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## Rs 15,000,000,000

That is how much the Maoist strike has cost the country so far


Every day of the Maoist strike the country loses Rs 3 billion (\$40 million). Since Sunday we have lost Rs 15 billion (\$200 million).

Bandas are the most tried and tested way to express political power in Nepal. All political entities here have used them at one time or another. Post-1990, parties have groomed students and workers to enforce their strikes.

In South Asia there is a healthy culture of defying strikes and there are government measures to either ban them or minimise impact. In Nepal, we have not yet learnt how to react. This is why in the past, even strikes organised by unknown entities have seen complete closures.

Ruling political parties aren't even trying to thwart the current banda: perhaps they fancy using this priceless tool when they themselves are in opposition. The state has never developed mechanisms to counter strikes, either by using the state apparatus to protect essential services or by ensuring people have access to education and healthcare.

We cannot really gauge the extent of future losses simply through tourism cancellations. Airlines may now review plans for Nepal. The outside world may try to figure out what's wrong with Nepal for a while, but beyond that we will be ignored by the international community. Nothing could be worse in a globalised world.

For the politicians, the recent events may simply represent another part of their struggle for power but for Nepal, the damage may prove to be irreparable. 

Sujeev Shakya

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**NEPAL TOURISM YEAR 2011**

**Together for Tourism**  
पर्यटनका लागि सँगसँगै

पर्यटन क्षेत्रलाई नेपालको आर्थिक विकास र नेपालीको सम्पन्नताको प्रमुख आधार बनाउने उद्देश्यले आयोजित नेपाल पर्यटन वर्ष २०११ अभियान सफल पार्न पर्यटक तथा पर्यटन सेवा प्रवाहमा प्रतिकूल असर पर्ने बन्द, हडताल लगायतका कार्यहरु हुन नदिने तर्फ पूर्ण प्रतिबद्धता व्यक्त गर्दछौं। साथै मुलुकको मुहार फेर्ने आर्थिक क्रान्तिको यो अभियान सफल पार्न सम्पूर्ण नागरिकहरुमा हादिक आहवान गर्दछौं।

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**NATURALLY NEPAL**  
ONCE IS NOT ENOUGH

**DOTTED LINE:** Pushpa Kamal Dahal signing his commitment to support NTY 2011 in February (inset, right) and the document. Translation of the document:

Together for Tourism  
Nepal Tourism Year 2011 is being organised to mobilise the tourism sector for Nepal's development and the prosperity of Nepalis. To make the campaign successful we express our full commitment not to allow bandas, hartals and other activities to take place that will affect (mainly) tourists and tourism services. Furthermore, we appeal to all citizens to support this economic revolution campaign to change the face of the nation.

Honourable Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda)  
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United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)  
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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

## GET BACK IN THE HOUSE

For its own good, and for the good of the country, the Maoists need to get off the streets and back into parliament.

There is a functioning legislature that we the people helped elect in 2008 that is in limbo. Yet the Nepali people are being held at gunpoint, the country's tattered economy further ruined, over issues that should be voted on in the House.

A general strike in this country works because of the power of fear that holds the whole country hostage. An editor of *Sikshyak* magazine was hospitalised in serious condition on Wednesday for defying the shutdown. On the Ring Road, we were witness to an elderly man on a bicycle being beaten mercilessly with a bamboo pole because he didn't deign to dismount when a bunch of 14-year-olds manning a tyre barricade told him to. These are not isolated incidents. Across the country, the Maoists are waging war by other means, by putting the whole country under house arrest. We

should stop calling this a "peaceful" protest.

Neither is it Jana Andolan III as Chairman Dahal would have us believe. It is one party's attempt to come back to power through forced street protests because it couldn't muster the magic 301 in parliament to pass a no-confidence vote. That's not us saying it, Maoist leaders have time and again warned that they will re-enact Lenin's 'October Revolution', and they often do what they say.

Giving in to this would mean setting a dangerous precedent of bypassing parliament. The Maoists themselves may get an absolute majority in the next election, for instance, but neo-royalists could bus in 200,000 people from the countryside and topple them too. Democracy works by a certain set of rules. Circumventing parliamentary arithmetic leads to totalitarian rule.

The Maoists became the largest party in parliament in 2008, but are short of an absolute majority. They squandered the support of their coalition partners and had to resign last year. Our public opinion survey results this month showed they are

still popular, which is why Chairman Dahal need not inflict more misery on this long-suffering nation and embark on such a self-destructive path. But the fact that he has unleashed this punishment on the very people he promises to liberate proves his sole goal is to set up an outdated model of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

We need to get the focus away from street terror for power to the constitution-writing process through the CA. For this, a government of national unity and the withdrawal of this strangulating strike should be the first

two steps. If necessary, Madhav Kumar Nepal should be willing to face a confidence vote in the House.

Otherwise we may have to witness more scenes on TV such as that on Tuesday of YCL activists having to be rescued by state police from a lynch mob of angry locals.

KD

## The 2/3 strategy



GUEST COLUMN  
J B Pun Magar

To understand the current nationwide mischief of the Maoists, you have to rewind to the Shaktikhor Tapes of 2008. In it, Pushpa Kamal Dahal taught his comrades to lie. He is caught on candid camera telling his commanders: "You have to keep repeating what is not true, and keep quiet about your real intentions."

Ever since the Maoists resigned from government last year, they have been saying, "We have to get back into government one way or another." It isn't hard to see that this slogan is a decoy. The Maoists are employing the Prachanda Doctrine of "repeating what is not true".

The Maoists have learnt two lessons from the elections and their time in government. First, keep the other parties out of the districts with fear tactics that

translate into votes at election time. Second, the Maoists always said "we are in government, but not in power", and next time they will not be satisfied until they have a two-thirds majority. The entire Maoist strategy today revolves around these two mantras, and the goal is an absolute majority in a future legislature.

Being a coalition partner cramped Dahal's style. He couldn't implement any of his revolutionary slogans, and to save himself from internal party pressure he had to go through with the sacking of the army chief in May 2009. He knew the Indians wouldn't like it, Girija Koirala had been consistently warning him not to do it, the president had given ample indications it would backfire. But he pushed it through and paid for the blunder. Everything that has happened since is an attempt to turn the clock back.

After coming to power, the Maoists didn't just drift from their revolutionary goals, they also went soft. Several of the

party's coveted ethnic wings split off, calling the leadership 'Bahunist'. The party was even on the verge of splitting. In fact, the Maoist central committee has since concluded that being out of power has actually strengthened the party.

The party's agitations for 'civilian supremacy', the anti-Indian campaign, and the

## What we are seeing is a Maoist election campaign to win an absolute majority

escalating protests against a 'puppet government' must be seen as part of the party's election campaign for the next polls, not an exercise to return to power right now. The idea is to ride the anti-Indian wave, and the results of the Himalmedia poll last week show why this may work: 76 per cent of the respondents (even more in the Tarai) think Nepal's nationality is threatened.

The same poll draws the

interesting conclusion that most people blame the Maoists for the present disarray, but also want them to fix it. This indicates an erosion of trust in the other parties that the Maoists also want to capitalise on. They want to keep the cadre engaged nationwide in agitation, struggle and training and have mobilised their ethnic units. They have brought thousands of jobless youth into a stick-and-khukuri

force that can stand-in for the YCL if it is disbanded and be useful in future elections.

The Maoists have hogged the headlines and kept rival parties distracted with bruising controversies so that they are restricted to reacting with bland statements. They have always regarded the mainstream media as the next big enemy because of its opposition to violence and totalitarianism. This is why they have decided to

cut diamond with diamond by setting up their own print, TV and radio stations.

The Maoists know they have to weaken the strong forces arrayed against them: India, president and the government. They are going after them one by one. The government and India are determined not to allow this to happen.

It is difficult to say whether the Maoists will be successful in their aim of legal state capture, but there should be no doubt in anyone's mind that this is what they are after. ■

Translated from the 16-31 May issue of *Himal Khabarpatrika*.



BHANU BHATTARAI

ON THE WEB  
www.nepalitimes.com

## TOM, DICK AND HARRY

The questions ask us to choose between Tom, Dick and Harry ('Looking for leaders', #500). If the choice were between the likes of Lee Kuan Yew, Nehru and Mahathir then it would have weight.

Baburam Dahal

- I am not a Maoist supporter, nor will I ever be, but to be fair to them, they are the largest party in the CA and won the elections. Let them run the government and if the people don't like them, they will face the same fate as others did.

Jagan

## ADVICE FOR THE MAOISTS

The latest poll from Himalmedia suggests that if elections were to happen today, the Maoist would be the largest party, more or less ('They're here', #500). This is a great political

opportunity for the Maoists. However, old tactics won't work. They need to show maturity, readiness to make trade-offs and consensus to take advantage of the situation. If they are too heavy-handed for the sake of short-term gain, they will be back to this situation within a year.

