd been told by a sneering jean-shop owner that 'nowadays bellybottom is not in style', a bike shop man shrugged, as if the ugliness of helmets were reason enough not to stock them. *Ajkaal chaldaina*. They're not in style, and who can blame them? Better dead than red (faced). 🇳🇵

To read about other adventures of Nepali Kukur, visit www.nepalitimes.com/blogs/nepalikukur

Nepali Kukur's day out

City living has many paradoxes to it, one of which is: there is so much going on, but you haven't the time to do it. Presumably one would have time to attend happenings in a rural setting, if there were anything happening at all.

One empty Saturday, I started with the idea of catching Edwin Koo and Debbie Ng's 'Bahini: life of my sisters' at the Nepal Art Council, making a double header of it with Siddhartha Art Gallery. And one thing led to another.

A saunter down Sanepa Hill and across the Bagmati Sewer, thence to Maitighar. In the cavernous ground floor of the Nepal Art Council, I peered at rather small photo frames that reflected light. A picture little documented took shape. Schoolgirls in class, but also schoolgirls at candle-lit homework and early morn housework in low-income households across the Kathmandu Valley.

Poverty is all around us, but do we see it save in dispatches in development reports?

Venturing upstairs, I barged into a space disgorging some of the luminaries of the Nepali contemporary art scene. What I saw on the walls was a little less illuminating. Am I alone in thinking many Nepali artists choose to leapfrog into the abstract without consolidating fundamental draughtsmanship? But I'll be looking for the gems in the dross this weekend when 'A passage through the years (1965-2010)' opens at the same venue. The other half of the second floor was hosting a rather insipid selection of pen and ink drawings of temples and gallis, but at least here, I thought, the artist was working on the basics.

Across the road and leftwards to The Mahal That Was A Stable. I trod past the uberpriced and pretentious artisanal kiranans hosted by Babar in lieu of his horses, then ran

the gauntlet of Chez Caroline on the way to Siddhartha Art Gallery. And? Jupiter Pradhan has a good thing going. The mixed media installations that make up 'Sojourn in Bangladesh' are of definite, if mixed, interest. If I had the cash money I might even have invested in some of his half-moon faces in walls, if not the somewhat amateurish metal lotuses upon which his protagonists agonised. Curator Sangita Thapa appeared pleased I'd attended, but threats followed an invite to another event: be there or miss out!

Mulling over the significance of our new culture on demand, I retired to the shade of Walter's outdoor patio with an iced coffee and tepid juice. The heat ushered me into the cool interior of Naya Pasal opposite, but the prices pushed me back out again. Where better than Hong Kong Bazar? Via Singha Darbar then, where ol' Prithvi's pink-faced



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Art-iculating a new wave of talent

The art scene in Nepal has not always been able to promote its local talent to best effect. More often than not, exhibitions manifest a power struggle between local and foreign artists. However, Lalit Kala Campus, the first college to offer art education in Kathmandu, in collaboration with Siddhartha Art Gallery, is set to break the mould. 'A Passage Through the Years (1965-2010)' is opening at the Nepal Art Council on 29 April. It presents the biggest collection of local works, both classic and modern, ever shown in Nepal.

The exhibition is straightforward in its intentions: to showcase the works of about 70 painters and sculptors, ranging from the late masters to the current generation of teachers at Lalit Kala Campus. An impressive number of roughly 150 paintings and 30 sculptures will catalogue the achievements of some of Nepal's most

brilliant minds and dexterous hands.

But the exhibition is not only about pleasing the eye. With the introduction of a Masters Degree in Fine Arts, the first of its kind here, Lalit Kala Campus is looking for ways to fund the construction of a new resource centre for the curriculum and its students. "Siddhartha Art Gallery is supporting the exhibition because students of fine arts are running without resources. We intend to do something for them," says Sangita Thapa, director of Siddhartha Art Gallery and curator of the show.

Of the funds raised, 50 per cent will go to the artists themselves, and 20 per cent will be directed to Lalit Kala Campus. With even more incentive and support being lent to the new wave of Nepali artists, the art scene will be well worth your attention in the years to come.

DINING

Pumpernickel Bakery, get an early breakfast or brunch with interesting choices of bread and sandwiches. Experiment with their goat cheese or yak cheese sandwiches, or have a sip of coffee in the classy indoor dining area. *Thamel, 7.30am-7pm, 4259185*

Le Bistro Restaurant & Bar, the outdoor dining area invokes a great atmosphere for a night of drinks with friends and family. While they serve a plethora of dishes, it is the Indian food they pride themselves on. *Thamel, 4701170*

Yin Yang Restaurant, east meets west as you choose from a variety of Thai and continental dishes. Get a little spice in your life with their pad thai or green curry. If you can't handle the heat, fall into the safety net of their western dishes. *Thamel, 10am-10pm, 4701510*

Forever Café, nestled inconspicuously along the Thamel streets, this café can easily be missed. It specialises in a variety of steaks and stroganoffs, and offers carnivorous affairs you'll not forget. *7am-10pm, 470078*

Koto Restaurant, the first Japanese restaurant in Kathmandu, serves up 25 years of history. Whether it's the fresh sashimi, sushi, sukiyaki or tempura, their experienced Japanese and Nepali chefs are sure to impress. *Darbar Marg, 11.30am-3pm and 6-9.30pm, 4220346*



Himalayan Java, one of our favourite places for coffee, just got bigger, with a new branch deeper in the heart of Thamel. Expect the same excellent service and quality food and drinks with a change of scenery. *Food Bazaar, Thamel.*



Splash Bar and Grill, the restaurant at Radisson, is serving a barbecue lunch with unlimited beer – perfect for a boys' day out. *Every Saturday from 12 noon to 2.30pm, Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu, 4411818*

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The Great Escape, retreat from the hustle and bustle of the city to The Dwarikas' Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort in Dhulikhel. Just 45 minutes from Kathmandu, the short ride will afford you enchanting panoramic views and a myriad of nature's best. Overnight packages available for local residents. *The Dwarikas' Himalayan Shangri-La Village Resort, Dhulikhel, 4479488, www.dwarikashimalayanshangrila.com*

Fishing Expeditions and Day Trips, Tiger Mountain offers a chance to catch the Golden Mahseer, one of Asia's most famous game fish, in Bardiya National park, while exploring the beauty of the Himalayan foothills. Perfect for this time of the year. *Contact 4361500 for prices and reservation*



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

MUSIC

Hari Maharjan Project, arguably the best guitarist in Nepal, Hari Maharjan was also a band member of Nepathya. He released a new album recently and will be playing some new tunes. *30 April, House of Music, Thamel*

