very 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
**The 2/3 strategy**

**FUGUE COLUMN**

J & Pum Magar

To understand the current nationwide mishief of the Maoists, you have to rewind to the Shaktikhet Tapes of 2008. In it, Pushpa Kamal Dahal taught his comrades to lie. His words were clear, as he himself later told 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 and win the next election, for instance, but neo-royalists could bus in themselves may get an absolute majority in the next election, for instance, but neo-royalists could bus in, if the elections were to happen today, the Maoist would be the largest party in the CA and won the confidence vote in the House. For its own good, and for the good of the country, the Maoists are waging war by other means, 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.

**The 2/3 strategy**

PUBLISHER’S NOTE

For its own good, and for the good of the country, the Maoists have 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 battered 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 Sikshyaak 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 lathi by police 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 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 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 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 stranglehold 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 burning pictures of a lynched mob of angry locals.
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 ‘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 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.

Can we please have a deal now?

Point proven
For a year now, the Maoist leaders have dragged the public through a campaign of ‘civilian supremacy’ under false pretences, one which included designation of the republic’s first president, five months of parliamentary closure, Singh 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 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 be written and the Maoists are the largest party by percentage of seats 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 Maoist strike. The only way to remain at the helm is to emerge as the party’s sole contender for the prime ministership. Ideally, this must be done through the parliamentary process rather than the ultra-nationalist card that brings the radicals to his side. Not having the courage to confront the cadres, 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)

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

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.

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 the protestors shows that the Kathmandu-centric media has a long way to go before it can claim to be national.
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 boatmen 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?

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

ECONOMIC SENSE
Artha Beed

NO DEAL: Farmers protest the bands by dumping vegetables on the East-West Highway in Chitwan, Monday
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 bookshelf 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.

“Young people who I don’t really know are occupying my room to protest. Why should I tolerate this?” she says. “I don’t want to waste my time worrying about them.”

**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.**

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.

“I don’t think that’s 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 muse 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 touch 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 Monette
**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 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 Nepali 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 Maoist party at street intersections st every day. Whenever you feel like it, Tundikhel intersection everyday at 10:00am at Chelsea International Academy, New Baneswor.

**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 Marinieres’ 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 bourgeois 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 untill late. You can also try walking to the nearby 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 everyday.

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.

Doggie 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@nepaltimes.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 Budhanikharita is easily walkable in a day. You can also try walking to the nearby hamlets of Dakshinkali and Godavari.
MONITORING RIGHTS: OHCHR Country Chief Richard Bennett waves from his bicycle on his way to monitor rallies.

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.

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

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

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WEEKEND WEATHER

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.

KIRAN PANDAY

KIRAN PANDAY

MIN BATINA BAJRACHARYA

KIRAN PANDAY

KIRAN PANDAY

KIRAN PANDAY

KIRAN PANDAY

KIRAN PANDAY
Where water kills

RUBENA MAHATO
in BAITADI

T

he 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, Public Health Inspector in Baitadi, says, “Deaths have been reported from Sigas, Gajari, Thalakanda and Shrivling VDCs but diarrhoea cases have been observed throughout the district mostly among women, Dalits and children.”

Since last summer’s outbreak, which left 11 dead in Baitadi, there have been no follow-up programs by the government in the affected areas. Does this mean the epidemic that claimed the lives of 282 (WHO, August 2009) in west Nepal hasn’t changed government strategy at all? Not entirely. This year, whenever cases of fatalities have been reported, government Rapid Response Teams have been dispatched with Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS), soap and medicine. No doubt this is what the government should be doing at the moment but the crux of the problem lies elsewhere.

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 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, 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 Shrivling 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 purification and, 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 “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,” Thagurana 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 Shamshu Chaudhary of Oxfam.

What ought one do when there’s naught to do?

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Following the outbreak last year, Oxfam has been implementing water and sanitation projects in 11 communities in Baitadi that included water purification and, 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 “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,” Thagurana 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 Shamshu Chaudhary of Oxfam.
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 gaze 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 the state. Thaksin’s lower classes are angry and frustrated by the status quo.

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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, and who would get what they 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 delivered. The sight of run-down physical infrastructure, paralysing a major airport with impunity, seeking to maintain power in a way that 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.

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LAST STOP

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.

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.

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

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

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信访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 anolan,” 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 Rastri Bank branch 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 Humla and 1,000 through Simkot. Last year, 5,000 pilgrims went through Humla, 1,000 through Simkot. The police escorted them back to the Indian border after they had to cut short their stay. “My bank had 75 per cent occupancy, now it is zero,” says one hotel owner in Pokhara.

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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, and Buddha have also cut flights. State-owned Nepal Airlines, however, is operating all international and domestic flights normally.

KIRATNAGAR – The Moeng-Sanur 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. Moeng Business Association chairman, Mahesh Jaju, says products have not reached market, raw materials aren’t coming from Kolkata port, and companies are having to demand more for stock and cargo.

POKHARA – The main bighots in Dhillikhali have shut their gates. Most workers have gone home and say they will only come back when the guests return. This season Dhillikhal should be packed with both foreign tourists and visitors from Kathmandu. Dhillikihel 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 as the bourse is 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 loss for exporters and importers. Even cargo that has been cleared can’t be taken to the planes or unloaded. Panthim, garments, handicraft products are all stuck.

BARIDYA – Tourists who had come on package tours to Bardia National Park are stuck, running out of money and shifting to cheaper lodges. More than a dozen tourists 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 vegetable fields. They claim the political stability has destroyed investor confidence in the area and the entire area is suffering a Rs 150 million loss every day because of the Maoist strike.

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SARLA - Tonight’s travel advice.

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 Bagmati, 6 May

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, aware of the power that they have, 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 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 punishing the same people with this shutdown. 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There has been enough debate on the provinces proposed by the State Restructuring Committee. The 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. However, ethnicity-based federalism isn’t the way to go. A proper utilisation of water, land and forest resources can help them to have 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 Bhum Subedi, 29 per cent of Limbus, 52 per cent of Raas, 79 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 Bahun and the Karnali basin has Mahakali, west Rapti and Babai.

The proposed 14 provinces don’t take geography and availability of resources adequately into account. Additionally, the draft has proposed 14 legislatures, executive and judicial levels 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. Land reform and cultural uplivishment 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 the 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.

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

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The business community has put forward a proposal (STATUTORY GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING: THIS IS NOT A JOKE) to make Khashabati estoration 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 Harry 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 extend 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.

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

When RCP and BRB were having it out on Sajha Saval, Ram Chandra told Baburam a pre-condition to the Baddies being allowed back into govt was disbanding the YCL. Comrade Lakhajiy’s reply: “Why don’t you kangressis also set up a YCL?”

Just as well the Rato Machhendranath Jatra has been postponed by a month. As three-quarters of its last week Chairman Jigme the Fifth 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 of Beldangi?

A diplomatic incident was delayed when Rishi the Dhalmini 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.

The organiser 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-

HIMAL Khabarpatrika
29 April-14 May 2010

Cover Story
HIMALMEDIA PUBLIC OPINION POLL
The people want change by Prof Krishna Khanal

Editorial: “We don’t want another rebellion”

More fear than hope among respondents
No to federalism and secularism

Investigation
Drug smuggling in gas tankers

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