Mike

- The real long-term problem for the Maoists is preventing factional splits in the party over strategy and personal ambitions, and, depending on how much political dominance they achieve, how long they can keep a disillusioned peasantry and working class in their place once they realise Maoist red capitalism is no better than other kinds.

Sarada

## RIGHT TO EDUCATION

A good policy of education starts from the right to education of a child, which prevails

over anything ('Marketing schools', #500). I don't mean that other things like a well-regulated market are not important but first comes the right to education. Why don't these educational institutes, which are autonomous bodies in democratic societies, chart a course where the right to education of a child and the pockets of their parents are taken into great consideration?

Nirmal

- I believe that education and health are the fundamental rights of citizens everywhere. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure that a favourable environment exists for that to be achieved. Political parties are there to ensure that the government as well as civil society and concerned institutions are playing constructive roles and monitoring and evaluating properly so that a citizen is not cheated.

Kamal Kishor

## The blogs

nepalitimes.com/blogs

## East West

Formula for a 'peaceful banda'



nepalnews.com

Weekly Internet Poll # 501

Q. What will May Day lead to?

Total votes: 2,254



Weekly Internet Poll # 502. To vote go to: www.nepalitimes.com

Q. Do you see the light at the end of the tunnel?





**PLAIN SPEAKING**  
**Prashant Jha**

A week into the heightened political stalemate, both sides have proven their points to each other. Here is what the Maoists showed – we can cripple the country, mobilise masses, and remain disciplined. And this was the government’s response – this is unconstitutional, and we will not be forced out from the streets.

Congrats Mr Nepal and Mr Dahal, you are both supermen. But can we now have a deal?

There is a degree of convergence on many contentious issues, but two problems persist. The first is integration and rehabilitation, where both sides have different views on numbers, process and timing. The other issue is power sharing, especially the process and timing of the government’s resignation, and who the alternative PM will be.

But scratch the surface and it is clear that the core problem is of trust and intent.

The government has convinced itself that the Maoists are all out to ‘capture the state’; that this is yet another instance of their duplicity and they have not changed; and if NC-UML gives in now, the Maoists will gobble up the state ‘for the next 25 years’.

This has elements of truth. The Maoists do want to infiltrate the state organs, especially because the existing ‘independent’ institutions are completely dominated by NC-UML loyalists. Radical communists also have little faith in the idea of non-partisan institutions, for they view every structure through the class prism. And Prachanda, if he takes office, will do so with a degree of unparalleled confidence.

But the argument that Maoists will ‘take over’ is more a reflection of the NC and UML’s own lack of faith in their political strength than anything else. If NC and UML spend all their time lobbying with the Indian embassy and NA to save them, the Maoists will of course become stronger. Just look at the Madhes to see how the Maoists can be challenged on the ground. Or travel to the eastern hills and ask non-Maoist politicians if they are scared. This is a fragmented society, and a degree of hard political work will give



KIRAN PANDAY

**Can we please have a deal now?**

# Point proven

politicians enough ground to exploit contradictions and weaken the Maoists.

The transformation of the Maoists is a process, not an event. Keeping the Maoists out, making them insecure, and then expecting them to follow the rules of the game is an approach that will not work. And for the same forces that did not allow the Maoists to even discuss the president’s step in parliament last year to talk about parliamentary supremacy is a bit rich. Politics has trumped legality every time in the last four years.

For their part, the Maoists seem to genuinely believe that NC and UML do not want the constitution; that at best, they will commit to a 1990-type constitution without the monarchy; and that older parties may ally with the president to dissolve the CA. Ultra-left sections also think that since polarisation has sharpened, it is time to mount an urban insurrection.

This is as flawed as the government’s perspective. Not all of NC and UML want to desert the constitutional ship. It is right-wing fragments in these parties, who have never believed in this process nor are members of the CA, who would like to restore the status quo. Ironically, Maoist protests are strengthening precisely these groups and weakening the progressives within NC and UML. In fact, there are sections within the Maoists who have an extremely unholy understanding with

certain arch-conservatives, all in the name of ‘nationalism’. And both these groups may want to see an end to the CA.

The Maoists also have to realise that their own actions while in government sowed deep doubts about their intent and the onus lies on them to allay those apprehensions. And an urban insurrection is not possible given

both the domestic and international situation.

The protests were useful because they have given a glimpse into the existing balance of power. NC-UML should respond to popular sentiment, and Maoists need to be more reconciliatory. On that basis, they should find a common explanation for what went wrong,

leading to the mistrust, and agree on a package deal for the future.

Madhav Nepal has to go, making way for a government led by an acceptable figure. And the CA – the only elected body in the country – must be saved. Anything else is a recipe for a massive confrontation, which will make this week’s movement seem like a picnic. 🇳🇵

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**TOTAL**  
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# All for one man



KIRAN PANDAY

KANAK MANI DIXIT

Certain home truths have to be brought before Kathmandu's waffling commentator brigade, which wants to have it both ways in analysing the indefinite Maoist general strike. The analysts sit on the fence while the mass public suffers because one man seeks an extra-constitutional path back to prime ministership.

If one accepts the basics of pluralism and non-violence as the guiding principles of our society, it is very easy to come to the conclusion that this general strike is a travesty. Announced by the Maoists as a 'revolt' to bring down the government, it is also against the constitution.

As for whether this *aam hadtal* is peaceful, the commentators and the international community would do well to consider the matter of 'structural violence'. Nepal is the 40<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world by population and the volume of pain that is being foisted on a beleaguered public is therefore gigantic. Only those taken in by Maoist rhetoric would pull back from demanding an unconditional lifting of the general strike.

Those who would tie the resignation of Madhav Kumar Nepal to the lifting of the strike are asking us to succumb to political blackmail. The UCPN (Maoist) negotiated and signed the Interim Constitution, under which the former rebels participated in elections and joined government, which they then left foolishly amidst internal bickering (ref. the 'commander-in-chief episode'). Thereafter, 22 parties out of 24 in the House came together to set up the present government through parliamentary process.

For a year now, the Maoist leaders have dragged the public through a campaign of 'civilian supremacy' under false pretences, one which included denigration of the republic's first president, five months of parliamentary closure, Singha Darbar encirclement, and a short-lived anti-India campaign. For a while, the leaders did contemplate a no-confidence motion, the only time they acted democratically this past year.

There can be two legitimate ways for the Maoists to enter (and even lead) government: get 301 on their side for a majority coalition, or build trust with the other parties for a national unity government. The latter is advisable, because there is a constitution to

saying where we will end up. There are enough fundamentalist, opportunistic forces out there waiting for the road to be cleared.

Those who believe the parliamentary parties to be craven must study how they stack up against political parties elsewhere in Southasia and the West. And they would not come up short at all, not the Nepali Congress, CPN (UML), NPWP, RPP or the Madhes-centric parties. While we have to see how the political spectrum transforms in the years ahead, there is no other path for the UCPN (Maoist) to take than towards the social-democratic middle of Nepali politics. It is clear by now that they have no magic wand for transformation, as promised from loudspeakers in the jungle.

## To give in to the Maoist strike is to fundamentally undermine Nepali democracy

be written and the Maoists are the largest party in the CA. However, extra-constitutional tactics will not lead to a democratic constitution, which would mean decades of conflict up ahead and a drag on economic growth and social transformation.

The Nepal government is weak, but the way to topple even a middling government is through constitutional process, be it in London, Paris or Kathmandu. Changing a government through street blackmail will lead to endless instability, and the anarchy of the recent past will pale in comparison. If the precedent is accepted as so many otherwise thoughtful people would suggest, there is no

the people under the 12 Point Agreement that it would transform into a civilian party. It has held on to the cantonments instead of transferring control to the Special Committee, which has representation of the major political parties. If there is one element that will guarantee the simultaneous failure of constitution-drafting and the peace process, it is this.

Having recklessly promised the former combatants 'full integration' into the national army, Pushpa Kamal Dahal finds himself cornered. Seeing competition for leadership within his own party, the chairman has decided to secure his position by using the ultra-nationalist card that brings the radicals to his side. Not having the courage to confront the cadre, devastating logic leads him to the present brinkmanship of street action. The only way to remain at the helm is to emerge as the party's sole contender for the prime ministership.

Something good may still come out of all this. The marathon meetings that have been held in the last week amidst the chaos have actually led to a narrowing of differences between the Maoists and the rest. Ideally, what we need now is relentless negotiation in the following three areas:

1. Constitutional process (extending the CA deadline and adopting directive principles to guide constitution drafting)
2. Peace process (setting the number for integration and defining the transfer of the cantonment command to the Special Committee)
3. Formation of a national unity government.

Before any of this can begin, however, the Maoists must call off the general strike.