Women in Concert, making a comeback for the seventh year running. Young female musicians will give their all for a highly charged concert for all music lovers. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to

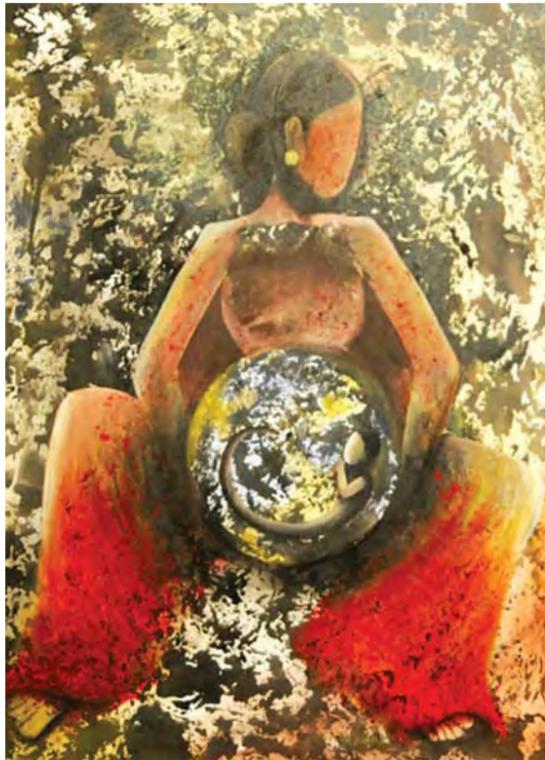


the Vidhea Shrestha Music Scholarship, which will allow women to pursue an education in music at the Kathmandu Jazz Conservatory. *8 May, 7-10.30pm, Garden of Dreams, Thamel.*

Sing On! The Kathmandu Chorale announces its spring concert. *8 May, 3.30pm and 6:00pm, The British School, Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur*

April Fullest, Dance with DJ Max and DJ Flow, *30 April, 8pm, Cube, Kamaladi*

EVENTS



A Passage Through the Years (1965-2010), a historical art exhibition featuring a galaxy of eminent and legendary painters and sculptors from Nepal. Curated by Sangeeta Thapa. Twenty per cent of the total sales will be donated to Lalit Kala Campus to set up a resource centre. *Opens 29 April, Nepal Arts Council, Babar Mahal*

Vrijmarkt Festival, buy and sell second-hand or self-made goods, play traditional Dutch games or show off any of your talents at the Queen's Day Free Market Festival. *30 April, 12 noon to 4.30pm, Summit Hotel, Lalitpur, 5521810*

Blood Bricks – Animals, People and the Environment, Animal Nepal directors, Pramada Shah and Lucia de Vries, talk about their love of animals during the monthly lecture organised by the Cultural Studies Group of Nepal. *30 April, 10am, Shankar Hotel, Lazimpat*



Daisy Baraili at Paleti, Darjeeling based nightingale Daisy Baraili of *Bhainsi Ladyo* fame has arrived in Kathmandu to perform for Paleti. Daisy has been active in the musical scene for more than three decades. In fact some of her greatest hits were recorded when she was just 13! *30 April, Nepa~Laya, Kalikasthan, 4437893*

Pilgrimage, a photo exhibition of the works of prominent Indian and Nepali photographers. *Runs till 12 May, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamsikhel, 5521120*

The Boy Friend, a musical comedy coloured with romance, and an abundance of unexpected twists and turns. Follow Polly and Tony, the two lead characters, as they discover their feelings for each other, and discover for themselves what fate has in store for them. Expect lots of laughter. *The Lincoln School, Ravi Bhawan, 7pm, Rs.500, 4270482*

Young European Art, painting exhibition by three artists – Catherin Biocca, Wies Olde Riekerink and Jonas Wijtenburg, hailing from Germany and the Netherlands. *Runs till 11 May, Kathmandu Contemporary Arts Centre, Jhamsikhel, 5521120*

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max Lagence/10



RSS

TO FRIENDSHIP: The 16th South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation summit opens at the Grand Assembly Hall of Thimpu, Bhutan on Wednesday.



KIRAN PANDAY

FLEX MUSCLES: Maoist cadre, who arrived in Kathmandu from across the country for the May Day showdown exercise in Lainchaur on Thursday morning.



FOO CHEE CHANG

TAG, YOU'RE IT: A man dressed as Kal Bhairab plays tag with children in Bhaktapur on Sunday.



KIRAN PANDAY

LIGHTS, CAMERA, NO ACTION: Mediapersons stage a sit-in protest at Ranipokhari police station after police baton-charged a group of photojournalists on Tuesday at Trichandra and Pashupati campuses.

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WEEKEND WEATHER
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

A powerful low pressure zone has built up over central Tibet and the eastern Himalaya and is sucking in moisture-laden clouds from the west, heralding a significant change in the weather pattern. But the distribution of potential rainshowers is uncertain because of the region's rugged and mountainous landscape. What can be determined, though, is that east Nepal will get a larger share of the precipitation than the west, which tends to get the larger share during non-monsoon months. Satellite pictures indicate that the Valley will get more afternoon showers, such as that we saw on Thursday, over the weekend.



FRI	SAT	SUN
30-14	29-14	30-16

Marketing schools



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At the time of writing, my neighbour's grandchildren have missed school for the fifth day. Instead of waking up early to pack their bags for school, they have been teasing dogs and encouraging them to battle each other in the alley, disrupting my morning snooze.

They had only been back to school for three days for the new academic session when the All Nepal National Independent Student Union Revolutionary (ANNISU-R) forced all private schools in the country to close. Almost five and a half million students will now remain at home indefinitely as ANNISU-R and the Private and Boarding Schools Organisation of Nepal (PABSON) spar over a 25 per cent increase in fees.

Private schools are registered as companies in Nepal and pay over 25 per cent tax on income, one fifth of which goes towards a fund to support government schools. The Maoist Party seems to recognise them as business entities, too. In 2009, then Finance Minister Baburam Bhattarai proposed taxing private schools an additional five percent so the government could reform the



KIRAN PANDAY

If private schools are business entities, shouldn't they operate as such?

schools in its charge. "It is up to the schools to decide if they want to transfer [the cost] to parents. We don't interfere," he said.

If you recognise private schools as companies, and expect them to make a profit and pay taxes on that profit, why make a fuss when they restructure their service charges?

The Maoist students started their agitation a month after the decision to hike fees was made,

without even looking for a negotiation. Were they simply looking to house their cadres in the closed schools before and during the planned May Day rally as Education Minister Sarbendra Nath Shukla alleged? As it turns out, over a dozen schools reported being asked to shelter out-of-town cadre on Wednesday (see pic).