PICS: KIRAN PANDAY

# The metropolitan media



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

Like most other capital cities in the underdeveloped world, Kathmandu is almost a self-contained country within a country. It is more connected with the other metropolises of the world than with its own hinterland. As long as its supply lines are open, the residents of Kathmandu do not worry much about whatever is happening elsewhere in the country.

When the Maoist hordes began to arrive for the May Day rallies and subsequent anti-government

embraced wholesale liberalisation, agriculture – the mainstay of the rural economy – has been in a tailspin. Central grants have been used to hire mechanical excavators to dig roads so that mini-trucks carrying cola, beer bottles and biscuits can be delivered safely and cheaply to every doorstep. Remittance inflows and the cash from land sales have been spent to acquire motorbikes and mobile phones that burden one's monthly budget without adding anything to income.

In a consumer economy, market expansion is more important than building irrigation channels or providing basic services. Community radio or commercial television, everybody advertises soda drinks,

protest rallies have perhaps come to the city of their own accord. At least some have defied the whip of the Youth Force (the militant youth wing of UML) to respond to the call of local Maoist commissars. But the media coverage in Kathmandu has made it look as if gullible villagers have been either lured or threatened into taking part in protest programs.

Media in countries with a flourishing independent press but limited public access to newspapers and television, due to illiteracy and poverty, are inherently right-of-the-centre. The advertising market ensures that it can't be otherwise. Businesses seldom want to upset the appellation of the status quo unless their own interests are at stake. The problem with such a media system is that civil society has limited access to the masses and even less influence upon public opinion.

In the absence of mediated channels of communication, those who work at the grassroots exercise greater powers of persuasion. At least since the mid-nineties, the only mediators villagers in Nepal have seen are the Maoists. True, they have been often brutal in their methods, but at least they are one of their own. In a society where feudal norms are still strong, a tormentor holds the promise of saving one from bigger tyrants.

The mainstream media's antipathy towards the political agenda of the Maoist is somewhat understandable: its advertisers bear no love for the enforcers of donation diktats. But the collective failure to understand the motivation of protestors shows that the Kathmandu-centric media has a long way to go before it can claim to be national.

## The media has missed the real meaning of this week's protests

protests, the denizens of the valley didn't know what to make of them. They looked different, dressed differently, talked in different languages and yet displayed a unity of purpose seldom seen among the middle-class Newar, Bahun, Madhesi and Janjati activists of Kathmandu.

Even though the majority of the nearly four million Nepalis in Kathmandu are first-generation immigrants with living familial ties in ancestral villages, few of us have been able to gauge the level of frustration in the countryside. But for the youngsters of the 15-20 age group (old enough to aspire, but too young to understand the limitations of an underdeveloped economy) the villages hold no jobs, no services and no hope.

Ever since the country

noodles or English 'boarding' schools. The media explosion since the 1990s has hardly given voice to the voiceless. It merely magnifies what the centre has to say or sell to the rest of the country.

That could be why so little is known about the people who encircled the city in a red arc running along the entire stretch of the twenty-seven kilometre long Ring Road. Even by conservative estimates, nearly 100,000 stood in a human chain to show that they were here to enforce the will of the periphery. The media has missed the real story in the deluge of news emanating from the residences of the male Bahun politicians who do not seem to realise that they are all in a boat that is barely afloat.

Most participants at the

### THIS WEEK

## Final countdown

The Maoist banda began on 2 May after the Big Three failed to reach consensus on key political issues. Tens of thousands of Maoist supporters took to the streets to demand the dissolution of the current government. Transportation, industries and educational institutes nationwide have been shut down. On Tuesday, the Maoists announced they would block the entrances to Singha Darbar as well, prompting government ministers to arrive at work before dawn.

Although the banda was mostly peaceful for the first four days, scattered cases of violence have coalesced into a growing wave of public discontent. Gunshots were heard during a clash between Maoist protesters and anti-banda protesters led by the UML-affiliated Youth Force in Bhaktapur on Wednesday, with each party accusing the other of firing. On the same day, in Dhankuta, 15 policemen suffered minor injuries while trying to separate Maoist protestors and Youth Force supporters during clashes. In Butwal, Maoists captured the municipality office building and told government officials they would have to work according to Maoist instructions. Police later recaptured the building. At the time of going to press, on Thursday, there have been increasing calls to defy the banda and groups of citizens have taken out defiant processions that have culminated in clashes with Maoist supporters in Kathmandu's Budhanilkantha, Basundhara and Arubari. Twelve student organisations met on Thursday in the capital to discuss ways to subvert the banda, and a Peace Rally is planned for Friday morning at Basantapur Square, Kathmandu.

The banda has put pressure on the capital's supply of milk and vegetables, among other essentials. Kalimati vegetable market ran out of stock on Wednesday. The government has responded by promising official escorts to trucks carrying these and other goods to the capital. But this may be insufficient to quell mounting discontent among civilians.



The banda has taken a toll on Maoist supporters as well, with many contracting illnesses, including the common cold and, in more severe cases, diarrhea and typhoid. Maoists have taken over a wing of Koshi Zonal Hospital to treat sick party cadres. The threat of illness and the sudden promise of rain have also compelled farmers participating in the protests to return home. According to some reports, returnees number 7,000.

In the meantime, ongoing meetings between the Big Three have repeatedly failed to deliver an agreement, despite claims by the parties that the differences are narrowing. NC and UML say the government will only resign if the Maoists first agree to bring all ex-combatants under the Special Committee, extend CA tenure by six months, disband the YCL, and set the basic principles of the new constitution, all by 24 May. The Maoists want the government to resign first.

The stalemate has caused concern abroad. On Wednesday, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon said the peace process is in peril, adding, "only adherence to existing commitments and a negotiated political settlement will offer a satisfactory outcome for the future of the country." Chinese authorities urged all parties to keep the national interest in mind, and UNMIN chief Karin Landgren warned that the peace process could crumble if a consensus is not reached. The Indian Government has extended its 'support' to Madhav Nepal's government, but for the most part has been conspicuous in its official silence.





RADHESHYAM KHATIWADA

 **ECONOMIC SENSE**  
**Artha Beed**

# The business of extortion

Extortion thrives because we let it

Last week, business people were hassled by requests for funds by supposed Maoists to finance a bandha that, paradoxically, would keep businesses closed. It's like financing a competitor's advertisement campaign. But since we do not have a system to redress our grievances, there is little one can do but cough up the money nicely labelled 'voluntary donations'.

The Beed wonders: why do we take this lying down? Instead of resisting it, why do businesses volunteer to collect money on behalf of political parties, perversely suggesting that a one-window policy be implemented to simplify extortion? Perhaps extortion is deeply rooted in our societies. Since the old days, priests from all religions have extorted what they can from devotees. Our rituals, especially

relating to death, are a great platform for priests to get the most out of us. If we are good at making money out of dead people, why not make money for leaders who are live and kicking? So when you are used to being fleeced at temples, rituals, schools, hospitals, cable television service providers and internet providers, you tend to be more prepared for extortion.

We have also had a history of state-sponsored extortion. Talk to the tax payer who wants to be honest and pay taxes. Does he not get extorted by the tax official? What about government contracts

or government jobs: doesn't securing them involve succumbing to the demands of people in power? Does one get to complete a land transaction deal in this country without being extorted by land revenue officials or touts who fill in forms that no one ever understands? Is it not extortion on the part of government to charge high airport tax and not do anything about airport maintenance, or charge high vehicle import taxes without delivering better roads?

In all fields we see forceful donations are a way of life, be it among college students wanting


money to go on vacations dubbed educational tours or neighbours going on a money collection spree for street lighting that actually ends up funding a big feast. We give in to people forcing us to pay money by way of deusi and bhailo contributions during tihar and everyday we pay for parking in places that the municipality says it has nothing to do with.

Extortion is like corruption, and it is deeply rooted in our society. The Beed terms it the 'two laddoo syndrome'. If we are ready to bribe gods for our own good, why should it be surprising when we bribe mere mortals?

**NO DEAL: Farmers protest the banda by dumping vegetables on the East-West Highway in Chitwan, Monday**

Similarly, when we are so used to being extorted in the name of religion or government, why would we react differently when we are being held to ransom by political parties?

Only a two-pronged solution can solve this. First, law and order under a strong state that can actually punish extortion. Second, political contributions have to be legalised and regulated so that people can make legitimate contributions to political parties with full disclosure, with political parties maintaining transparency. If public companies are to publish their finances in newspapers why shouldn't we expect the same of political parties?

We need to have more public debates on this issue as there is a very fine line between volunteerism and crime.  [www.arthabeed.com](http://www.arthabeed.com)

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नेपाल सरकार  
सूचना तथा सञ्चार मन्त्रालय  
सूचना विभाग



ABHA ELI PHOBOO

Chandra Acharya\*, 35, is a single mother of two teenage girls, eking out a livelihood by working as a tailor in the day and cleaning houses in the evening. She became a Maoist three years ago because she believed that they would protect workers like her and create better job opportunities.

Last week, Chandra was asked to house Maoist supporters in the room she rents in Anamnagar. The room is tiny, badly lit, and can barely fit Chandra and her daughters. The only furniture they have is a narrow wooden bed shoved against a wall, two bamboo stools and a small book shelf that houses their meager utensils. A thin mattress is rolled up on the bed, and Chandra unrolls it every night to sleep on the floor so her two daughters can sleep on the bed.

"I have young daughters and am not willing to house strangers I know nothing about," she insisted, and bargained with the Maoist group she is affiliated with to let her simply participate in the protest marches instead of housing cadres. Now, she's marching with flags in the daytime and rushing to shop for food in the evening, before hurrying to clean houses. She leaves her daughters at home with instructions to finish homework and study for school.

"This is not the Nepal I want them to grow up in," says Chandra "This is not what I want for my children. I don't want them to see more riots than I have in my lifetime. I want them to go to school, be educated, and have good careers. I'm not sure what this banda thing is going to accomplish in the long run."

Last week, forty-three-year-old Norsang Tamang arrived in Kathmandu with a busload of people from villages in Rasuwa. Norsang is a farmer in Gatlang VDC with seven children, the youngest barely three years old. It's sowing season and he doesn't want to be in Kathmandu. His oldest son wasn't feeling too well when he left and his wife can't plough the fields alone. But the Maoists threatened to beat him and his son and wife up if he didn't pack immediately. So he did.

Norsang is not even a Maoist. He has no political leanings and no interest in who has power and who does not. "I don't really care who the leader is. I don't care what party is in power as long as they build good schools in the

village so my children can learn and become better people, and let me farm in peace," he says.

He has had a stomachache since he arrived in Kathmandu, but has no money or any idea where to get medicine. "Where would I go? All the shops are closed," he says "I must return home at the earliest or we won't have enough for the winter. I've already lost so many days." He met a driver he knows from his village and arranged for a ride back home for whenever this is possible. Norsang pulls out a card that the Maoists gave him.

"They said I could ride for free if I show this card," he says, showing it to the person next to him.

"Dumb," the person reads aloud.

"Is that what it says," exclaims Norsang, and pulls it back. "I'm not dumb!" He puts it back in his backpack. It's still unpacked. "I don't take anything out in case I forget to put it back in when I leave. This city is godforsaken, there's no water even to drink. To think that there's a clear lake, Parbat Kunda, right by my house," he says.

He's ready to leave the first chance he gets. For the last week, he's woken up at dawn and instead of going out to the field to sow, he's followed the crowds through the streets of Kathmandu.

\* names changed

Frightening to some, inspiring to others, every protestor has a tale to tell

# Banda tales





# Ba(n)d(a) reviews



When you are stuck at home during the banda, it's time to get into a good book, or catch up on the pile of DVDs you bought from the street seller. You can't spend all day refreshing Nepal News, or the Nepali Times website, desperately hoping to hear about a resolution to the deadlock out on the streets. So, this week my local (read 'home') picture theatre was showing the latest films from two of my favourite directors: Pedro Almodòvar's *Los Abrazos Rotos* (2009), and Tim Burton's *Alice In Wonderland* (2010).

It is said that Pedro Almodòvar is probably the world's greatest director of women. *Los Abrazos Rotos*, translated as *Broken Embraces*, is a strong argument in favour of this bold assertion. The film follows the trials of film director Mateo Blanco (a name that Almodòvar sometimes directs under) and his leading lady Lena as they shoot under the jealous gaze of the producer, Lena's overbearing older lover. Lluís Homar and Penélope Cruz are both outstanding in their leading roles, and as with all of Almodòvar's films the driving force of *Los Abrazos Rotos* is the



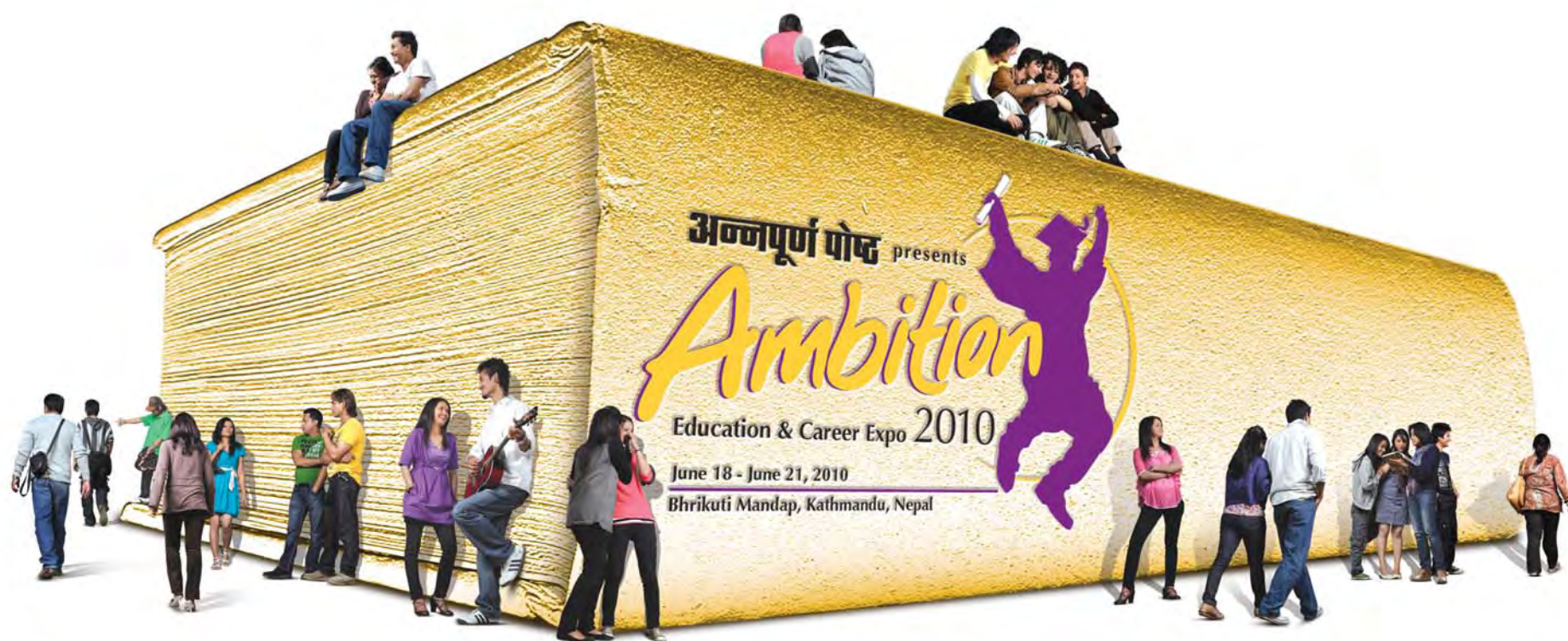
incredible chemistry between the actors, and the tension it creates between the achingly believable characters. At the same time, one cannot escape the director's eye for the aesthetically pleasing, whether in the form of the bright Spanish backdrop, or Cruz in the foreground.

Another director known for his deftness with visuals, though preferring shades of grey over the reds and yellows of Spain, is Tim Burton. And his latest, *Alice in Wonderland*, is no disappointment in this regard. Even when watched on a small screen, without what are meant to be mind-blowing 3D effects, it looks fantastic. Cleverly recreating much of the visuals of Disney's original animated picture, Burton adds his signature dark, twisting eye candy, reminiscent of *Edward Scissorhands* and his *Batman* films. On first viewing the chemistry between the characters seems off, but I have always found

this with Burton films and leading actors Johnny Depp and Helena Bonham Carter. After all, at their best these actors do not have the most accessible styles. I'm sure that, like with *Sweeney Todd* and *Sleepy Hollow*, the subtle dynamics between the director and his muses silently emerge on repeated viewing. The real problem with *Alice In Wonderland* is the pace. So incessant are the big effects and the fast moving action that the beautifully rendered characters don't get a chance to reach you.