If the private school system were an efficiently working market, then the consumer – the

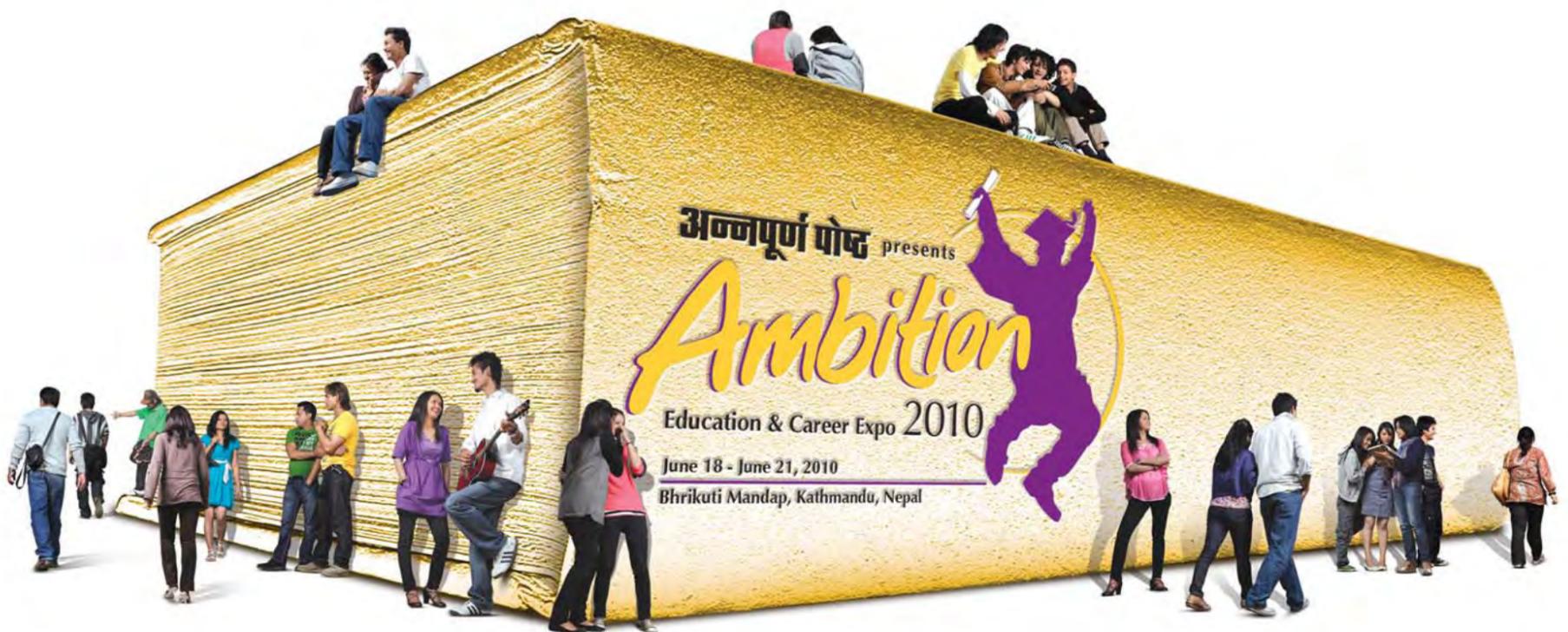
students' guardians – would have more control over how the schools structure their fees. The catfights between PABSON and ANNISU-R would have to be taken out of the classroom, and not lead to school closures, because the guardians would take their children elsewhere. However, this is not an efficiently working market. Like so many things in Nepal, consumer rights are undermined by political capture.

It is particularly distressing in the case of schooling because guardians deem education of their children so important (rightly) that they are prepared to be ridden over roughshod by both schools that charge them ridiculous fees for non-existent facilities and powerful political unions. In Kathmandu, the cost of educating a primary school student is, on average, Rs 11,844 per year (without the admissions fee) while the average annual income is Rs 45,900. A principal at a well-regarded private school says parents are willing to pay beyond their means to ensure their children get what they consider is a good education.

The problem with the current system is that the guardians have no rights or bargaining power. No political party will come to their aid and risk being vilified as elitist when extra taxes get whacked onto private schools, or when they are fleeced with extra charges. What is needed is to secure consumer rights and improve their bargaining power. Regulation is only the means to the end of helping the real consumers, rather than politically affiliated student unions. A political bargaining needs to be mobilised, too, so politics doesn't hold the future of children hostage.

Ultimately, the debate should shift to whether education should be a profit-making industry. In many countries, educational institutions are given charity status and therefore are tax exempt. You cannot be penalised for seeking an education. It is a need, not a luxury. It should be treated as such.

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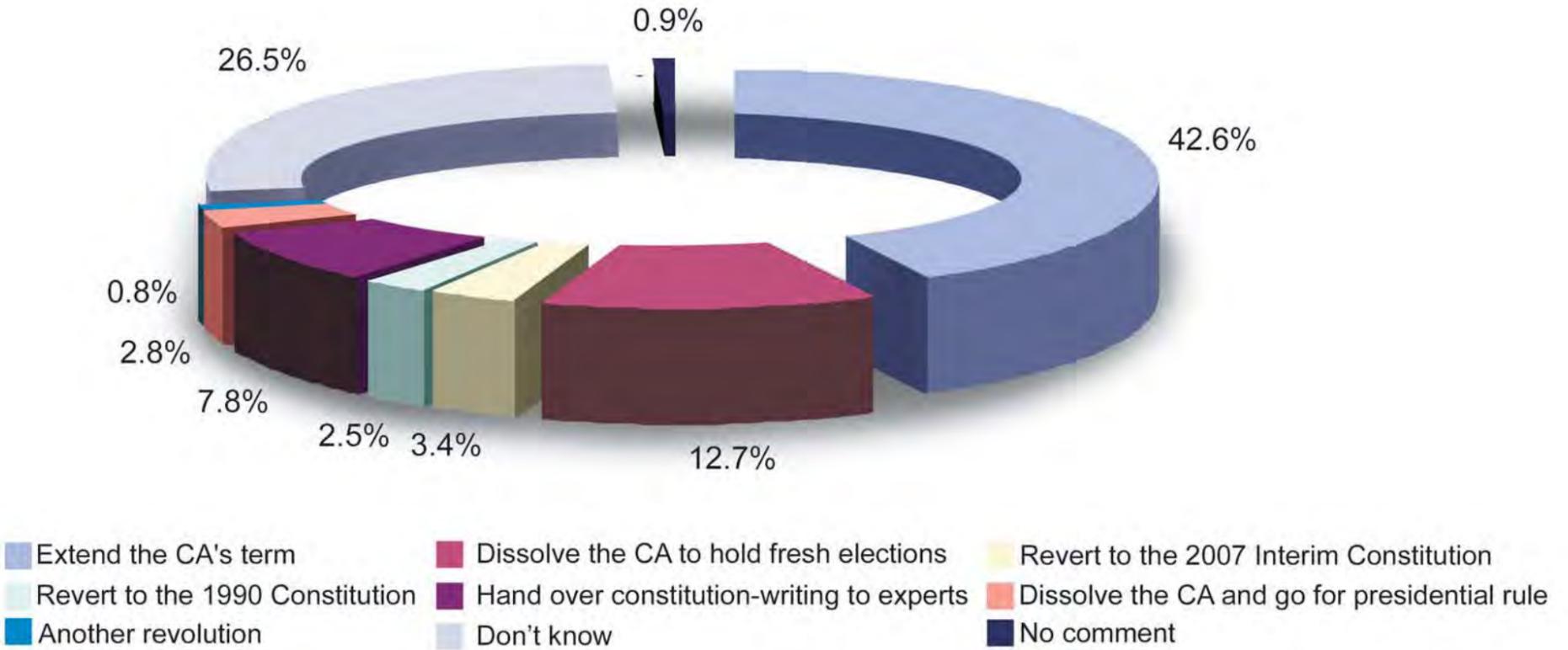
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An extended CA and a