Despite its faults, *Alice In Wonderland* manages, like *Los Abrazos Rotos*, to provide some welcome escape from the political drama unravelling on the streets outside. I suppose that the listings for this weekend at my home cinema won't do the same: Steven Soderbergh's *Che*, parts one and two, back to back. And yet...  Alexis Morcrette

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## EVENTS

**Fun and games**, we saw them on May Day, we have seen them everyday since May Day playing cricket in Tundikhel no matter how many people swarm the centre of the city chanting slogans. They seem to be having a good time, and we wish we had a cricket bat so that we could join in. Idea: form a little cricket league, invite your colleagues and neighbours. *Everyday, whenever you feel like it, Tundikhel*

**Red rallies**, we haven't been sent a program by the Maoist Party. Judging by past events like the Ring Road gherao, and rallies from three intersections every half hour, we are going to surmise that you can head to your nearest intersection for a little bit of red anytime. *Runs indefinitely, everyday at 6am and other unannounced times, dress code: red*

**Rally for peace**, Federation of the Nepal Chambers of Commerce and a bunch of other human rights outfits are organising an anti-bandha peace rally to will the Maoist leadership to change their mind about the indefinite strike. If you believe in miracles or don't know what you are meant to be doing on a Friday morning anymore, this one is for you. *Friday, 7 May, 9:00am, Basantapur Darbar Square*

**Road side debate**, tired of having your kids stare at the television like zombies? Then send them to the Road Side Debate organised by the Nepali Youth Debater's Club. They talk about things like momos vs burgers and other pertinent youth issues. Mainly they get your children out of the house. *Meets everyday at 10:00am at Chelsea International Academy, New Baneswor*



KIRAN PANDAY

## DINING

**Jar, extraordinaire**, you know what does not take hours to prepare, has protein, fat and minerals, and comes in a spoon – peanut butter. It goes well with carrots, but even better with celery. And raisins. So, pop a jar open, look out of the balcony and enjoy. *Your pantry, open everyday we presume*

**Summit dining**, But if you just started dating a girl and don't want to bet on your chances that she might be available until after the indefinite bandha, then you might want to take her out for dinner. In which case, we suggest you try 'Green Lip Mussels Mariniere' at Summit Hotel. We can't guarantee that they won't be messy, neither that they are available. However, if someone said they were going to buy mussels for dinner, we would be impressed. Immensely. If she is a keeper, we hear Dwarika's is also in business. *Summit Hotel, Lalitpur / Dwarika's, Old Baneswor*

**Rebel label**, drinking is a bourgeoisie indulgence, so you may not want be to seen doing it. So head to a bhatti behind Patan Darbar Square and drown the bandha's sorrows with a bottle of Signature whisky. We think an order of chhyang



is a better idea because they come in jerry cans. Trick to locating a bhatti – any dark hole by the side of the road. Hint: green curtain. *Your local watering hole, Patan, Bhaktapur, Kathmandu*

**Roasted goodies**, we don't know how long the bandha is going to last and if there will

be any fresh vegetables available next week. But what you do know is peanuts are extremely healthy and have a truckload of energy. So, whether you are out on the street protesting or at home conserving your energy for god-knows-what, a cone of roasted peanuts will go a long way. Try roasted chickpeas too. They are as tough as rocks, but they contain tonnes of goodness. *Ring Road, opens noon till late*

**Beaten rice**, on its own. *Black plastic bag, open in special circumstances*

## MUSIC



**Music of the people**, the music concerts organised by the Maoist party at street intersections start early, but snacks are served to those who show up early. You might have to show your red party membership for that though. Some of the dancers are pretty good, but you might want to give the *khukuri* dance a miss. *All day, everyday, indefinitely, at your local street intersection*

**Doggy opera**, a study shows that classical music soothes even the savage beast. Judging by the behaviour of our neighbourhood strays, it would seem they've only been exposed to crazy rock and metal sounds. Be a good samaritan and play some Gigli and Mozart to the dogs. We would be happy for you to try this near our homes. *Email editors@nepalitimes.com for our addresses.*

## GETAWAYS



**Run baby run**, put your trainers on and run in any direction you want. Keep on running. When the bandha is over, you can just take a bus back.

**Keep on walking**, there was a time when there were no roads in Kathmandu, nor were there any microbuses. People were fine. Be thankful for the clean air in the valley and go for a hike. A trail around Budhanilkantha is easily walkable in a day. You can also try walking to the nearby hamlets of Dakshinkali and Godavari.





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**SILENT STANDING:** Usually traffic-logged Sundhara Road looks empty on Sunday, the beginning of the indefinite strike called by the Maoists.



**FEW HURDLES:** Locals take to the streets on foot as all vehicles are barred. Some tourists were evacuated from the country with the help of the army.



**MONITORING RIGHTS:** OHCHR Country Chief Richard Bennett waves from his bicycle on his way to monitor rallies.



**LOOKING GOOD:** An out-of-town Maoist supporter takes some time off for personal grooming on Monday.

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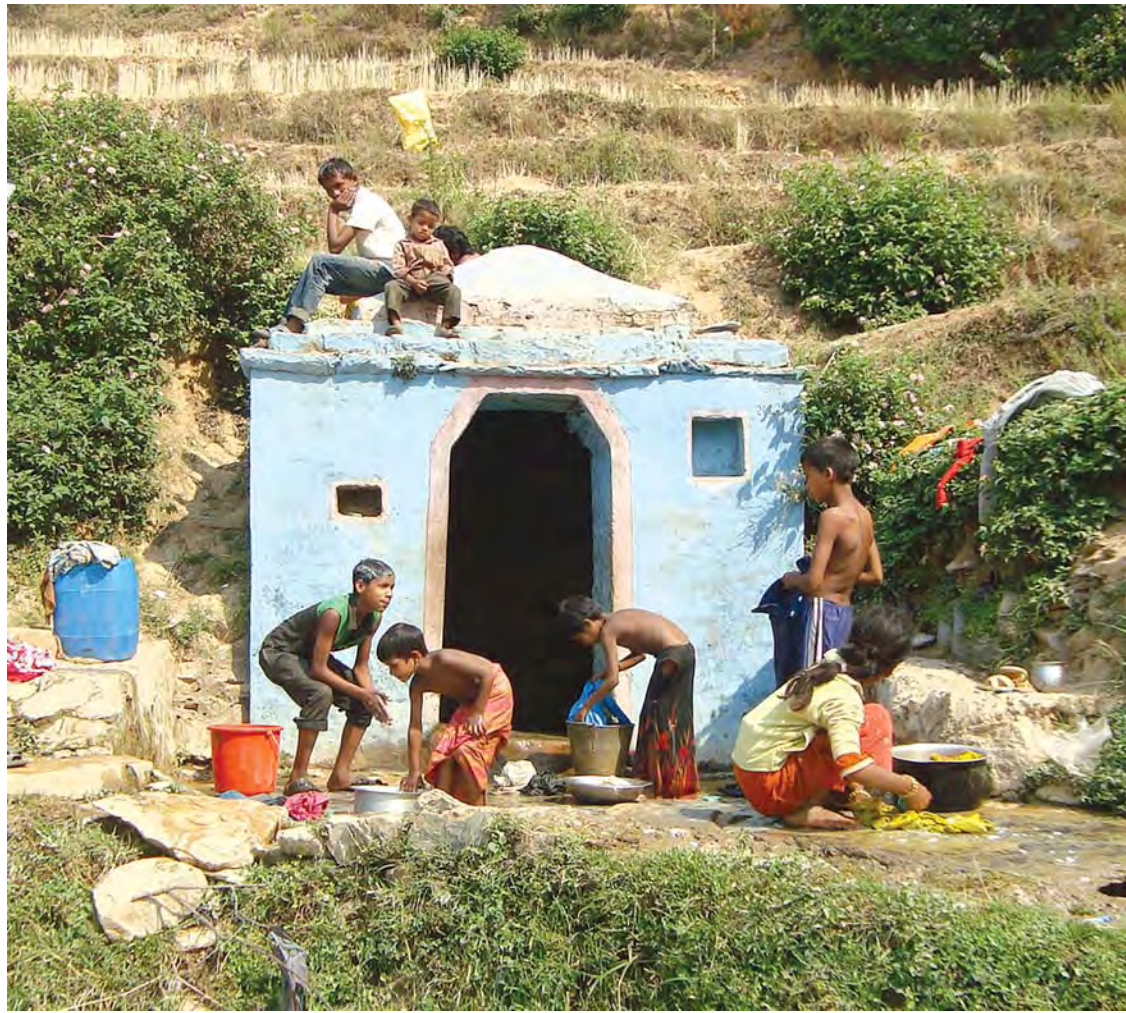
**WEEKEND WEATHER**  
by NGAMINDRA DAHAL

The current spate of wet weather is caused by an infusion of moisture being carried all the way over from the Mediterranean on seasonal westerlies. There is still a lot of lingering humidity from the storms that caused unseasonal floods in the Saudi desert this week, and these will rise up with mountain updrafts to form huge convection systems in the Himalayan midhills that will be rain-bearing. Expect temperatures to be two degrees below seasonal with evening and night showers accompanied by thunder.



FRI	SAT	SUN
		
23-18	24-18	24-17





RUBEENA MAHATO

# Where water kills

RUBEENA MAHATO  
in BAITADI

The monsoon rains are not yet on the horizon, but the mini-epidemic of diarrhoea that has afflicted Maoist supporters in the Kathmandu Valley should remind us of the continuing woes of western Nepal. Baitadi has already seen seven deaths due to diarrhoea, with outbreaks in district headquarters Dasrathchand as well.

According to the District Health Office, there was a 56.7 per cent increase in cases of diarrhoeal diseases between February and March. Mohan Singh Thagunna,

When prevention has been shown to be work wonders, why wait until the situation gets so bad that the best one can hope for is damage control? Simple measures such as teaching people about hand washing, water purification, safe excreta disposal and ORS use are in order. Rather than simply reacting when disaster strikes, the government should work year-round to provide access to safe drinking water and promote good hygiene.

"Drinking water coverage in the district is almost 90 per cent," says Devnath Yadav, Acting Divisional Engineer of the Drinking Water and Sanitation Division Office, Baitadi. But in reality, potable water is so

**ALL'S NOT WELL: Children go about their business at a water source found to be contaminated in Dasrathchand, Baitadi.**

diarrhoea can mean death. Health teams comprising a lab assistant, senior auxiliary health worker and an office assistant have finally reached remote VDCs such as Sigas and Gajari, but Thalakanda and Shivling are still waiting for help.

Following the outbreak last year, Oxfam has been implementing water and sanitation projects in 11 communities in Baitadi that included water protection and purification, a hand-washing campaign, and toilet construction. This year no cases of diarrhoea have been reported from these communities. But for wider impact, the government has to take the initiative.

Unfortunately, the lack of coordination between the Drinking Water and Sanitation Division Office and the District Health Office has precluded any such water and hygiene campaign. Devnath Yadav concedes that the water and sanitation office hasn't been able to focus on sanitation, because of "institutional and human resources problems". The national health system, for its part, focuses on treatment. "After the outbreak of last year was controlled, no one has gone to see the condition of the water sources in the affected areas," Thagunna reveals.

There is no time to derive satisfaction that diarrhoeal outbreaks have not reached epidemic proportions. Every death that could have been prevented is a failure of the nation's health system. "Instead of counting bodies and claiming there is no epidemic, government bodies should work together for hygiene promotion campaigns so no one dies next year," says Shambhu Chaudhary of Oxfam.

scarce here most people drink water from unprotected wells that are potentially highly contaminated. One such source is the well at Dasrathchand-1 where Oxfam carried out a water quality test recently. Results showed 29 Coliform per 100 ml, while WHO guidelines determine that no such bacteria should be detected in a 100 ml sample.

Twenty-two-year-old Janaki Bhatta of Dasrathchand-5 started drinking water from a local well last month when the entire municipality faced an acute water shortage. She was admitted to the district hospital after recurring diarrhoea and vomiting.

Bhatta was lucky, because she could immediately avail herself of the medical services in Dasrathchand. But for many who live in far-off villages more than a day's walk from the capital,

## Doing nothing, nothing doing



KALAM  
Rabi Thapa

What do people do when there's nothing in the usual scheme of things to do? They think of alternatives to the usual suspects, or, as time wears on, begin thinking of all the things they should *really* be doing.

But why is it such a problem to have nothing to do? Is it not something of a city-centric, western-something obsession with some of us that we always have to be doing something? Of course, if one's very survival depends on doing something every day – if you are a daily wage labourer, that is – then this argument holds less water than a flu-bugged Maoist supporter. And to some extent, everyone's 'survival' is affected by a banda, especially those who depend on the free flow of commerce, kirana pasal to five-star hotel.

But if we do have the luxury of contemplating using this leisure time better because we're not expected to turn up to work or school, what should we be doing? Nothing to buy, nowhere to eat, nowhere to drink, nothing to see (that we want to see), it's no surprise if we take the easy way out by plunging into sociable activities at each other's houses: eating and drinking and gambling and slagging off the powers that be.

Rather, should we not be contemplating what the whole idea of 'doing' is? As so many of us equate doing with being (punctuated with breaks of conscious non-doing, all the better to get on with doing more productively), then does not doing mean not being? Is this why we feel so listless and useless after a couple of days of enforced bandas?

## What ought one do when there's naught to do?



KIRAN PANDAY

Probably what makes it worse is the enforced aspect of it. After all, we have a ridiculously undeserved number of public holidays in Nepal and honestly, I don't see people complaining about the ones that they care about. It's the idea of the enforced shutdown that bothers people: the fact that what you can and cannot do on this or that day is determined by uncontrollable forces. You can't really plan for it, and you can't do anything about it. If you decide to brave the streets on a bicycle, you are as likely as not to have the air let out the tyres by teens who can't, you conclude, yet understand the labour theory of value.

So that's what it is. You feel like you have the air let out of you. And here's the killer. While you go about doing nothing, those who are enforcing the banda are having one heck of a productive time partying in the streets, holding rallies, listening to speeches, and dreaming of a final victory. For many, this is a paid-for holiday, a welcome, inspirational respite from overwork, it is productive non-doing. For others, it is actually work. As a passerby quipped upon sighting a group of cadre making their way up from Tripureshwor to join the May Day rallies, 'Well, I guess they have to do their job, too.' *Jaagir pani ta kharu paryo ni.*

So as you wander around trying to find something to do, perhaps a little wondering is in order, too. Not merely about your place in the grander scheme of things, about being and nothingness and all that. But about the meaning of your place and role within the smaller world of Nepali society, and that of all the others. A little more empathy, not apathy, might go a long way.





# Thailand in denial

SIN-MING SHAW

**BANGKOK** – Thailand's political and social fabric is fraying. Indeed, the country's future looks as shaky as it has never been.

In other prosperous democracies, the middle class provides the glue that holds society together. In Thailand, by contrast, the bourgeoisie, centered in Bangkok, is barely emerging as a social and political force.

Instead, for a half-century, an unspoken social contract among four broad groups has held Thailand together: the Palace; big business; the military; and the common people, mostly rural and urban poor, who accept the rule of the other three estates.

Thailand's national mythology is that it is a happy Buddhist country, a 'land of smiles' bound together by compassion and harmony under the benevolent grace and blessings of the Palace and the generosity of big business. The less fortunate classes are docile, content to accept their subservient roles and satisfied with the social welfare, no matter how skimpy, provided by their betters.

The poor and the military hold the Palace in genuine

reverence. *Forbes* magazine ranked the Thai monarchy in 2009 as the richest of all the world's royals, putting its net worth at \$30 billion. Thailand's blue-chip firms gain much from direct involvement with the Palace and from social proximity to it. One Hong Kong scion whose wife is from an elite Thai family estimates that perhaps 20 families control most of Thai business.

The Thai military is constitutionally subordinate to civilian leadership, but in reality it owes its allegiance to the

large part of the local economy. They demand that the government dissolve the current legislature immediately, and that Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva resign because he was never elected and is viewed as a front man for the traditional anti-Thaksin monied groups.

Many believe that the current crisis will pass, and that Thailand will revert to its historical harmony among the four groups. But this view ignores the country's new political dynamics.

worse over the years, with no discernible 'trickle-down' effect.

The sight of run-down physical infrastructure, punctuated by super-modern shopping malls with global consumer brand names well beyond the purchasing power of most citizens, is not what you would expect in an economy once described as a potential Asian Dragon. The wealthy dwell in air-conditioned houses, travel in chauffeur-driven cars, and shop in luxury malls, apparently oblivious to how the rest of the country lives. Poor rural families see too many of their children become prostitutes in order to survive.

The poor view the coup against Thaksin of 2006, and the later disbanding of his party, as revenge by the traditional elites who wanted the old ways back, and who would get what they wanted by force since they could no longer get it through the ballot box. It is a view that is not entirely wrong.

In late 2008, anti-Thaksin mobs wearing yellow shirts and led by prominent business figures occupied Bangkok's Suvarnabhumi International Airport with impunity, seeking to annul the result of a general

election in which pro-Thaksin forces gained power, despite Thaksin's exile overseas. Yellow is the colour of Thai royalty, and the Palace was believed to be sympathetic to the mobs.

Now Thaksin loyalists – the 'red shirts' – are doing much the same, demanding change through mob behaviour. They believe that they, too, are entitled to act with impunity. The red shirts are not blind to Thaksin's excessive corruption. But they see him as a rare Thai politician who actually bothered to connect with them. Moreover, as prime minister, Thaksin made a point of delivering much-needed services to the underclasses: subsidised medical care and micro-loans to name just two.

What Thaksin did for the poor required only political self-interest. Yet even that elementary wisdom has never occurred to traditional ruling elites too set in their myopic and arrogant ways. Until it does, Thailand's otherwise promising future will be increasingly remote. 🇹🇭

*Project Syndicate*

*Sin-ming Shaw, a former fellow at Oxford University, is an investor based in Thailand and Argentina.*

## Thailand's lower classes are angry and frustrated by the status quo

Palace. In the current crisis, army generals have told the public that they are reluctant to use force.