What should be done if the Constituent Assembly (CA) is unable to complete writing the constitution by May 28?



KUNDA DIXIT

In early April, Himalmedia conducted the latest in its series of nationwide public opinion surveys. The poll team, overseen by professor of political science at Tribhuvan University, Krishna Khanal, interviewed 5,005 respondents in 38 districts. This included a one-day poll

(7 April) in 28 urban areas to aim for accuracy in a fast-changing political scenario.

The intention was to gauge public opinion and measure the gap between what the majority of Nepali people want and the preoccupations of the political parties, the relative popularity of those parties, and the level of trust people have in political personalities.

The most dramatic, but perhaps not surprising, outcome was how the public's trust in the political leadership has plummeted since the elections in 2008. To the question 'Since the demise of Girija Prasad Koirala, which political leaders do you trust to take the peace process forward and finish writing the constitution?', respondents most favoured Maoist leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Baburam Bhattarai with 38.7% and 29.7% respectively. But apart from Madhav Kumar Nepal (23.4%) and Sher Bahadur Deuba (20%), no other leaders have really made an impression on the public, with 27.8% choosing 'don't know'.

The poll also sought answers to public perceptions of the Maoists. While they were seen to be most responsible for creating

obstacles in the peace process (30.1%), 26.8% strongly believed they would renounce arms and violence for good and 40.7% had some belief this would be the case.

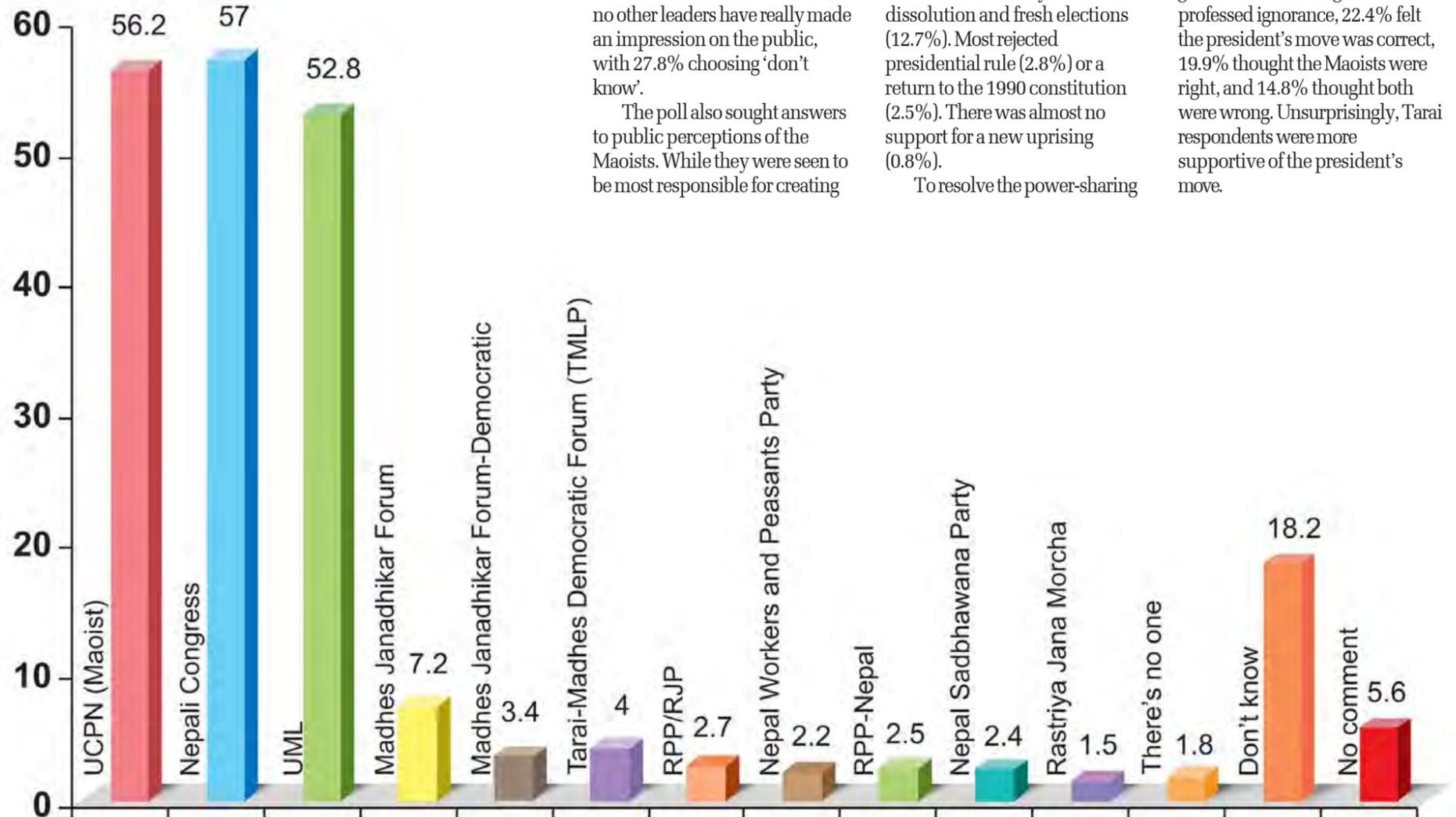
Most Nepalis expressed concern about the constitution not being written on time. About half blamed the CA members, 35.8% felt it was the government's fault and 31% said the Maoists were responsible. The most popular course of action was a constitutional amendment to extend the term of the CA (42.6%), followed by CA dissolution and fresh elections (12.7%). Most rejected presidential rule (2.8%) or a return to the 1990 constitution (2.5%). There was almost no support for a new uprising (0.8%).

To resolve the power-sharing

deadlock, 24.4% favoured the Maoists leading a new coalition government while a further 20.7% favoured a UML or NC-led unity government including the Maoists. Only 16.4% wanted the Madhav Nepal government to continue, with negligible support for handing over power to the president (or the former king, for that matter).

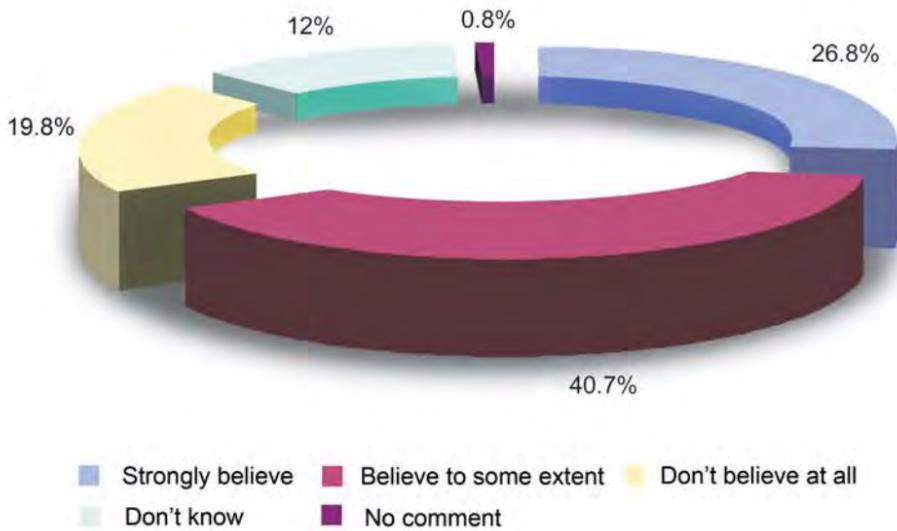
Respondents appeared to be almost equally divided in assessing the army chief affair of last year that led to the resignation of the Maoist-led government. Although 41.6% professed ignorance, 22.4% felt the president's move was correct, 19.9% thought the Maoists were right, and 14.8% thought both were wrong. Unsurprisingly, Tarai respondents were more supportive of the president's move.

Which three parties would you choose to lead Nepal to prosperity?

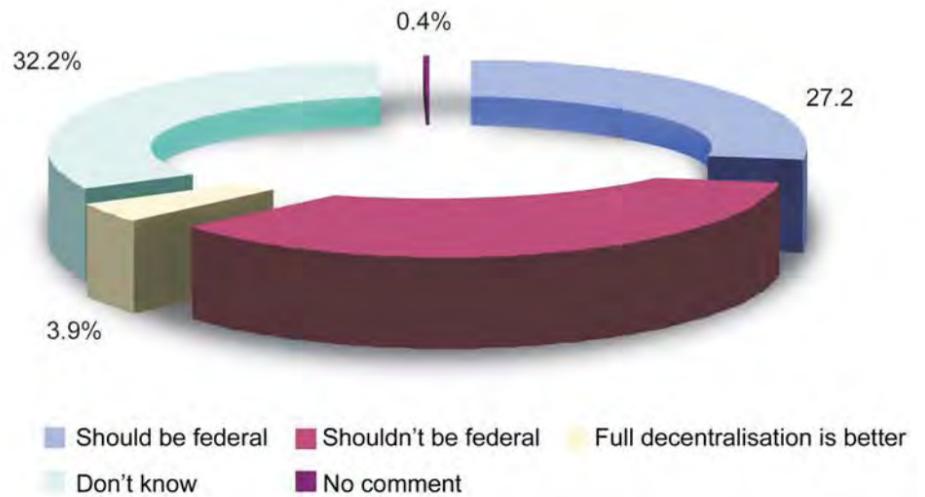


Maoist-led government

To what extent do you believe that the Maoists will permanently give up arms and violence and join the political mainstream?



Nepal has been declared a federal state. What do you think?



Nearly a third of Nepalis don't know how to resolve the dispute over the assimilation and rehabilitation of Maoist guerrillas. A quarter said only those who met the military's criteria should be integrated into the national army, and 18.3% felt there should be wholesale integration into the army as the Maoists want.

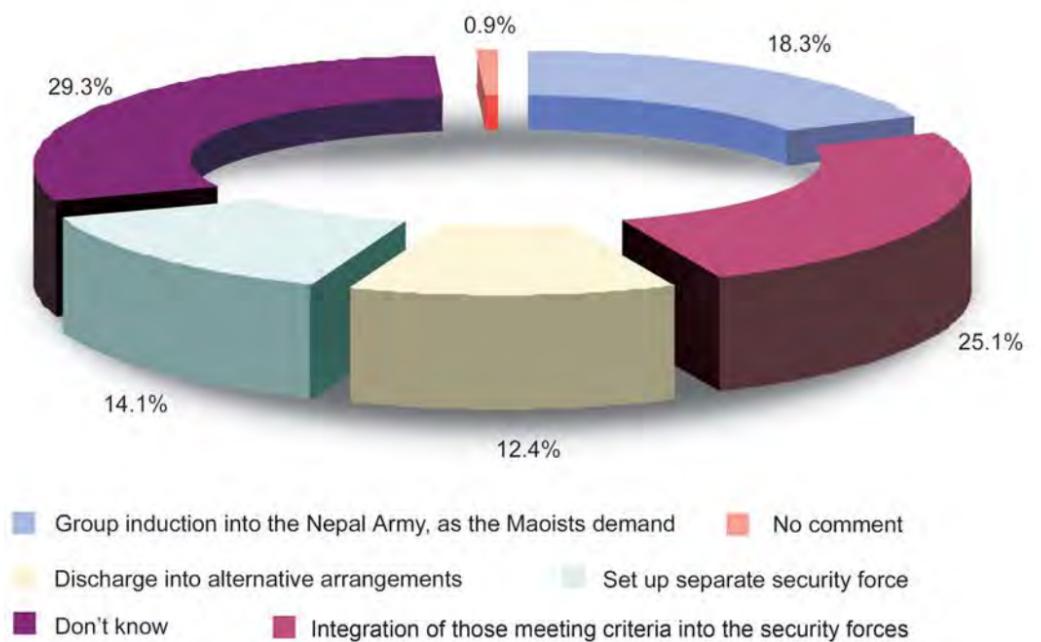
In the future constitution, a majority (70.8%) wanted Nepali to be the language for official government business, although Nepali as lingua franca received 79.2% support in the hills (including indigenous groups) and 61.2% support in the Tarai.