How long this inactivity will last is anyone's guess. Mobs wearing red shirts to symbolise their loyalty to former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra are now camped out in two major commercial areas, paralysing a

First and foremost, Thailand's lower classes have decided that docility is a thing of the past. They are angry and frustrated by the status quo. Save for the handouts they got under Thaksin, they benefited little from the economic growth of the past three decades. The vast gap between the urban rich and the rest has grown



**उज्यालो ९० नेटवर्कमा**

**आर्थिक खबर**

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ALL PICS: FOO CHEE CHANG



**MECHANICAL GRAVEYARD:** Trolley buses lie in a decrepit state of disrepair at their depot in Min Bhawan. The trolley bus system, when started in 1975, was touted as a key component of public transportation in Kathmandu. They were taken offline in 2001.



**MAOIST MANIFESTATION:** Maoist slogans and graffiti can be spotted all around the bus park. The bus park was home to members of the Young Communist League up till recent times.



**SELF-ANNULLING PROPHECY:** A bold claim plastered to the side of a trolley bus.

**MAKE YOUR OWN BED:** An unmade bed inside a trolley bus suggests continuing utility. This 'makeshift hostel' was probably how YCL cadres were accommodated once.

**OLD SCHOOL, NEW SCHOOL:** The bus park has been transformed into a terminal where electric tempos are charged and serviced after work.





# What about the economy?

Nagarik Arthik, 5 May

नागरिक

KATHMANDU – Because of threats from the Maoists, banks have decided to close from Wednesday until the strike is over. As soon as we open our doors, they come and threaten us to close,” says the manager of Kist Bank, Kamal Prasad Gyawali. Another manager says his bank gets it both ways. "If we open they threaten us, if we close we are accused of helping the andolan,” he said

POKHARA – The banks have been forced to close their ATMs because of Maoist threats, and consumers are starting to feel the pinch. Most people only have cash to last two or three days, and then when ATMs and banks close they face a big problem, says Min Bahadur Shrestha of the Rastra Bank branch in Pokhara.

POKHARA – This is the peak season for Indian tourists and pilgrims fleeing the heat and visiting Muktinath, and some 600 of them were stranded in Pokhara. Police escorted them back to the Indian border after they had to cut short their stay. “My hotel had 75 per cent occupancy, now it is zero,” says one hotel owner in Pokhara.

NEPALGANJ – This is the time of year for Indian pilgrims to visit Mansarovar in Tibet via Humla. Most used to stay in hotels in Nepalganj and fly to Simkot. Last year 5,000 pilgrims went through Nepalganj. Prem Bhandari of Sneh Hotel says if the strike isn’t withdrawn in a few days this season will be a write-off. Hotels which are empty have had to provide food



ABIN SHRESTHA/KANTIPUR

and lodging for some of the 23,000 Maoists who have come to Nepalganj for the agitation.

KATHMANDU – Most domestic flights have been cancelled because of the Maoist strike. Buddha has cut 70 per cent of its flights and the airline is flying only three of its seven planes. Kathmandu-Pokhara flights have come down from five to two daily. Yeti has reduced its eight daily Pokhara flights to six. The airline is also facing problems because of its inability to take pilots to the airport. Passengers have stopped booking tickets. Yeti, Agni, Guna have also cut flights. State-owned Nepal Airlines, however, is operating all international and domestic flights normally.

BIRATNAGAR – The Morang-Sunsari industrial corridor is suffering a Rs 150 million loss every day because of the Maoist closure. There are 550 factories and manufacturing units in the area, including multinational companies. This has left thousands of workers out of income. Morang Business Association chairman, Mahesh Jaju, says products have not reached market, raw materials aren’t coming from Kolkata port, and companies are having to demmorage for stuck cargo.

DHULIKHEL – The main big hotels in Dhulikhel have shut their gates. Most workers have gone home and say they’ll only come back when the guests return. This is the season Dhulikhel should be packed with both foreign tourists and

visitors from Kathmandu. Dhulikhel is also a major area for seminars and conferences, and all have been cancelled.

KATHMANDU – The Nepal Stock Exchange, which has 1.5 million shareholders, has ground to a halt for the past three days. The NSE, which was beginning to show signs of life in the past year, is on the verge of ruin. “The political instability has destroyed investor confidence,” says one stock analyst, “In earlier strikes people could come in motorcycles at least, this time they’re not even allowing bicycles.”

KATHMANDU – The air cargo terminal at Kathmandu airport has been closed for six days, causing huge losse for exporters and importers. Even cargo that has been cleared can't be taken to the planes or unloaded. Pashmina, garments, handicraft products are all stuck.

BARDIYA - Tourists who had come on package tours to Bardiya National Park are stuck, running out of money and shifting to cheaper lodges. More than a dozen visitors from France, Britain and Finland are at various hotels.

GHANDRUK – Lodge owners and restaurant workers in the trekking town of Ghandruk are now planting corn and weeding fields, since there are no guests. "There isn't a single tourist today in Ghandruk, all those returning from ABC have returned and there is no one going up," Kisam Gurung said on Wednesday. There are 24 lodges in Ghandruk that employ 50 people.

## Compromise promise

Editorial in *Naya Patrika*, 5 May

नयाँ पत्रिका

The alternative to negotiations and consensus are negotiations and consensus, not conflict and confrontation. Only consensus politics can take this country forward, excluding one or the other party will neither bring us peace nor a new constitution. Which is why both the Maoists and non-Maoists must be serious about finding a negotiated settlement. The Maoist street agitation is historic in the way it has been conducted in a disciplined and peaceful manner. If the same elegance were reflected at the negotiating table, we would not be far from an agreement. This means both sides have to give in a bit, to compromise. The resignation of the prime minister and the simultaneous withdrawal of the strike call could be one such meeting point. So, in the name of the people, find a compromise quick.

## Stand up!

Editorial in *Nagarik*, 6 May

नागरिक

National political forces haven’t been able to stand up to the UCPN-M’s injustice to the people by this prolonged paralysis of the country. The so-called friends of Nepal in the international community, civil society and individuals are only chanting the mantra of ‘consensus’. They have not been able to speak out against an illegal shutdown of the country at a time when the venue for settling power-sharing disagreements should be the elected constituent assembly. The Maoists swear by the people, and yet they are punishing the same people with this shutdown. There is no alternative to the Maoists being a stakeholder in government, but the path is through parliament. The party is undermining itself by prolonging this strike. How long do they want to hold the people hostage? Why should the other parties even sit down with them? More outrageous is that the political parties can’t tell the Maoists that they won’t sit down for any more negotiations until the strike is lifted.

# Birth pangs of a new constitution



KIRAN PANDAY



LAXMI PD NGAKHUSHI

Rama Parajuli interviewing political analyst Saurav  
*BBC Nepali Service*, 6 May

BBC  
नेपाली

There will be more protests in the future, this is not just an andolan to remove the prime minister. It is about whether or not to keep on following the rules laid down in the Interim Constitution.

UML and the NC are the two democratic forces and they have tried to convince the Maoists to not just give lip service to democracy but to behave like a legitimate political party. But most Maoists are hell-bent on establishing what they call ‘jana satta’, a dictatorship of the proletariat, modelled on North Korea, Castro’s Cuba or Stalin’s Soviet Union. And for this they are determined to wage an even more violent revolution.

It’s difficult to say whether the struggle

between an open society and what the Maoists want will lead to violent confrontation, but this is not something that can be sorted out in two minutes. There are two options, go back to war, or compromise. This street battle is just the surface of a much deeper ideological quarrel between whether we want a democratic constitution or a hardcore communist constitution. That is why there is a trust gap. This is just the first of many birth pangs we will have to suffer in the process of writing the new constitution. So unless one side or the other becomes weaker, the Nepali people have to suffer some more.

The Maoists tried to oust the government through a vote in the House, and when they couldn’t get the numbers they decided to go to the streets. They resigned from government on a whim after the reinstatement of the army chief. They perhaps want desperately to get back in.





KIRAN PANDAY

# Ecology-based provinces

**GOVINDA DAS SHRESTHA**

**T**here has been enough debate on the provinces proposed by the State Restructuring Committee. The Big Three parties have also agreed to form a commission to finalise the federal model, despite originally neglecting to do so as specified by the Interim Constitution.

The Maoists have said the proposed 14 provinces can be reviewed as required, which leaves enough room for an appropriate model of federalism. They can't easily give up on the ethnic model of federalism as they fought the war with support from backward and marginalised communities. However, ethnicity-based federalism isn't the way to go.

There are 103 ethnicities, yet only nine of the proposed provinces have been named after ethnic communities. This might invite communal conflict. Ironic, since the stated purpose of federalism, as Article 138 of the Interim Constitution declares, is to end discrimination based on class, caste, language, sex, culture, religion and region.