The country seems divided over federalism, with those against it making up 36.3% of respondents and those for it making up 27.2%. But 32.2% didn't know. Slightly more people in the Himal and Tarai were against federalism, including many from ethnic

communities. If federalism is to go ahead, however, about equal numbers (25%) favour federalism along ethnic/linguistic and north-to-south territorial lines. Interestingly, 16.1% favour retaining the current development region or zonal system, which to a large extent is demarcated from north to south. The One Madhes proposal of the MJF, however, was opposed by 65% of respondents, although nearly half the respondents in the Tarai supported it.

It's no surprise perhaps that with the prevailing atmosphere of insecurity and confusion, along with all the talk of ethno-linguistic federalism, 76.1% of respondents felt Nepali nationality was under threat (82.6% in the Tarai). More surprising then that it is inter and intra-party conflict, far ahead of communal or foreign forces, that's considered the prime culprit.

How should the Maoist combatants in the cantonments be managed?



2010 survey

From 5-18 April 2010, 76 interviewers fanned out across 38 districts in 146 VDCs in the mountains, midhills and plains of Nepal to survey 5,005 people selected through scientific random sampling. On 7 April, interviews were conducted in 28 urban areas on the same day. The survey was led by TU political science professor Krishna Khanal and an experienced team of pollsters who have taken part in previous Himalmedia polls. After fine-tuning 31 questions, interviewers were given thorough training in selecting respondents and conducting the survey, including the importance of conducting separate interviews in private.

In a post-survey debriefing, interviewers said they found a marked difference from the Himalmedia poll of 2003. During the conflict, people were reluctant to talk and there was considerable tension and fear. "This time, we found respondents much more relaxed, even though there was apprehension that the country could slip back into to war," said poll team leader Hiranya Baral.

Sunita Shrestha, a pollster in Kanchanpur, ended up being interviewed herself after completing the survey when she was asked: "Now you tell us, what will happen after May 28?" Many, especially women, either didn't know or didn't want to answer some of the questions. But they wanted to know if the political deadlock would drag the country back to war. In Rolpa and Palpa some respondents were still wary of talking about the Maoists and refused to answer some questions. In Gulmi, a female interviewee even came up to a pollster and whispered her answer to a question on whether or not the Maoists had given up violence for good.

Despite this, many interviewees wanted to engage the pollsters in conversations and although many blamed the Maoists for the political deadlock, they also felt the party had improved with regards to their behaviour. "The Maoists are seen to be the best of a bad lot of politicians," said Bhim Karki, who conducted interviews in Banke, "but the general feeling was they were responsible for destroying things, so they should be the ones to fix it."

What surprised many interviewers was how quickly Nepalis seem to have forgotten about the monarchy, although pockets of supports were found, for example among Muslims in the western Tarai.

Don't know/ No comment

As with previous polls, there were large numbers of 'undecideds' that made it difficult to come to a conclusive verdict based on the survey results. There were at least as many people who didn't want to say or hadn't made up their minds on the question of the political personality they trusted the most as there were poll votes for Pushpa Kamal Dahal, who led the list. Similarly, on the question of which party was the main obstacle to the peace process, undecideds made up 40.9%, far ahead of the second choice, the Maoists (30.1%). On the question of what should be done with the Maoists in cantonments, undecideds (30.2%) outnumbered those who felt combatants who met the criteria should be integrated into the national army (25.1%). A Himalmedia poll predating the 2008 elections suggests that most undecideds end up voting for the Maoists.

Interestingly, though, there were very few don't know/no comments for the question on whether the monarchy should have been abolished, or on the question on whether Nepal should be a Hindu or secular state.



“They will step back”

Interview with Shankar Pokharel, Information Minister and government spokesperson in *Dristi*, 27 April

How has the government evaluated the activities of the Maoists?

The government has assessed the activities of the Maoists based on reports received from across the country. It has readied itself for what it takes to deal with the challenges.

Do you think Maoist policy is to capture power through a people's revolt?

This is what they have been saying publicly. The Maoists declare in mass gatherings what the CA is supposed to declare. The declaration of federal states however did not get legality. Since the episode of the army chief, their game plan is to force the president to resign through street protests, and infiltrate and split the parties into factions. Having failed in all attempts, they have been bluffing with an ultimate revolt to bring down the government from the street and complete the constitution-writing process. They will not succeed in this. The

Maoists' real transformation will begin after this.

Has the peace process collapsed?

Let's not say it has collapsed, but it is a breach of the peace accord. The Maoists have been reiterating their commitment to the peace process, but their activities are against the peace accord. The upcoming Maoist protests will take this to that level.

The Maoists are demanding a national unity government for consensus. Why do you oppose this idea?

After the election, UML supported the Maoists as the biggest party to form the government. The problem began when the Maoists tried to sideline the UML and NC by calling them losers and trying to move ahead alone. But no one stopped them from trying to forge a consensus when they were in government. Instead, during this period YCL created havoc in the country, Maoists murdered NC and UML cadres, and they attempted to remove the army chief unconstitutionally. The Maoists have lost the opportunity to lead the government.

What if an agreement is not reached with the Maoists? Are there chances of military mobilisation?

The democratic forces hope to forge a consensus and move forward. However, the Maoist agenda alone can never be the basis of consensus. It is the 12-point agreement, the peace accord and Interim Constitution which form this basis. Maoist combatants are still in cantonments, even though their discharge was meant to be completed within six months of signing the peace accord. But the Maoists don't even attend the meetings of the special committee to manage ex-combatants. They have only one agenda: government.

Is there a possibility of mobilising the army or not?

The peace accord has its limitations. There is no possibility to mobilise the army against the Maoists under the existing peace accord. But if their activities cross certain limits, the government can mobilise the army if deemed necessary, anytime it wants. I don't think they will go as far as to breach the peace accord. They will step back.

“May Day will be a historic day”

Interview with Shaligram Jamarkattel, President of the All Nepal Federation of Trade Unions, in *Janadesh*, 27 April

जनादेश

What kind of demonstration is it going to be on 1 May?

We have two programs: celebration of May Day and launching of the 'people's revolt'. The Maoists have announced the 'people's revolt' to coincide with May day. It is therefore going to be a historic day. This movement is aimed at dissolving the 'puppet' government and forming a national unity government under Maoist leadership as well as to achieve peace and write the constitution.



PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

Are the Maoists planning to capture power in the name of May Day?

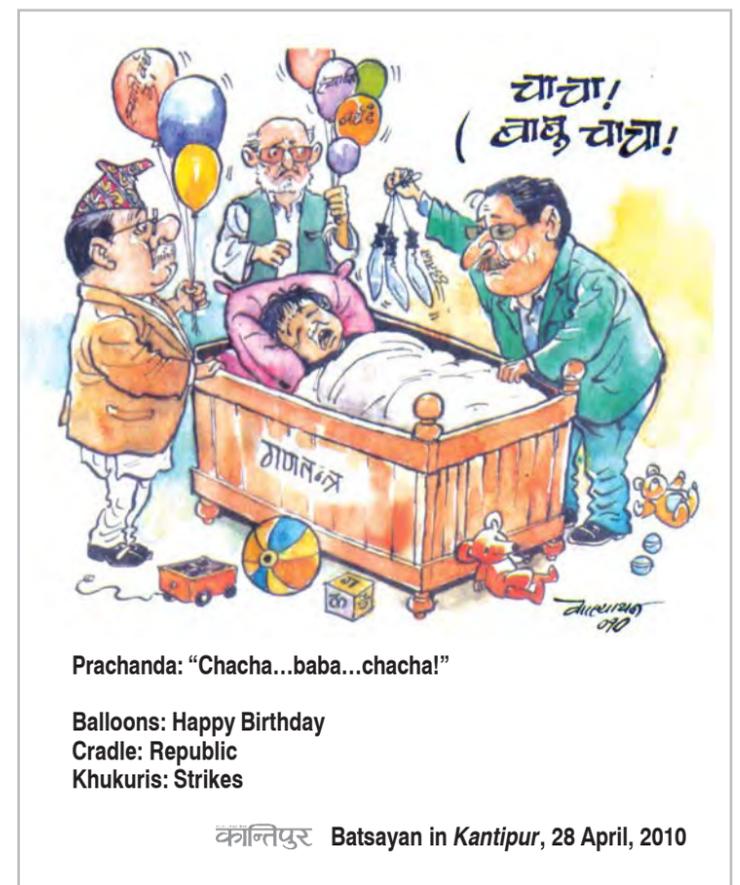
The Maoists have not said they will capture power just yet. This protest is for civilian supremacy, dissolution of the puppet government, national unity government under Maoist leadership, peace and the constitution. Constitution-writing and the peace process will not be completed under this government. The political parties in power and reactionaries are exaggerating a peaceful protest. They are afraid of people taking to the streets. This will be a show of strength by the Maoists.

Is it going to be a 'people's revolt' or a demonstration on the day?

We will take rallies from major junctures of the city that will converge into a mass gathering in the open air theatre in Tundikhel. Chairman Prachanda will address the gathering. If the puppet government does not step down and allow the Maoists to lead the government, then a program of agitation will be announced from the same place.

What do you say to the remark that industries are being forced to close down and some are even investing abroad due to the labour problem?

This is not true. Those who do not want labour to unite spread rumours. There are two reasons for closure of industries: wrong policy of the government and wrong activities of the industrialists themselves.



Prachanda: “Chacha...baba...chacha!”

Balloons: Happy Birthday
Cradle: Republic
Khukuris: Strikes

कान्तिपुर Batsayan in Kantipur, 28 April, 2010



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KIRAN PANDAY

We lost our identity by writing 'Gurung'

Tashi Shyahngo Gurungseni
UML CA member, Mustang

In which proposed province are you?

I am in Tamuwan province. The entire Mustang district is in Tamuwan province.

Do you think the identity of the people of Mustang is guaranteed under this division?

We are not Gurung. We are from the Bahragaun community. Therefore, there should be a 'Bahragaun autonomous region'.



How can provinces become ethnic in a secular state?

The country should be secular but the provinces should be ethnic.

Don't you think people of other communities in a province will feel bad if we name provinces after a particular community?

It will definitely hurt them but we cannot help it. The proposed model is yet to be finalised. There should be special provision for minorities in the new constitution. I don't fully agree with what has been proposed now.

How many are you from your community in the CA?

I am not Gurungseni. I belong to the Bahragaun community. I got the surname Gurungseni while acquiring citizenship. This changed my identity. I feel bad about it. No one from the 5,000 households of our community has ever got any position in politics, government or the bureaucracy so far. I am the only one from my community to become a CA member.

Uncertainty reigns

DHRUBA SIMKHADA

There is less than a month left to draft the constitution. The political parties are not sure whether the tenure of the CA should be extended or if they can draft the constitution within the given time frame, while the debate persists on fundamental issues. The big three parties are clearly divided: NC and UML want to extend the CA by one year while the Maoists are totally against this. Instead of engaging in

Twenty-three months have passed but contentious constitutional issues remain unresolved. These are unlikely to be resolved in the next month, either. To proceed with the constitution-writing process, the CA should resolve the differences on constitutional issues first and then address other issues.

The CA should decide on the forms of the governance, the basis of federalism to address the concerns of different communities, and the integration and rehabilitation of the Maoist combatants in the cantonments.

changed over time. Now, the entire country is divided on the issue of federalism. Some are in favour of ethnicity-based federalism while others have opposed the idea. The fear of communal conflict is getting stronger due to the issue of federalism.

Endorsing a new constitution alone will end the current political chaos. The concerns of the Maoists, parliamentary parties and ethnic communities should be addressed in the new constitution. On 9 November 2009, janajati CA members torched the draft concept paper on fundamental rights and directive principles in front of the south gate of the CA building, claiming their rights had not been addressed. This might be repeated in the future if grievances are not addressed. But there have not been any studies on the issues that need to be addressed in drafting such a constitution.

The issue of PLA fighters is another big challenge in moving ahead with peace and the constitution-writing process. There has not been any agreement on how and when the PLA fighters will be managed. The political parties have their own interpretations of the peace accord and weapons management, which have only polarised the issue, and even the numbers of combatants to be integrated in various security organisations has not been settled. Without this, neither the constitution nor the peace process can be brought to a conclusion. 

Time is slowly but surely running out for the constitution, but the song remains the same

constitution writing, the Maoists have announced an indefinite general strike. Since the biggest political party in the CA is on the warpath, the constitution-writing process is uncertain.