Discrimination exists although there are laws that forbid it. Federalism is supposed to eliminate this by empowering the marginalised through inclusive development. The creation of ethnic provinces doesn't help in this regard.

How can the creation of ethnic provinces in a country where there are over 100 ethnic communities speaking 92 languages lead to economic, social, and religious equality? What should be the status of a non-ethnic community within an

ethnic province? Should we call the ethnic people back into their own provinces to ensure their rights are protected?

In Nepal, 18 to 75 percent of each ethnic community lives outside of its proposed province. According to TU Professor of Geography Bhim Subedi, 29 per cent of Limbus, 52 per cent of Rais, 78 per cent of Sherpas, 18 per cent of Yadavs, 51 per cent of Tamangs, 50 per cent of Newars, 67 per cent of Gurungs, 58 per cent of Magars, 38 per cent of Tharus, and 71 per cent of

## A river basin based federal model will ensure inclusive socio-economic development

Muslim people live outside their native provinces. Ethnic provinces will create more problems than solutions.

Ecology-based provinces can be an alternative to ethnic provinces, and could incorporate the interrelated economies of the Himal, Midhills and Tarai. There are three river basins in Nepal: the Kosi, Gandaki and Karnali. The Kosi watershed has two tributaries, the Kankai and Kamal, in its basin. Similarly, the Gandaki basin incorporates the

Bagmati and the Karnali basin has Mahakali, west Rapti and Babai.

The proposed 14 provinces don't take geography and the availability of resources adequately into account. Additionally, the draft has proposed 14 legislatures, executives and judiciaries as well as institutional and physical infrastructure for the capitals of these provinces. This requires a lot of resources.

The direct investment of time and money for the development of Janajatis, Dalits and backward communities would do more to empower them than the investment of resources towards the formation of 14 provinces. Language and cultural upliftment programs can help protect their identity while investment in education and health will help improve their capacity. Autonomy and proportional and inclusive representation will guarantee their participation in development activities and state affairs. Development activities should be taken to the local level for transparency and accountability.

A proper utilisation of water, land and forest resources can be the basis of the sustainable socio-economic development of Nepal. River basin-based provinces can only help the country's economy grow. All three ecological zones are inter-dependent as they have their own limitations and advantages: the Tarai in food grains, Himal in medicinal herbs and Midhills in horticulture and vegetables. Besides, a north-south corridor will help business and economy prosper. 

## 'We are sons of Newars'

Chun Bahadur Thami  
CA Member, UCPN Maoist, Dolakha



**What was your profession before becoming a CA member?**

I used to farm and also work as a carpenter. I used to make doors, windows, tables, benches, beds and cupboards.

**How did you feel when you got nominated for the CA?**

Obviously, I was happy.

**How many are you in the CA?**

I am the only CA member from my community. Thamis are not even in higher posts in the bureaucracy or security bodies.

**What is the total population of Thamis?**

According to the 1991 census, they are 13,000. But it is not the correct data. They are about 80,000 across the country who live in 55 districts. Thamis live in 22 VDCs in Dolakha. They can also be found in Sindhupalchowk and Ramechhap.

**What do Thamis want from the state?**

We lagged behind in terms of economy, politics and education due to the centralised unitary system. To improve the plight of Thamis, we need an autonomous region with political prerogatives in the regions where they are in the majority.

**In which proposed provinces are you?**

I am in Tamsaling province. But we want a separate autonomous region within the province combining 22 VDCs of Dolakha and 13 VDCs of Sindhupalchok. A Thami should be the chief of the region and others should be given lower positions only.

**What if other communities demand similar identities and prerogatives?**

Other communities have the right to demand their identity. There are about 800 Sural in Thami autonomous region. We can create an autonomous unit at the VDC or settlement level. They should be given autonomous regions where they are in the majority.

## 'Extend by four months'



Parbati Mahato (Kumal), CA member, CPN (ML), Chitwan

**What do you think of the proposed 14 provinces?**

When the proposal was discussed in the full session of the CA, most CA members opposed the idea of ethnic provinces. I am a Kumal, married to a Mahato (Chaudhari). I belong to an ethnic community but I am not in favour of ethnic provinces.

**It is said the CA members did not work hard to complete their task on time.**

We face many problems. If someone from my region is admitted to hospital, we are expected to go there. Sometimes, we go to see the ministers or visit the NEA for electricity. Big leaders and ministers have their cars but we have to walk. I cannot describe in words how much trouble we go through. Therefore we missed some meetings of the CA. We are not provided with all facilities.

**So you are saying the state facilities are not enough.**

We get Rs 45,000 per month from which tax takes away Rs 5,000. The party levies Rs 25,000 and we get Rs 15,000 in hand. How can we live with Rs 15,000 while the house rent is Rs 8,000? We travel by three-wheelers and minibuses sporting CA badges on our coats. We hear people wondering why, if the state has given us Rs 50,000, we don't take taxis. I have my share of pain. I used to earn Rs 18,000 as a kindergarten teacher and Rs 20,000 from raising goats before I was a CA member.

**Now it's confirmed that the constitution will not be written on time. What should be done?**

We can extend the CA for four months. If it isn't completed in four months, it will never be written.



# Shit happens

The business community has put forward a proposal (STATUTORY GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING: THIS IS NOT A JOKE) to make Khaobadi extortion tax deductible and have a ‘one-window’ policy whereby shops and companies don’t have to empty their pockets for every Comrade Tom, Dick and Hari who comes around for door-to-door ransom collection. Asked about this at the FNCCI-organised **Decisive Debate to End All Debates** last week Chairman Stupendousness replied: “We never extort anyone. We just ask them to donate voluntarily, and if they don’t, we remind them of the consequences.” First Prize in this week’s Doublespeak Gold Medal.

ॐ

All is not hunky-dory within the Baddie leadership it seems. Kaji Narayan was visibly displeased at being kept out of the threesome on the Maoist table during the **Final Solution** debate. The organisers probably thought if we have the original why do we need the photocopy? The very next day NKS let it slip that he was available for PM-



ship if there was going to be a deadlock between PKD and MKN, which brought a sharp, immediate response from BRB. We are also hearing BRB is sending feelers through **back channels** to MKN not to step down. And the plot thickens even more as Lord Ram Chandra throws his hat in the ring as well, announcing his availability for Baluwatar. Journalists chasing up the leak found the source was none other than RCP himself. Which is why the tripartite talks among the trinity of troikas in the three parties won’t amount to much because the individual components are waiting for the

right moment to become prime ministers themselves.

ॐ

When **RCP** and **BRB** were having it out on Sajha Sawal, Ram Chandra told Baburam a precondition to the Baddies being allowed back into govt was disbanding the YCL. Comrade Laldhoj’s reply: “Why don’t you kangresis also set up a YCL?”

ॐ

Just as well the Rato Machhendranath Jatra has been postponed by a month. The decision was taken for various astrological and planetary reasons,

but it has turned out to be a blessing in disguise because it is highly unlikely that the **Khao-ists** would have allowed the rath to be pulled during a bund. “Two legs good, four wheels bad. (Unless it is a pram).”

ॐ

Why anyone would want to come to power in a powerless country is beyond me. Could it be that Nepal is now an officially zero-emission country because we have cut our electricity consumption by half, vehicles have been forced off the roads, brick kilns have been struck down, so we are now well placed to reap the benefits of the Clean Development Mechanism? And we are saving **Rs 10 karod** a day by not burning all that petrol and diesel. Hurrah! We are all going to be rich.

ॐ

It took a SHARK Summit in Thimphu for us to finally find out that King Jigme Keshar Namgyal Wangchuk was actually born in Nepal in 1980. His Majesty told Makuney he had a “special emotional bond” with Nepal because he was born in Patan. This throws up certain possibilities in bilateral

relations. The first, of course, is that we bestow honorary Nepali citizenship on His Royal Highness pronto and officially declare Bhutan a vassal state. The second is that since we lost our monarchy and don’t have any eligible king in the offing, we restore the monarchy and install **Jigme the Fifth** on the throne. Or, since he was born in Nepal, shouldn’t he be sent to the refugee camp at Beldangi? A diplomatic incident was deftly avoided when Rishi the Dhamilo managed to stowaway on Makuney’s flight to Paro and thought that would be enough to enter Bhutan without a visa. He would have been deported on the spot had SuzieQ not intervened on behalf of her Sidekick-in-Chief.

ॐ

The comrades are having a difficult time retaining the people they bussed in from the districts. The restaurants and guthis forced to feed the thousands are asking how much longer, and the diarrhoea outbreak is threatening to turn into an epidemic. The Baddies set up a ‘manab sanglo’ (human cockroach?) along **Ringworm Road** the other day, but a well-placed hailstorm forced the crowd to go titter-bitter.



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29 April - 14 May 2010

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