It should be obvious to all by now that constitution will not be drafted by 28 May. According to NC leader Ram Sharan Mahat, there are three alternatives: draft the constitution by extending the CA, announce new elections or leave the country in a constitutional vacuum. Since there is no possibility of holding new elections, he says, extension of the CA after 28 May is the only way to avoid a constitutional vacuum.

Unfortunately, the political parties have not been able to agree on what political system is best for Nepal. Britain and India follow a multiparty parliamentary system with an executive prime minister while America has an executive president. Israel has a directly elected executive prime minister and a ceremonial president. If we do not decide on this issue, constitution-writing cannot move forward.

Federal model is another issue to be resolved. The Interim Constitution proclaimed Nepal a federal republic state. The political parties also came up with different federal models during the elections, which have

Better late than never



Amod Prasad Upadhyay
NC CA member, Morang 2

Where is the country's politics heading?

Now is the time to set a new political trend through a new constitution. But the political parties did not act as they should have, which has resulted in the current political deadlock.

Can the CA come up with a constitution in this situation?

Time is running out to resolve the political differences and draft a new constitution. But we should not rush the constitution – it would be wise to find a lasting solution even if it needs two more months.

How do you think things should go if the constitution is not written by 28 May?

It is sad that the constitution-writing deadline will not be met. This was all our fault. It is still the political parties that will have to take responsibility to deal with the situation after May. The political parties have to come up with a constitution anyway.

What prevented political parties from reaching a consensus?

The CA should have been kept away from political prejudices, which unfortunately did not happen. The CA Regulations say that CA members need not obey their party whip in the CA sessions, but this did not happen in practice. We defended our political ideologies even in the CA.

What is your take on federalism?

We have already approved the federal system. We took the decision on federalism thinking of the prosperity that the system might bring. We were not expecting the people to be divided on an ethnic basis. We cannot afford to risk the prosperity of the country under a federal structure by demanding political prerogatives in the provinces drawn along ethnic lines.

Better late than never

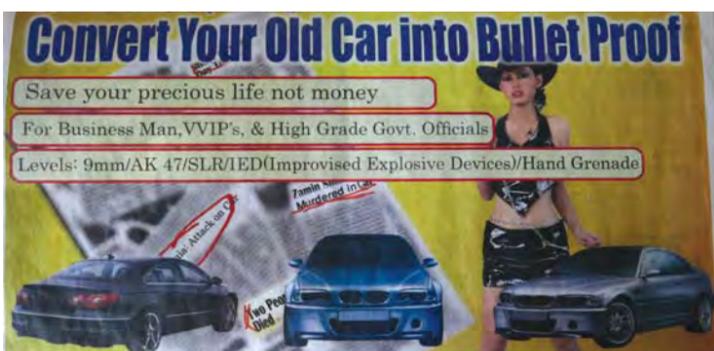
The Only in Nepal Absurd Quote of the Week must be Deb Gurung explaining nationwide Red Guard exercises to the BBC Nepali Service: **“A khukuri is not a weapon”**. Right. The man should try taking Nepal’s national knife through airport security and see what happens. Deb Dai went on to explain that the khukuri is a cultural item used to decapitate buffaloes and no one should be unduly perturbed about Baddies brandishing it about. After all, it is keeping the Bhojpur knife industry in business and is good for the economy. Just like the breakdown in law and order is good for the economy because the sale of armour-plated Mercs have gone up?



The Second Runner-up to this week’s funny headline contest must be this one from a Kathmandu daily about the nation’s finest being on high security alert: **“Police Confiscate 350 Sticks”**. What the Ass wants to know is why those sticks are not in the containers that the UN is guarding like a hawk.



PKD asked media moghuls this week why they were complaining about being extorted when



businesses were forking out donations without even being threatened. Then he was asked who he was alluding to when he said a **‘Hidden Hand’** didn’t want the Maobaddies to come to power. His reply (actual quote): **“It is hidden, so how can I tell you who it is? However, if there are certain foreign forces you think I am referring to when I say hidden, and if those forces are the ones I am thinking of when I say hidden hand then you will not be too widely off the mark.”**



And someone tell me this item from the Zimbabwe Herald (Published by the Government of Zimbabwe) is not real:

VP Mujuru Hails China’s Support
HARARE, 20 April: Vice President Joice Mujuru has commended the Chinese government for its continued

support for Zimbabwe and has called for strengthening of bilateral ties.

VP Mujuru said this at a luncheon she hosted yesterday for workers from China Jiangsu, the company that refurbished the National Sports Stadium.

“When the President talked about the Look East Policy many people thought it was a joke, but we have many programmes set out and there is a lot that is in the pipeline,” she said. Zimbabwe supports the **One China Policy on Tibet, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Nepal.**

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And in other news: A Bad Boy attacked college students with a non-lethal khukuri last week, got

himself arrested for attempted murder and then was released because his cohorts went on a rampage. A cantonment combatant was found with 35 grenades on a nightbus, detained and released due to political pressure from a higher-up authoritarian. Khao Baddies were not satisfied with the amount of ‘donation’ they got from three educational institutions and made arses of themselves by resorting to arson and torching eight yellow school buses. Police arrived promptly at the scene and took the buses into custody.



The Awful One is making a last ditch attempt to seize power by launching a hunger strike and refusing to dine with the president and prime minister. Things must be really bad if Shitall Nibas dinner diplomacy is not working. His Fierceness is so desperate to get back to sleeping in his 100K posturepedic bed he does not want a consensus candidate from his own party to be PM. The Baddies are really begging Cutwall & Co to take over because they need an enemy. Last one leaving the city, please turn the lights off. Oops, sorry, they’re already off.



Those of us who got a rude wakeup call last week as cannon fire rent the air at dawn must be thinking: how many Democracy Days do we need in this country? Trouble is we have at least two words for democracy in Nepali: Prajatantra and Loktantra. And when we usher in **Janabad Dibas**, we will observe that too by blasting howitzers at an ungodly hour and scaring all the crows.



Baddies are so much into extortion these days that they think pyramid schemes are great business. Comrade Lil Babadur told the honchos at Unity who run an illegal network business: **“When we form the government, we will implement your scheme as government policy.”** Why not just declare loot and plunder govt policy?



Pradip the Giri was chief guest at a book launch the other day. He came an hour-and-half late. The title of the book: **‘Samayalai Salam’**.



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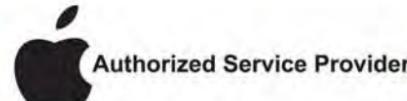


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